

# BARREN GROUND: RE-CONCEIVING HONOUR AND SHAME IN THE FIELD OF MEDITERRANEAN ETHNOGRAPHY

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*Abstract:* Despite the differences in perspective that define the field, ethnographers of Mediterranean societies consider the cultural values of honour and shame in a remarkably consistent and theoretically impoverished manner. The article attempts to demonstrate that the rhetorical strategies of structural functionalism continue to characterize discussions of honour and shame in Mediterranean societies, even when anthropologists appear to have rejected this theoretical paradigm. Arguing that to conceptualize the values of honour and shame as a type of juridical code does representational violence to the lives and experiences of Mediterranean peoples, the author advocates a practice-oriented theoretical approach to these cultural values that is more sensitive to social relations of inequality and difference.

*Résumé:* En dépit des différences de perspective qui définissent le champ, les ethnographes de sociétés méditerranéennes considèrent les valeurs culturelles d'honneur et de honte de façon remarquablement consistante et théoriquement appauvrie. L'article essaye de démontrer que les stratégies rhétoriques du fonctionnalisme structurel continuent à caractériser les discussions traitant de l'honneur et de la honte dans les sociétés méditerranéennes, même si les anthropologues semblent avoir rejeté ce paradigme théorique. En raisonnant que cette conceptualisation du complexe honneur/honte en tant que code juridique n'est que représentation injuste de la vie et de l'expérience des peuples méditerranéens, l'auteure recommande une approche théorique et pratique vis-à-vis ces valeurs culturelles, plus sensible aux relations sociales d'inégalité et de différence.

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Nothing has been more definitive of the ethnography of Mediterranean societies than an enduring concern with the cultural values of honour and

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shame. Stanley Brandes argues that the honour/shame theme played a pivotal role in the emergence of the Mediterranean as a culture area and a legitimate regional specialization (Brandes 1987:121). Rather than make another contribution to this enormous literature, I have chosen instead to focus upon a few exemplary studies (Campbell 1964; Davis 1977; Delaney 1987) to argue that despite considerable differences in theoretical perspective, the honour/shame complex has been conceptualized in a remarkably consistent and limited manner. It may well be argued that Mediterranean ethnography is no longer predominantly concerned with considerations of honour and shame. However, to the extent that contemporary anthropologists continue to claim the importance of the honour/shame complex in defining the Mediterranean as a culture area and stress "the continuing fruitfulness of honour and shame as organizing principles for research" (Brandes 1987:121), a critical consideration of the manner in which the concept has been theorized appears both relevant and necessary.

It would seem that a felt need to establish cultural unity *among* Mediterranean societies has resulted in an inability or lack of desire to explore cultural creativity, conflict or resistance *within* these societies. Other scholars have expressed scepticism about the proposition of a Mediterranean cultural area revolving around a series of traits in which the honour/shame complex is central (see Fernandez 1983a, 1983b, 1986; Giordano 1987; Herzfeld 1984, 1985, 1986a; Kielstra 1987; Llobera 1986, 1987; Pi-Sunyer 1986). Some argue that the honour/shame complex does not exist in all Mediterranean societies, others that it exists in too many other societies across time and space to be considered distinctively Mediterranean. More interesting are arguments implicating the honour/shame syndrome in a Northern European or Anglo-Saxon cultural stereotype that neutralizes histories of domination and subordination—anthropologists may unwittingly perpetuate a discourse that legitimates social relations of inequality by continued, unreflective use of these categories (Fernandez 1983a, 1983b, 1986; Herzfeld 1984, 1987; Llobera 1986, 1987). I seek to add another voice to this growing critique of the honour/shame coupling, but I do so on alternative and more modest grounds. My argument emphasizes the elisions, erasures and exclusions in descriptions of local level activities that are consequent upon dominant approaches to honour and shame in Mediterranean societies.

First I will critically and extensively examine Campbell's (1964) work on Sarakatsan shepherds, because I believe his structural functionalist analysis has produced one of the best ethnographies of the Mediterranean. My critique of Campbell's understanding and presentation of the honour/shame complex will risk the charge of anachronism; arguably, it is unfair to criticize our intellectual ancestors for failing to address contemporary theoretical concerns. My point, however, is not to condemn Campbell for the

representational conventions of Oxford ethnography, but to use his work to delineate the rhetorical strategies that characterized structural functionalism. Once these are identified, it becomes possible to see how these conventions operate to obscure certain dimensions of social life. Moreover, I want to demonstrate that the fundamental inadequacies of structural functionalism have not been remedied by subsequent explanations or interpretations of the honour/shame complex that adopt such divergent perspectives as materialism (Schneider 1971), economic determinism (Davis 1977), and structuralist symbolic analysis (Delaney 1987). The problems that plague Campbell's work re-emerge in later elaborations of the cultural complex in other Mediterranean societies even though their authors would deny having a functionalist orientation.

In his classic study of Greek Sarakatsan shepherds, Campbell (1964) sees honour and shame as values and social forms that embody moral attitudes, traditionally common in Greece, that have parallels in other parts of the Mediterranean. He subsumes both the manliness of men and the sexual shame of women under the rubric of honour, which is depicted as a sign of the recognition of the excellence or worth of a person (Campbell 1964:268) or, more frequently, his or her family. A family's honour is always at stake in relations with others in the community, and the community is the arena in which families compete for honour. Families are internally cohesive and mutually oppositional and it is the opposition of families that gets played out in the community using the cultural idiom of honour and shame. Honour functions, according to Campbell, as a very sticky kind of Durkheimian social glue – what cements people is their agreement on what separates them.

Unequivocal oppositions between families find expression in their competitive behaviour. This serves as a safety valve because competition represents an indirect form of opposition which allows the full participation of antagonistic parties. Because social prestige “depends overwhelmingly on the opinions of enemies” (Campbell 1964:264), one must be constantly involved in activities which demand their engagement. Thus, argues Campbell, “the more they oppose each other, the more they affirm their support of a particular system of values and beliefs” (ibid.) which he defines as “the rules of the game” (ibid.). This is typical of a functionalist tendency to see structures of values, beliefs and forms of cultural expression as means of achieving order, stability and consensus: rules rather than resources, sources of constraint rather than enablement. Competition for prestige is the social bond between families, a notion which reflects the Durkheimian tradition in which cultural systems are seen to reflect the structure of social orders and contribute to their reproduction and continuing coherence.<sup>1</sup>

The social, cultural, economic, political and moral orders of the Sarakatsani are seen as an inextricably interwoven tapestry, without flaws,

broken threads, rough knots, pulls, pattern breaks or borders:

the care of herds, the structure of the community, and its social values, form a coherent pattern of activities and sentiments which presents few inconsistencies. The three concerns of the Sarakatsani are mutually implicated. The sheep support the life and prestige of the family, the sons serve the flocks and protect the honour of their parents and sisters, and the notion of honour presupposes physical and moral capacities that fit the shepherds for the hard and sometimes dangerous work of following and protecting their animals. (Campbell 1964:19)

Sarakatsan society and culture are represented as a harmonious, internally homogeneous, seamless whole in the “distanced normalizing mode” (Rosaldo 1989) typical of an ethnographic tradition which views culture as an organic unity continually reproducing itself as the “same,” consequent upon internal laws that operate without regard to historical contingencies, larger political structures and forces, or international economic trends.

In this vision, honour is a cultural value that operates as an integral part of the reproduction and continued functioning of the productive system defining Sarakatsan society. The benefit of conceiving of honour in this way is that it enables and compels one to see such values, not as mere ideas, ideals, superstructural ideologies or representations, but, in the Wittgenstenian sense, as deeply embedded in a “form of life,” or way of being in the world.

This “form of life,” however, is an incredibly static one, in which all agonistic conduct serves to reproduce the status quo:

Prestige is constantly evaluated through the gossip and laughter of others . . . the process of evaluating the conduct of other Sarakatsani is a reaffirmation of the solidarity and indeed of the existence of the community as such. Gossip and denigration are carried out in terms of a system of value. . . . Public opinion, functioning through gossip and ridicule acts to sanction the community’s prestige values. (Rosaldo 1989:315)

Within such a framework, all activity always serves to sustain the dominant discourse. Nothing can act to challenge it, modify it or question its assumptions. Any admission of its existence is seen to be an affirmation of its authority. I will be concerned to demonstrate how Campbell’s text achieves this effect in a number of different areas and to point out critical junctures or moments where this stasis could be transcended.

Campbell presents the values of honour/shame in a manner which precludes any investigation of the possibility of any *struggles* to define the meaning and fix the attribution of these terms in particular historical circumstances. We are given no resources with which we might attempt to discern *differences* in interpretation of these values amongst parties differently

situated. As Herzfeld (1980) notes, in most Mediterranean societies the term resonates in so many ways, and has so many nuances, that evaluations of honour are contentious, negotiated, and never final, and those in one social stratum (i.e., the *senoritos* in Alcalá) may interpret it differently from another (i.e., the peasantry).

Throughout the ethnography we are given a sense of honour as a singular entity—a complex, internally differentiated entity to be sure—of the same value, held in the same regard, and given the same meaning by all members of the society. We are presented with the prevailing world view or dominant ideology (depending upon your political perspective) which appears to be that of those occupying privileged positions in the social structure. Can it really be said that the “individual’s foremost concern is prestige and reputation for honour of his family” if the individual we consider is a *Pistiolis*, the subordinate male in a *stani*, the fifth daughter, the disgraced wife or the seduced daughter? What does this system of values look like from their perspective? To say that reputation, founded on honour, is *the* meaning of social life again begs the question of perspective. Certainly this would seem to be the point of view of the dominant adult men in this society but can we assume that this is *the* meaning of social life for women, children, or those whose life situations preclude success in these terms?

Campbell, in what Rosaldo (1989) ironically calls “the classic ethnographic tradition,” presupposes a singular cultural order about which consensus prevails, assuming that those whom this order excludes, dispossesses or disempowers, nevertheless seek only to emulate it and achieve success in its terms, regardless of how unlikely such success might be. The possibility that such people might recognize their disempowerment, and critically comment upon the character of the system that accomplishes it, is one that cannot be addressed within a functionalist paradigm. This is not to suggest that such activity always exists; dominant discourses can and often do achieve a hegemonic status that may (almost) completely constitute the “common sense” of a given form of life (Willis 1977). It is, however, to suggest that to define a form of life *in the terms of* such hegemony is to give legitimacy to those who are empowered by it, and to create no space in which one could recognize any *internal* dynamics that might create conditions for challenge or change.

*Honour, Family and Patronage*, though, is not an entirely synchronic analysis. In addition to situating the Sarakatsani in national history, Campbell also demonstrates how the nature of a person’s honour, and the others with whom one’s honour is bound up, change over the course of an individual’s lifetime. The diachrony introduced to the explication of honour, however, is of a particular kind—an ideal type or composite life-cycle is developed. Again, therefore, we see unfolding structures rather than open-ended

processes. As I will attempt to show, the use of an "ideal life type" as a mode of introducing diachrony acts to reinforce the silencing of those whom the "system" disempowers and deprives us of any sense of their experience.

In the "ideal life type" Campbell creates, a woman gains power as she gives birth to children and these offspring grow older and eventually displace her husband's authority. Such a perspective, however, is only possible for the ethnographer whose omniscient stance enables him to see in any particular woman's life the promise and potential held out by the ideal life cycle. For any given young woman, this trajectory is anything but an established future. She cannot be certain she will marry, will be capable of bearing children at all, even less certain that she will survive childbirth or that its pain will yield culturally valued male children. Even if she does give birth to male children, she has no guarantee that they will survive to adulthood with a reputation for manliness untouched, marry, thrive and prosper, and thus that the autonomy from her in-laws, and eventually her husband, will actually take place (or that her honour will remain intact throughout her lifetime, given its contingency on the competence of men to protect it). In many ways, the projection of an ideal-type life cycle enables the ethnographer to rationalize the domination of women in a manner which effaces the pain, uncertainty and anxiety which would seem to characterize great portions of Sarakatsan women's lives *even if* their lives eventually approximate the ideal type, and especially if they don't.

Although Campbell manifests a great deal of sympathy for the dominated and disciplined position of women in Sarakatsan society and the social and physical hardships they endure through marriage, his account of the society reproduces this domination by denying them any autonomous voice or any recognition of or resistance to their disempowerment. Women are never seen to have any perspective on their situation except one of resignation. The quarrels and struggles between women, for example, are glossed over by Campbell as so much discordant noise, making men's lives difficult or unpleasant. We are told that wives of brothers are expected to quarrel because of women's identities with their children and that the children of the various wives have divergent interests. Such quarrels, however, are denied any particularity (being mere static generated by the system's operation), or any independent force in the system itself, for Campbell insists that it is primarily men's obligations to their children that accounts for the growing distance from brothers which results in the disintegration of the corporate group, rather than women's displeasure, antagonism or desire for family independence.<sup>2</sup>

Campbell also mentions that members of one gender often criticize the contributions made by the other to the family unit, but quickly incorporates

such criticisms by insisting that they “serve to draw out and emphasize what is expected of male and female roles” (Campbell 1964:275). Again, conflict and resistance is seen merely as affirmation of dominant cultural values. It is undoubtedly true that all humans are obliged to speak with a received language—cultural idioms that are inscribed with the social relations of power these idioms support. This does not necessarily imply, however, that all modes of speaking are the same, or that all use of dominant cultural codes operate to reproduce the status quo in the same way.

Take, for example, Campbell’s observation that women are conscious of a common fate, and that their solidarity is demonstrated when they “speak together of their common subjection to men in sexual activity,” of their dislike of sex, their absence of physical pleasure and their sympathy for the bride-to-be who asserts an intent to bring a knife and castrate her husband (Campbell 1964:275-276). Can these conversational practices so easily be characterized as activity that reinforces cultural norms? Merely by giving voice to these sentiments, women are speaking about what Campbell elsewhere describes as the unspeakable for women. That they do so in a cultural idiom that makes reference to dominant cultural values does not justify depicting such protests as affirmations of the status quo. These dialogues both represent and reproduce an internalization of sexual shame *and* embody real resistance to the relations of power that the honour/shame complex supports. That structures of power are reproduced by the resistance activity of those whom they dominate has often been demonstrated (see, e.g., Willis 1977). But, once again, we risk defining culture from the point of view of those who benefit most from its discursive forms if we represent all challenges to its norms in terms of their revolutionary or transformative impact (i.e., no transformation = no challenge) instead of exploring the meaning of these challenges from the point of view of those who initiate them.<sup>3</sup>

It is, for example, hard to determine from Campbell’s account whether this commentary by women is really an affirmation or a rejection of their dominant cultural portrayal as evil, sensual, insatiable creatures whose powerful sexuality must be disciplined and redeemed. One could argue that conversations like those mentioned above constitute a *denial* by women that they have these attributes and thus an assertion that their subjugation is unnecessary and unfair. A structural functionalist perspective, however, predisposes one to argue that these women are just publicly affirming their acceptance of dominant values by demonstrating that they have so completely realized the ideal of female sexual shame that they are incapable of experiencing sexual pleasure. Neither of these interpretations can be said to be “correct” and, indeed, we might have to entertain the possibility that both are true *simultaneously*—that is to say, that women consciously recognize the ambiguity of these statements and the multiplicity of meanings at

play which gives these activities both their appeal and their subversive potential. As Rosaldo suggests, "In many cases the oppressed fail to talk straight. . . . Precisely because of their oppression, subordinate people often avoid unambiguous literal speech. They take up more oblique modes of address laced with double meanings, metaphor, irony and humor" (Rosaldo 1989:190).

Such a proposition also casts a different light on Campbell's later statement that women *accept* the dominant cultural portrayal of their gender and that this acceptance is demonstrated by the fact that they "take perverse and compensatory pride in their reputation for cunning and deceiving men" (Campbell 1964:278). Again the perspective of the powerful is adopted—perverse to whom? From the point of view of men such pride may seem perverse; whether women see it this way is another matter. To characterize such pride as "compensatory" is, again, to deny women's interpretations and challenges any influence; their "perversity" is merely permitted as a harmless sop given their general disempowerment. If we were to explore the contexts and practices in which women expressed and acted upon such pride we might gain interesting insights into the ways in which dominated groups deploy the elements of cultural codes in "tactics" and "strategies" that may subtly but surely modify the structures of domination themselves (de Certeau 1984).

Campbell's monograph is certainly only one of several structural functionalist accounts of Mediterranean social codes of honour. I have taken examples from Campbell's ethnography to hold up to critical scrutiny, but examples might also have been taken from Peristiany (1965) or Pitt-Rivers (1961, 1963, 1977). Rather than document more examples from within British structural functionalism, however, I wish to move beyond the paradigm to demonstrate that the inadequacies in the treatment of *cultural* forms that characterize it, are, curiously, not avoided by those who have challenged structural functionalist assumptions about *social* relations. For example, in his comprehensive survey of Mediterranean anthropology, Davis (1977) attempted to refute the claims of egalitarianism that characterized structural functionalist ethnographies by demonstrating the existence of socioeconomic inequalities and the role of the honour/shame complex in expressing them. Davis sees the code of honour as a "system of stratification" defined as a "socially construed embodiment of the realities of material differentiation" which converts them into guidelines for social action (Davis 1977:75). Honour, then, is related more or less directly to the distribution of wealth and individual control of resources.

Davis' insistence on linking honour exclusively or primarily with socioeconomic standing—defined in terms of material resources and social status—has been challenged (see especially Brandes 1987; Gilmore 1987;



Herzfeld 1980, 1987) and countered with evidence from a number of Mediterranean cultures. However, his discussion of honour as a cultural phenomenon does not depart significantly from previous discussions of the subject.

Davis reinterprets Campbell's data on the Sarakatsani to illuminate the presence of socio-economic inequality, affirming Campbell's unelaborated judgment that "among all Sarakatsani, some are clearly superior, some clearly inferior, while the vast majority – about four-fifths – struggle in the middle" (Davis 1977:85) (also suggesting that the top and bottom categories may be larger than Campbell recognizes). He notes that it is characteristic of such pastoral societies that "wealth attracts greater wealth, while poor men are ignored. The more prosperous a Sarakatsanos is the more he attracts associates to his company, and the leadership of a wealthy man is the focus for the aspirations of the middle sort of shepherd. Poor men do not associate with anyone" (Davis 1977:86).

Davis reiterates prior suggestions that the lower orders of Mediterranean societies cannot and do not participate in these evaluations because they lack the resources to be evaluated in these terms. The notion of honour, the struggles to maintain it, and the activity of ascribing and withholding it are chiefly preoccupations of "the indeterminate middle section of the communities, where rank is uncertain" (Davis 1977:99). Conflicts over honour then, are most often "between near-equals struggling for an edge over their rivals" (Davis 1977:96). Although many of these societies seem to hold a belief that all men are born with honour intact, those in lower groups are seldom accorded it in social life, and honourable behaviour is neither expected of them, nor recognized as such; without wealth or associates a man lacks the resources necessary to assert honour.

These insights about the social specificity of the situations in which honour/shame is negotiated prompt a host of questions about the deployment of these significant forms that Davis fails to explore. If men of lower orders are not evaluated by the wider society in these terms, how are they evaluated? Ethnographers unwittingly accept the point of view of the "middle classes" by denying these people any distinctions, viewing them, as they are viewed by those who participate in the competition for honour, as an undifferentiated underclass. The possibility that these people might have alternative cultural means for evaluating themselves, and that such evaluations might embody a commentary on dominant cultural codes, goes unexamined. The meaning that those who are marginalized give to their exclusion from dominant cultural idioms of stratification remains invisible, or is glossed simply as an attitude of resignation (Davis 1977:92). At the other end of the social scale, we are left similarly uninformed. The probability that élites give different meanings to honour, interpreting it differently than the peasantry or middle orders, has been noted (Herzfeld 1980:342; Pitt-

Rivers 1977:1-17), but rarely elaborated. The social range of the use of these cultural forms has been narrowed, but the idea of it as a singular unified code remains intact. The interactions of those who engage it, those who are excluded from it, and those who interpret it differently, are not seen to implicate, shape or modify the code itself. Even when inequality is recognized as a *social* reality, its *cultural* ramifications are not pursued. Inequalities, when acknowledged, are addressed in purely material terms and cultural forms remain untouched by social struggles.

If Davis (1977) links the honour/shame complex to economic stratification, Schneider (1971) connects it to underlying social structural oppositions in Mediterranean societies (social structure and control of resources), Ortner (1978) sees it as an ideological mystification determined by social relations of production and state formation that require the domestication of female sexuality, and Gilmore (1987) relates it to psychosexual factors—a resolution of gender-identity ambivalence and internal developmental conflicts, Delaney (1987) links it to some political implications of the state religions of the area. In each case we are presented with a code that needs to be unlocked by anthropologists by examining something which lies underneath it and can be seen to generate or explain it.

I will focus upon Delaney because her explanation is so resolutely cultural and therefore seems more likely to transcend the limitations of the structural functionalist approach to honour and shame than the explanations of her more sociologically oriented counterparts. In Delaney's case, "social structure, politics, economics, and ecology" (Delaney 1987:36) are rejected as conditional rather than determinative factors in favour of procreation as a cultural construct embedded in a wider religious system of beliefs about the world: "Briefly stated, I suggest that honor and shame are functions of a specific construction of procreation which, in turn, is correlative with the religious concept of monotheism" (Delaney 1987:36).

Delaney delivers a sophisticated and persuasive presentation of the pervasive symbolic logic of sexuality that defines the Mediterranean region's cosmology and serves to explain the cultural resonance or meaning of a wide variety of practices. Although extremely convincing metaphorical linkages are drawn at a macro-level, we are left without an understanding of local level practices and a picture of social agents acted upon by external forces but rarely agents operating within and upon the structures so imposed. As Brandes notes, "we are presented with a lexical distinction in Turkish between different types of honor, but never learn whether or how these terms are *used* at the folk level" (Brandes 1987:125; emphasis added).

Delaney reveals a desire to transcend the juridical model of honour/shame as normative code with the promising initial assertion that "the mistake has been to interpret the honour code somewhat like a dress code — as a

set of rules and regulations—focussed on a superficial conformity. Instead, I propose that it is more like a kind of genetic code—a structure of relations—generative of possibilities” (Delaney 1987:35). But it soon becomes clear that for Delaney, such possibilities are realized *among* Mediterranean cultures but not *within* them. To extend her metaphor, the schoolgirls who find ways of expressing their individuality by manoeuvring within the constraints of official dress codes are Mediterranean societies, not the individuals who comprise them. Consequentially, we are given no account of how people within Turkish society exploit the generative possibilities afforded by such a logic in their everyday pursuits, political struggles and social disputes. A specific culture, once again, is presented as the ubiquitous seamless whole without ambiguity, paradox or contradiction, which remains untouched by the practices of social agents who blindly reproduce it.

Herzfeld (1980) has made the important point that honour is an inefficient gloss on a wide variety of indigenous values and that the component elements of honour differ from place to place. Thus, attempts to fix the definition of honour as an index of some other socially valued trait or capacity do violence to the complexity of the symbol in particular social contexts. Recognizing that symbols are multivalent and multivocal, we should be attuned to the variety of ways in which a dominant symbol speaks to people in any given situation, and the possibility that it speaks to different people differently. It is its very *lack* of fixity, or the multiplicity of its referents that makes honour so powerfully resonant in Mediterranean societies.

In his early work, Herzfeld (1980) also addresses honour as an index of conformity to a social code. Again, we are dealing with a juridical, rule-following model in which the code remains a static structure.<sup>4</sup> In more recent work (1984, 1985, 1986b) Herzfeld begins to formulate an idea of the code of honour along the lines I have been advocating—as a repertoire of available symbolic resources put to use in significative practices or as an ever-transforming structure that is emergent in performance. In discussing Blok’s (1981) attempts to subsume diverse cultural terms and symbols into a Mediterranean code of honour (that is itself taken as evidence of Mediterranean cultural homogeneity), Herzfeld remarks that:

the evidence suggests that the symbols which Blok analyzes are used with considerable internal variation and with richly inventive interpretation at the local level, and that what we see instead of a single code is a highly complex series of overlapping and restlessly shifting *bricolages*. (Herzfeld 1984:445)

Symbols, terms and images associated with honour are signifying resources “differentially activated according to circumstances” (Herzfeld 1984:446).

Herzfeld (1986b) further elaborates this position in his discussion of the use of gender categories in ethnographies of Greece. He argues that anthro-

pologists, in their preoccupation with binary cultural oppositions, lose sight of the essentially manipulable, rhetorically subtle nature of significant symbols and their capacity for transformation. He suggests that we focus on situating the uses of gender symbolism in specific historical settings and goes on to discuss the gendered categories of *flotimo* and *dropi* (elsewhere glossed as honour and shame) as they are deployed to articulate experiences of national identity and negotiate complex relationships between different levels of identity at national, regional and local levels of social life.

This suggests that one of the ways in which anthropologists could avoid reproducing the inadequacies of structural functionalism (which also characterize contributions from other theoretical perspectives), is, as Davis himself recognized, to write accounts of Mediterranean societies in which the interplay of cultural forms and social inequalities are traced through history (Davis 1977:76). Such accounts can be found in Richard Maddox's historical studies of the Andalusian town of Aracena (1987; forthcoming), which I will draw upon to demonstrate how the cultural concepts of honour and shame might be revitalized to inform larger theoretical concerns with the interrelationship between culture and power.

Maddox gives the concept of honour far more complexity because instead of attempting to pin it down, define it, or explain it in terms of material, ecological, social or cosmological determinants, he narrates its use and deployment in the strategies and tactics of agents who are differentially situated in the social relations characterizing the region at specific historical junctures. In this way, he avoids the dangers of structural functionalist analysis to which so many other Mediterraneanists fall prey. As I shall point out later, however, a "theory of practice" approach<sup>5</sup> poses its own risks against which we should maintain constant vigilance.

Let us take, as an example of his concern with cultural praxis, Maddox's account of the story of Madre Maria, a *beata* who lived in Aracena in the 17th century, and her nephew, Juan, who was an officer in Aracena's militia:

One day, Juan found himself involved in a heated argument with a man in a tavern in Seville. The man struck Juan, and Juan didn't return the blow. Word of this spread, and soon people in Aracena began telling Juan that if he did not answer the insult, he would "live without honour" for the rest of his life. When Juan decided to avenge himself, the saintly Madre Maria intervened [and convinced him to leave his vengeance to God as a Christian]. . . . The Captain of Juan's militia company lodged a formal complaint against Juan with the Conde of Villainbrosa . . . [that] alleged that Juan had been disgraced and recommended that he be stripped of his military commission. . . . [Madre Maria] wrote to a friend of hers who was a ranking government official in Seville and asked him to intervene on Juan's behalf. . . . [He

met with Conde and at a strategic moment] presented the reasons for reconsidering the case that Madre Maria had advanced and put them forward as his own. Impressed with the official's argument, the Conde decided to absolve Juan . . . instead of punishing Juan because he had not avenged himself as a soldier, he favored him because he had proceeded as a Christian. (Maddox 1987:2-3)

Maddox interprets this affair of honour by looking at each of the protagonists: the social position each occupied, the cultural values each held and appealed to (including those of honour and shame), and their respective self-interests and political goals. What becomes clear in the course of his analysis of this incident and others (Maddox forthcoming), is that in any given situation there are alternative (culturally mediated) modes of proceeding, and that the decisions individuals make involve "a multiplicity of discursive strands that echo and reanimate the modes of representation at the core of the culture" (Maddox 1987:6). Rarely are individuals faced with a situation where only the values of honour/shame are at stake (or where the meanings of these are self-evident). Values and meanings of religion, honour, shame, kinship and patronage intersect and dialectically condition each other, and actor's strategies involve interpretations of this configuration:

Each discursive strand is somewhat autonomous but also dialectically conditioned by the way in which it relates to other cultural elements. Thus, in some measure, what it means for Madre Maria's nephew to be regarded as honorable is conditioned by what it means for him to be regarded as religious. . . . [Although] in the orthodox view of the text, religious values and spiritual meanings ought in principle to encompass and transcend worldly values related to personal honor and family interests . . . in the practices the text describes, as opposed to the orthodoxy it affirms, it is clear that worldly values of honor, shame and the defense of family reputation and patrimony are assumed to be everyday concerns . . . religious and secular notions alike lend support to patronage as an ideal form of social relationship among unequal parties [which is] multiply voiced not only in terms of the demands of honor and of spiritual virtue but also as a moral extension of natural family-like duties to non-kin. (Maddox 1987:6-7)

In order to understand this culture, then, we need to understand the contradictions and "tensions as well as the convergence in the values of religion, honor, kinship, and patronage" (Maddox 1987:7) as these are manifested in specific historical conjunctures, and how particular aspects of the structural manifestations of social power are "activated, reinforced or challenged, as mandated by circumstances and the aims of the people involved" (Maddox 1987:8).

Maddox argues that although discursive formations of this complexity are manifest in many ethnographic studies in the Mediterranean region, the focus on honour/shame, either as an underlying cultural code of master symbols or as the ideology of specific groups, has resulted in an inability to address honour and shame as one discourse within a wider constellation of values and meanings which form a "repertoire of signifying practices that inform schemes of possible action" (Maddox 1987:9). Investigating "culture" as a process rather than a code "opens the possibility of comparing the range of habitual and improvisational procedures by means of which persons, communities, and policies become and maintain who and what they are" (ibid.).

The thrust of Maddox's argument parallels my critique of exemplary anthropological discussions of honour in its determination to address the *uses* to which cultural discourses are put in the activities of everyday life, and in its recognition that such practices cannot be examined in isolation from considerations of the positions occupied by agents in social space and the meanings they give to those positions, which must of necessity draw upon the cultural resources available to them.

My reservations about theories of culture that emphasize local practice derive from a fear that in our quests to carve out room for the creative practices of diversely situated social agents, we may deny the constitutive cultural dimension of consciousness itself. In other words, we do have to guard against neo-utilitarian accounts of cultural strategies which unwittingly reproduce dominant liberal discursive constructions of self that envision social agents as autonomous consumers, freely picking and choosing amongst cultural forms like so many products enticingly arranged on a supermarket shelf to maximize their self-defined pleasures.<sup>6</sup> An understanding of culture as constantly reproduced, modified and transformed in the practices of social agents must be combined with a recognition that the motivations for such activities are also constrained and enabled by social traditions of cultural practice (see Coombe 1989a:72-88; Ortner 1984). Both the activities and the consciousness of social agents are shaped within cultural systems of meaning that people themselves are constantly recreating. We collectively create meaning in practice, but we do so within cultural constraints of convention and tradition that provide enabling resources for that very activity (see Coombe 1989a:88-99).

Furthermore, close attention to the social situation of individuals and groups is necessary to convey a sense *both* of the habitual and the improvisational nature of the signifying practices in which Mediterranean peoples. In other words, we do need to continue to specify the social and semantic limits within which their cultural creativity operates, for such limits are cru-

cial to an understanding of the nature of such practices in relations of domination and resistance.

Ongoing consideration of the honour/shame complex in the field of Mediterranean anthropology holds promise only insofar as the continuing tendency to adopt the predispositions of structural functionalism is transcended. Local, contextualized accounts of individual and group negotiations of the meaning of honour and shame in specific social situations should be central to Mediterranean ethnography. Such accounts enable us to better understand the complexity of people's experiences in these societies and the relationship between culture and power which shapes them.

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### Notes

1. For a discussion of functionalist and structuralist perspectives on structure and the possibilities for transforming such approaches to incorporate a greater recognition of human agency, see Coombe 1989a; Giddens 1976, 1979, 1984.
2. Campbell notes that the Sarakatsani themselves "claim that brothers would undoubtedly live together all their lives if it were not for the quarrels of their wives" but finds this a "rather too simple explanation" (Campbell 1964:71), asserting that differences between women provide the occasions for separation but never the *real* cause or determinant.
3. In her collection of essays on gender and power in rural Greece, Jill Dubisch (1986) manifests a desire to transcend models of Greek culture that perpetuate the privileging of male perspectives and deny women's comprehensions of cultural realities. A number of essays in the volume explore the question of female acquiescence, resignation or acceptance of dominant values, and the extent to which women have a "muted" culture or latent power that may be culturally recognized, even if men and women accord it different degrees of legitimacy. Dubisch's discussion (1986:26-35) of women as actors and their "muted" cultural models holds particular promise.
4. Julian Pitt-Rivers (1977:x) provides the clearest articulation of the juridical concept of honour in *The Fate of Shechem* where he asserts that "there is first of all a general law of honour, as there is of hospitality, reminiscent of the concept of natural law except that it rests upon social necessity rather than moral absolutes, and then, providing the basis of action at a specific time and place, the various codes of honour as of hospitality like the legal codes of various nations." The prevalence of such juridical analogies in anthropological descriptions of culture is remarkable. As an anthropologist I have been repeatedly struck by the violence that juridical models do to our understanding of culture. As a legal scholar, I wonder whether the juridical model doesn't also do violence to our understanding of law. Suffice it to say that I believe we need a less legal understanding of culture and a more cultural understanding of law. (For discussions of the complex relationship between law and culture see Coombe 1989a, 1989b, 1990.)

After suggesting that honour is like law, Pitt-Rivers then analogizes it to magic:

We might liken it to the concept of magic in the sense that, while its principles can be detected anywhere, they are clothed in conceptions which are not exactly equivalent from one place to another. Like magic also, it validates itself by an appeal to the facts (on which it imposes its own interpretations) and becomes thereby involved in contradictions which reflect the conflicts of the social structure. . . . (Pitt-Rivers 1977:1)

As I have argued elsewhere (1989a, 1989b) the law works in a similarly "magical" way and this description of "magic" may well describe all systems of "local knowledge" (see Geertz 1983).

5. Maddox adopts an approach which in important respects approximates the type of analysis suggested by Pierre Bourdieu in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977). "Theories of practice" are also comprehensively surveyed in Ortner (1984), and explicated (in terms of a reconceptualization of structure and subjectivity) in Coombe (1989a).
6. Of course this doesn't even appropriately represent North American commodity consumption practices, but that is another topic. I have stressed the need to simultaneously rethink the nature of subjectivity with our reconsideration of cultural codes or structures elsewhere (Coombe 1989a). In that discussion I outline some of the potential dangers of a theory of practice that fails to attend to the cultural influences that shape a sense of self, and people's interests, preferences and desires.

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