

---

## Introduction to Modern Greek Ideology and Folklore

---

NADIA C. SEREMETAKIS

IT HAS BEEN SAID THAT anthropology is the study of people in crisis by people in crisis. From which we can conclude that anthropology is not a comforting discipline. A sense of internal exile and displacement pushes many anthropologists and folklorists beyond the perimeters of their society in search of alternative human possibilities.

Other anthropologists embark in less well known but perhaps more difficult intellectual exploration to the exiled centers of their own culture.

Alki Kyriakidou-Nestoros, the anthropologist and folklorist, is a veteran of this personal and intellectual journey which in recent decades has become an important historical and ethical project throughout Europe. Her work is an exploration of the excluded centers of her own culture. Her research matured during the social change and cultural crisis of post war Greece — a period in which centuries-old-cultural forms and practices disappeared in a few decades to be replaced by European and American values and styles. Her work is inevitably informed by this cultural destruction. But she renders this transformation meaningful by compelling her readers to appreciate the enormity of that which has been lost and that which is currently in danger of extinction. Her work has revealed the historical presence of a peasant civilization in Greece independent of any superficial resemblances to Hellenic antiquity. In doing so, she has contributed to the restoration of a repressed but integral component of Greek culture. For repressed cultural history fosters a disfigured society, one ignorant of its past and thus incapable of making sense of its present and envisioning its future. Her work poses the disturbing and subversive question: "Is Greek Folklore a Symbol or a Reality?" This question exposes the

central (but perhaps still not fully recognized) issue in temporary Greek cultural research. That is, the differentiation between Greek culture as a textual, class or institutional construct and Greek culture as human practice. This question both addresses the possibility of a concrete experiential Greek folk culture and at the same time recognizes its possible ideological extinction. To establish the symbolic status of Greek folklore studies in the past, as she has done, is to clear an epistemological space for the critical exploration of Greek folk culture in the present.

Alki Kyriakidou-Nestoros has written with philosophical insight about the antagonisms and dichotomies engendered by the co-existence of oral and written culture in Greek social history. In doing so, she has contributed to the pluralization and democratization of the concept of culture in Greek studies.

By separating oral cultures from the distorting dominance of the text in Greek historical studies, she has followed the ethical concerns of one of her teachers, the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss who wrote emotionally about the cultural "Violence of the Letter."

Yet, this respect for the integrity of oral culture in her work has not resulted in an anti-intellectual or anti-rational position. To the contrary, it has produced a rigorous scientific position. She has demonstrated that once we salvage oral tradition from the prior distortions of an archival research tradition, we are free to perform a sensitive translation of the reality of that oral culture into a systematic body of objective knowledge.

It is only with the establishment of this body of objective knowledge that the dialogue between ourselves and our cultural others can be raised to a universal and paradigmatic experience.

On behalf of the Center for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies and the New York anthropological community, I welcome professor Alki Kyriakidou-Nestoros, this year's Constantinos Paparrigopoulos Lecturer.

---

## Introduction to Modern Greek Ideology and Folklore

---

ALKI KYRIAKIDOU—NESTOROS

YOUR EXCELLENCY, YOUR GRACE, ladies and gentlemen, dear graduating students.

I am very honored and very happy to be here with you tonight on this most joyful occasion for you, for your parents and for those of us who have come from Greece and are proud to attend the graduation exercises of the Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies Program at Queens, which is the most extensive program on Modern Greek history and culture at any institution of higher learning outside of Greece.

To Professor Harry Psomiades, the founding and caring father of both the Program and the Center, I would like to express my deepest gratitude — not only for inviting me to speak to you tonight, but for all that he has been doing these past eleven years for the promotion of Modern Greek studies in this country: for the seminars he has organized on Greek economic, social and cultural problems, for the books that have been published in the Modern Greek Research Series that have made these problems known to a wider public, for the personal attention and encouragement that he has bestowed to each and all of his students and his guests from Greece.

My colleague at the University of Thessaloniki, Dimitri Maronitis, was his guest some time ago and he gave a lecture in the recently established Linos Politis lecture series. I was so surprised and so touched that a series of lectures at Queens should be named after our well loved and respected teacher at the University of Thessaloniki, Linos Politis. This is really more than we ourselves, his students, have done for his memory in Greece and that is why we look upon the Center of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies as an example of what dedication and faith can work — miracles.