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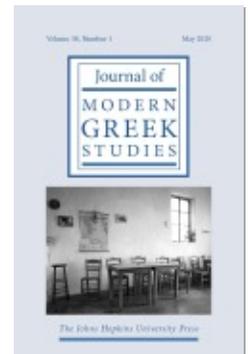
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Picturing the Imaginable: Fantasy, Photography, and Displacement in the Highland Cretan “Village”

Konstantinos Kalantzis

Abstract

What does the Cretan village signify in contemporary Greece during the so-called crisis? How do national constructions of the village clash with Sfakian residents' vision of what the village is about? How do locals' visual practices, ranging from children's drawings to digital photography, create political possibilities that disrupt dominant hierarchies? In this paper I explore what the Cretan highland village means for people and what experiences it generates in contemporary Greece. I think through these experiences in relation to nationally normative concepts of the village which conjure specific materialities (e.g., a square with stone houses). By focusing on residents' perspectives and on those of tourists and cultural producers, I examine the ruptures, but also the dialogues and continuities, that exist between locals and external onlookers around what the village is and what it can look like. I further unpack the signification of Crete as an epitome of the demotic in the context of Greece's bailout deal with the EU and IMF and examine the centrality of the village for a range of actors with different political sensibilities. Finally, I look at local digital photographic practices and assess how these constitute political breaks with previous androcentric visions of village life, while conforming to other normativities that operate in the context of global social media iconographies.

Introduction

In this article I explore the village as a notion in contemporary highland Crete and consider the things it does for locals, Greek nationals, and non-Greek visitors; the ways in which it is defined and experienced; and the cultural possibilities it enables. I am interested in the village as something semantically

constructed, but also physically and materially engaged to produce various kinds of social experience. Thus, the quotation marks over the term in the title are a way of taking a certain distance from an a priori acceptance of the village as a given entity and an invitation to explore how experiences of the village are generated and contested (see also Tilley 1994, 7–15). My exploration furthers the problematic raised by a recent body of works that ponders what the place of the village might be in 21st-century anthropology and the social sciences (Sorge and Padwe 2015, 236). The question is raised some three decades after a certain critique of anthropology's complicity in depicting its interlocutors (typically villagers) as premodern, bounded subjects. Although, as various commentators stress, this critique may have inflated past ethnographers' sensibilities (e.g. Herzfeld 2015, 338), it resulted in a remedial focus on sites of urbanity and issues such as power and the work of the elites, embedding local experience in larger encompassing frames (Sorge and Padwe 2015, 239 and 242).

The mountainous Sfakia area in southwestern Crete is a valuable case study as it shows how local experience and the village extends far beyond a physical site, the interest in which the above post-1980s critique would deem obsolete. Sfakia, operating as what Shneiderman calls—in the context of the Himalayan village—“an organizing principle” (2015, 318 and 330) and as an *ur-village*, mobilizes deeply felt identifications and fantasies of rurality and resistance for a range of (urban and rural) actors, and also for official pedagogical and commercial forces of the nation-state. Sfakia is thus key for national self-images today at a time when the loss of stature of both rural economies and the Greek global political position is often lamented by Greeks. And this builds on Sfakia's pre-existing globality and central role as an imaginary for urbanites. My emphasis on the dialogue between onlookers and Sfakian residents thus extends the focus on the village as something more than a point on a map (see also Shneiderman 2015, 319), given that Sfakians have been in a complex conversation with powerful cultural producers since at least the 18th century. Their most nativist views and local experiences thus were never a product of isolation but resulted rather from a global encounter with producers who had access to representations of tradition and locality (folklorists, musicologists, etc., see Kalantzis 2019, 179–205).

There are two themes that inform my article and I will be returning to them throughout. The first is that of continuity and rupture. I am referring here to how constructions of the village by urban cultural producers and visitors correspond to, affect, or break with residents' experiences of place. I am particularly interested in that zone where tourist constructions, municipal strategies, and locals' perceptions refract each other and thus complicate the

clear-cut distinction between outsiders and insiders. The second theme is that of normativity, by which I mean how experiences of the village conform to or defy dominant definitions of that category.

In my article, I draw on ethnographic fieldwork in Sfakia, a region with dozens of coastal and highland villages, mostly comprising hamlets set spatially apart, reflecting an older patrilocal settlement pattern (currently incorporating some deviations) with members of the same patriline building houses in particular areas (see also Kalantzis 2019, 41–42; Rackham and Moody, 1996: 89). I have been working on Sfakia since 2005 when I first set out to explore the tension between onlookers' expectations and Sfakians' own desire for the traditional—an exploration conducted through a focus on visual culture and through consideration of analyses of Cretan performances of manhood (see Herzfeld 1985) and theories of power in the relationship between peripheries and centers in colonial and other contexts. This long-term engagement enables me to track changes in representations and experiences of the village for over a decade. A key feature of the period under discussion is its culmination in what we conventionally call the Greek crisis; a term with various limitations such as its implied radical distinctness from a pre-existing non-crisis (see also Roitman 2014, 4 and 70), but which I employ in this paper to speak of a particular historical phase. It started in 2010 with Greece's bailout deal with the EU and the IMF and entails, among other things, a reimagining of notions that are semantically akin to the village, such as the native and the traditional. During this phase, these ideas are often pitted against the Western political mechanisms enforcing Greece's financial regulation (see also Kalantzis 2016a; 2016b; Herzfeld 2011; Theodossopoulos 2013; Dalakoglou and Agelopoulos 2017).

A tourist primal scene: Rupture

Consider a scene I witnessed in the summer of 2006 at a highland Sfakian village which condenses sensibilities and expectations at play in the encounter between Sfakians and Greek tourists (Kalantzis 2019, 251–253). A family of Greek urbanites from a privileged suburb of Athens sat timidly at a coffee-house and ordered soft drinks. They were immediately treated to *raki* (strong unflavored liquor made from grapes, seen as an emblem of Crete) by local men who were sitting inside the establishment. This led to the father calling a peer on his mobile phone to loudly express his veneration of this highland village as a realm of genuine native Greekness which he contrasted with his suburban habitat. He said, “I feel like a man here underneath the White Mountains, not like us in Glyfada, who have become . . . I do not even want to say what [he

means effeminate].” When locals offered to treat him to another shot of raki, the man declined, claiming, “Let us not forget that I am a Glyfadiot and hence cannot handle it as you can.”

This episode manifests elements I repeatedly observed in such encounters. Locals exert power through a gaze that cannot be returned by sitting inside, which additionally enhances many tourists’ idea that the backstage is more authentic (to recall Dean MacCannell’s work suggesting that the search for a hidden elsewhere is key to urban tourist imaginaries [1999, 101]). Public hospitality achieves a certain effect of superiority fulfilling the host’s self-image and accomplishing the guest’s containment (Sfakians paid for the Athenian man’s drinks, and he admitted he was unable to match locals in drinking; see also Herzfeld 1987). Furthermore, the scene is embedded in a sexualized geography of imagination whereby Sfakia is identified with masculinity and urbanized Greece with effeminization.

It is important to stress that the scene, orchestrated by both sides as an encounter between rugged natives and soft urbanites, took place in a village with little tourist infrastructure, which in urbanites’ imagination means being closer to unpredictable nativism and less corrupted by modernity. It also happened under a gigantic white poplar which recalls the archetypal Greek village square as a place of public entertainment. It is not accidental that this same space has been since the 1960s a primary photographic site for passing non-Greek travelers who took snapshots of local men and often sent them back to the sitters, seeking to establish a relationship across space. The coffeehouses in that village, with their pattern of paying for the newcomer’s drink, are also the sites where the encounter between old men and Greek professional photographers took place. This meeting often resulted in the publication of postcards featuring those men as anonymous rural types, a result that triggers critical discussions among Sfakians over the question of exploitation, but also fuels pride in having deceased kinsmen distinguished for their visual valor (see Kalantzis 2014; 2015; 2019).

But we also ought to understand this coffeehouse scene within the general disenchantment otherwise described to me by Greek tourists who visited Sfakia in the late 2000s. These interlocutors told me of their inability to understand the spatiality of Sfakia and about their discontent with tourist signs and the buildings that some called concrete boxes. The villages, they said, were “not traditional,” which partly refers to the fact that they consist of dispersed hamlets, lacking the open space with the plane tree and pedestrianized pavement known as the *plateia* (square). Hence, I noted earlier that the poplar under which the Athenian family drank *raki* made the setting look like a square although in its actual physical parameters it was not one (as a side note, trees such as mulberries

are more commonly used in highland Crete for shade than planes). According to many Sfakian interlocutors, Greek tourists, upon arriving, have asked in disappointment, “Is this really Sfakia?” This was often followed by questions that both adulated and infuriated locals: “Where are your traditional clothes? Where are your guns?” At first sight, the modern materiality, with its departure from the archetypal village idyll, could not sustain the myth of tradition that Sfakia invokes in Greece. There are poignant power dynamics in this configuration, as urbanites demand that Sfakians be traditional in a particular way that creates tensions with Sfakians’ own simultaneous desire for the traditional. I explore the tension at length elsewhere (Kalantzis 2019, 209–245) but it is useful to briefly ponder it here as it introduces the theme of rupture.

So, let me ask: what is this village idyll that Greek tourists spot as Sfakia’s lack? Discussions with these commentators revealed that their disappointment concerns the absence of buildings made of stone, of ceramic tile roofs, and of a square with a plane tree. Their expectations allude to how the village is presented, particularly since the 1990s, as a visitable/palatable place in guidebooks such as “Road” and “Alpha Guide” that mostly address middle class audiences. This is a distinctly Greek preoccupation as Greek nationals are the main audience partaking in this imaginary. Non-Greek (mostly northern European) tourists who return for vacation in Sfakia (some since the 1970s) do not generally take local architecture to be a disturbance of their expectations of ruggedness and tradition—and in fact some of them have even suggested to me that the presumably “anarchistic” building landscape reflects the attractive insubordination of the residents themselves. But for Greeks, Sfakia is beyond the normative version of the village; beyond the nationally imaginable.

When I asked my Sfakian interlocutors about Greek tourists’ disenchantment and their aesthetic preference for lowland Cretan villages, I faced something that Michael Herzfeld might describe as a rhetorical performance turning blame into moral advantage (see Herzfeld 1985). Different interlocutors, from the village of the *raki* scene, attributed their habitat geography to their preference for ample living space over proximity to others. This is consistent with their depiction of village life as full of conflict and the surveillance of neighbors, a vision that complicates their concomitant representation of village life as encompassing solidarity and exchange, evident, say, in gestures of public hospitality—which fuel pride and become a field of oscillation between opposing dynamics (such as trust and suspicion: see also Candea and da Col 2012, 11). Even more, they attributed the unbearable narrow-spacedness (*stenohoria*) of lowland Cretan villages, which tourists find picturesque, to an Ottoman architectural pattern. Thus, they ascribe their picturesqueness to Turkish corruption and



Figure 1. Postcard depicting men at a coffeehouse. c. 2006. Sfakian viewers asserted these men came from different areas of western Crete and were pieced together in the image through montage. Copyright Michalis Kouvidis.

present their own unpalatable village landscape as evidence of their historical resistance to invaders.

So here we have a moment of rupture between an external desire for the normative traditional (the stone village with small alleys and a square) and what appears to be an indigenous view that questions this. This rupture registers also in the visual domain, as is evident from showing a certain postcard (Figure 1) to interlocutors and discussing it. I had purchased the postcard at a tourist souvenir shop in the town of Chania. Such postcards are ubiquitous throughout Crete and a significant proportion of them depict old men as emblems of rurality; this resonates especially for visitors on Crete because the island is identified nationally and internationally, in contexts ranging from film to tourist guides, with a male whiskered figure. While seemingly addressed to non-local visitors, postcards can also become desirable images for Sfakians in the absence of other photos of deceased relatives, which is a reminder of the historical asymmetry between Sfakians and those with access to the means of producing imagery (see Kalantzis 2014; 2015; 2019). Figure 1 was produced by a Heraklion-based professional and focuses on the coffeehouse as a space of public male sociality, purporting to offer onlookers a glimpse into native tradition.

When I showed the postcard to a group of Sfakian interlocutors, however, they looked closely and burst into laughter, rejecting it as fake. They said that the photographer had pieced together the men on the left, who in actuality are sitting in a lowland village in an area neighboring Sfakia, with the men on the right, who are sitting in a Sfakian highland village. This picture would have been impossible in real life, they claimed. Not only did it show men from different areas sitting together—Sfakians speak disdainfully about certain villages in this lowland area and do not accept them as representing a common tradition with theirs—but it also showed men sitting together even though, some said, personal differences among them didn't actually permit this.

The postcard montage is an attempt to present the village as an inviting place of social unity where older men sitting together become the imaginary hosts of the spectators. But this vision seemed to clash with my interlocutors' deconstructionist commentary which indicated that specific native hierarchies (e.g. the lowland deemed as inferior to the highland) as well as local social dynamics (e.g. not being on speaking terms with a covillager) break with the unifying fantasy offered by the image. This commentary was in keeping with Sfakians' reactions to other postcards I discussed with them, which, despite the appreciation of the sitters that they triggered, also elicited criticisms of urban producers' tactics and of covillagers' complicity in the photographic act.

Utopia and displacement

But what is this vision of the Cretan village that the postcard promises about? In responding to this question, it might be useful to think of literary theorist Fredric Jameson's work on film and social imagination (1979). Revisiting the Frankfurt-school equation of mass culture with manipulation and false consciousness, Jameson argues that films have ideological functions (per a Marxian perspective), but are only able to manage collective sentiments and anxieties by mobilizing specific longings: this is their "utopian" function (1979, 141 and 144). Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* films, Jameson says, have the ideological function of encouraging the conviction that the deterioration of daily life in the US is an ethical and not an economic matter; related to the evil of specific agents (here, the Mafiosi) and not to political and institutional structures and the role of profit in their design (1979, 146). The way in which the films achieve this, however, is by activating a fantasy about the family as an object of utopian longing. This is where contempt for the Mafia (and for the ethnic group orchestrating it) competes with envy for its solidarity and cohesion

(1979, 146). One would say that we see the tight bonds among members of the family in *The Godfather* and we yearn to be members of that family.

I argue that the Sfakian coffeehouse postcard scene offers something comparable: a promise of establishing bonds and belonging to a community of rugged nativism, of being part of that family of men. Importantly, this is not a fantasy limited to male or Greek visitors. In fact, one aspect of Sfakia's veneration as a place of rootedness from the 1960s onward relates to a number of female visitors from northern Europe who stayed in the region by marrying local men and starting households there. The desire to establish bonds and to be part of what the coffeehouse postcard signals, involves, among tourists, a constant engagement with the idea of danger. There are dozens of examples—in Greek and non-Greek tourist guides, Facebook commentaries, blogs, and discussions—where urban commentators infuse Sfakia with a sense of imminent hazard, the survival of which gives them additional cultural capital (e.g. Nehring 2005; Lakopoulos 2007). Threat encompasses the treacherous hiking conditions of the arid, rocky White Mountains, the residents' blood feuds, the dangerous roads sprinkled with roadside shrines marking accident sites, the stray bullets from festive shootings, the supposed risk of saying no to more *raki* at the coffeehouse, and so on. The occasionally humorous tone in such commentaries, along with the fact that the idea of tradition itself, as promoted in key texts addressing middle-class audiences, may at times be questioned, is a sign of how these ideas are often reflexively and playfully embraced. Similarly, postcards are often collected by people who find them amusingly obsolete and “retro.” Thus, we are not necessarily dealing with a deadpan, solemn acceptance of the notion of the traditional, but rather with a veneration which Roland Barthes in a different context described as “the reader” experiencing “the myth as a story at once true and unreal” ([1957] 1993, 128). But in this slippery dynamic of enjoyment and possible questioning there is also a deep desire for the village as a place where a truer community life materializes.

And this fantasy is enacted daily in Sfakia when, for instance, locals feed guests and situate them in familial positions whereby belonging to the village via nurturing becomes an imaginary possibility, or when they generate the (often playful) shock of guests via festive shootings. Sfakians tend to offer hospitality in public sites with a distinctive nonchalance, evident when my interlocutors claim to not remember the details of the myriads of guests they have hosted. Both parties performatively iterate two subject positions as resulting from the encounter: the rooted-in-place host offering something morally and materially valuable (Sfakians typically say that the hospitality ethic no longer exists in sites of urban modernity and they present their own residence as a matter of

being deeply embedded in the locale forever) and the traveling guest who lives in cities and desires contact with a rooted world of reciprocity and pleasurable rural sensations. Such imaginaries are noted in other contexts too, as with Andrew Shryock's Jordanian Balga Bedouin interlocutors who attributed "true hospitality" to the past or areas in the desert, and Antonio Sorge's highland Sardinian village traditionalists who signified their ethos as antithetical to that of urbanites (Shryock 2012, 23; Sorge 2015, 264).

These observations respond in part to an important question: how do Greek visitors sustain the fantasy of tradition in Sfakia without the spatial markers of picturesque village traditionality? My suggestion is that they do so by displacing the fantasy of the traditional village onto the male figure. This has a long history in Sfakia. Take, for instance how, in 1939, state-commissioned photographer Nelly focused on whiskered men in formal attire as *the* image of the picturesque Cretan hinterland that the Metaxas regime would approve (Figure 2; on Nelly, see also Zacharia 2015). In the genealogy of 18th- and 19th-century travel writing on Crete that precedes Nelly's visit, these men were seen as the products of a mountainous enclave—an idea (one of Romanticism's key legacies) with tremendous resonance today. Thus, a second component of displacement is the mountainous landscape, understood as the site of activity and the generator of these visually distinctive men. In a contemporary echo of this stance, a *Vogue Hellas* journalist suggested in a 2006 article that the core allures of Crete are the charmingly dangerous residents, their hospitality, and their physical distinctiveness (but not the built environment: Xenakis 2006). Similarly, a recent special issue on Crete in the online tourist guide *GREECE IS* limits images alongside an article on Sfakia (entitled "Land of Resistance") to pictures of mountainous landscapes and portraits of whiskered men, some in traditional attire and a headscarf (Blatsiou 2019).

Here, we can extend Jameson's perspective on utopian longing by thinking through Slavoj Žižek's Lacanian reading of the last scene in Charlie Chaplin's film *City Lights*, where vision and visual recognition play a key role (Žižek [1992] 2001, 4–10). In the scene, the previously blind girl comes to realize that the tramp who just walked into her shop is actually the man who secretly facilitated the operation that restored her vision. For Žižek, the scene confronts us with the tension between an idealized symbolic order (the girl previously thought the facilitator was a wealthy, handsome young man) and the actual object, naked of symbolic support, that disturbs this fantasy; the film leaves this tension unresolved since it ends before the heroine reveals if she will accept her benefactor (Žižek [1992] 2001, 4, 8–9). We can think of the Greek tourists' disappointment with Sfakia's dispersed settlements sprinkled with modern materiality (often



Figure 2. “Man from Sfakia, 1939.” This image is part of Nelly’s 1939 photo project in Sfakia commissioned by the Metaxas regime which focuses on male, often formally dressed, figures in mountainous settings. When I brought these images to the field, my interlocutors insisted on writing down the names of the sitters who, as a rule, appeared anonymous in the archive and in two published editions of the mid 2000s featuring some of these images. Viewers identified this particular sitter as Sifis Lefas (nicknamed Horeftis and Efoplistis). Copyright Benaki Museum Photographic Archive.

deemed gaudy by educated middle-class observers) as a rejection of immediate/tangible materiality in favor of an idealized, symbolic rurality. The displacement onto the male figure sustains Sfakia as a symbolized, unitary image. The visual plays a key role here, as is evident in the succession of commercial photographs of old Sfakian men used nationally and internationally as emblems of Crete (see Kalantzis 2019, 81–114). This visual heightening involves a degree of reduction (Crete as an old whiskered man) which, it may be argued, is inherent in the

demand for iconicity and symbolization. This would illuminate why, in recent years, posters advertising Cretan products or commercial events increasingly move away from photography and adopt digital cartoon-like logos to typify Cretanness as consisting of absolute essentials: long whiskers, leather boots, and a headscarf. Photography has a degree of unpredictability in that it preserves details in the frame that may defy the photographer's agenda and render the sitters recognizable relatives (for their kin) beyond their role as national symbols, enabling a partial critique of symbolization (as happened with the coffeehouse postcard; see also Kalantzis 2019, 101–109). The demand for a unitary image that would secure Crete's place in fantasy as an ur-rural-land is also evident in Greek visitors' search for typical village signifiers such as stone and tile roofs. The search operates reductively on the complex history of local architecture, with its material differences between households based on income, builders' style, altitude, period of construction, etc., in favor of a uniform (national) palatable format.

Continuities and the poetics of stone

Sfakians' hospitality and other nativist performative gestures feed the sense of desirable village rurality and are thus in dialogue with tourists' expectations. But these aren't the only signs of a certain continuity between the two parties. A series of children's drawings on the theme of "Sfakia and my village" that I collected when visiting their elementary school in 2007 also confirm the displacement of the built environment in favor of the village as synonymous with pastoral, traditionalist manhood.¹ The drawing shown here (Figure 3) portrays a whiskered man holding a gun and a glass (presumably liquor) which represents practices intensely debated locally (discharging weapons at festivities and competitive alcohol drinking from water glasses) but iconic nationally as emblems of Crete. He is standing in front of a mountainous backdrop where imaginatively personified clouds and the sun wear headscarves, another nationalized Cretan emblem (for an exploration of another drawing's relationship to national hegemony, see Kalantzis 2014; 2019, 117–152). If Figure 3, drawn by then nine-year-old student Maria Kapridaki, is a local version of the official vision at play in Nelly's project (note the figure's whiskers and headscarf), this kinship references the history of an encounter between Sfakians and the dozens of urban specialists who have historically represented them.

The iconographic similarity is a reminder of the fact that the relationship between locals and outsider onlookers can entail, besides rupture, dialogical processes whereby external agents pick up and further inflate pre-existing

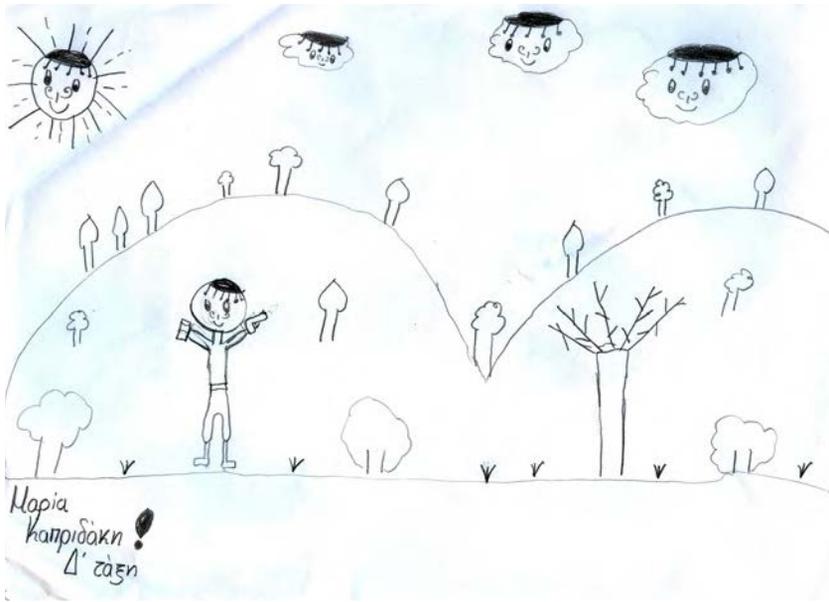


Figure 3. Drawing by Maria Kapridaki, nine-year old student at a Sfakian highland village elementary school, 2007. The theme of the drawing is “Sfakia and my village.” Other drawings from students on the same theme also focused on men in mountainous landscapes. Reproduced with permission from Maria Kapridaki.

native idioms in a series of historical interactions, thus blurring the boundaries between the outside and the inside (for more on this, see Kalantzis 2015; 2019, 179–205). A comparable process that speaks to the complexity of the encounter is illustrated by the following example. An important change in the village landscape that I witnessed while working in one Sfakian highland location was the 2006 construction of an artery linking the north to the south of Crete and replacing the old road that ran through the coffeehouse area where the *raki* scene that I opened with happened. There were various consequences to the bypass: for example, some male residents lamented the loss of ocular control over who was driving into the region, while coffeehouse proprietors disappointedly noted the decrease in passerby clientele in their establishments. The element I want to stress is that new houses and shops emerged on the sides of the new road. These were constructed following material themes that are key to the normative picturesque village imaginary. For instance, they used stone and sometimes wood, and businesses referred to their products (on signposts) as traditional (Figure 4). In part, this was a local response to what Sfakians thought visitors wanted. But it was also more than that. After observing this process for over a



Figure 4. Photograph depicting an artisan's facility that is being renovated by introducing an exterior layer of stones. Stones are increasingly used in Sfakian building practices and they enable a certain revival of an idealized past even if, as some interlocutors argue, the new technique lacks compared to stonebuilding of the past. Photo by the author, 2019.

decade, it has become apparent that locals increasingly present stone technique as a core element of their village and associate it with the notion of tradition. This includes the expression of pride in local stonemasons, some of whom post their construction jobs on Instagram and Facebook, receiving congratulatory commentary by people throughout the region. Here, stone construction becomes inseparable from the touristic: this is the point where external and internal desires merge. Moreover, Sfakians did not just copy stone construction but revisited it, since it did exist in pre-1960s buildings—but they did so via what they made of tourists' desires.

Sfakians in fact base their claims to autochthony on the presence of old stone ancestral houses, but they simultaneously displace these with new constructions they deem necessary and properly modern (hygienic, comfortable, etc.). Another tension stems from the fact that Sfakians also lament the transformation of settlements that were previously deserted and later renovated (most often with stone) by non-Greek buyers. They find them in some ways to be non-villages and they avoid calling them villages, though they are mostly

accommodating of present-day users and some interlocutors even note that at least these foreign buyers kept these areas alive, averting the much-deplored prospect of village emptiness. Sfakians, especially in highland areas with little land buying activity, formally describe locals' selling not only as the ultimate betrayal of devotion to patrilineal property, ancestry, and pride in the village but also as moral corrosion by monetary logic. (When selling happens in the highlands, they attribute it to inheritors of property who haven't lived in the village and thus are not properly infused with a sense of commitment to it.) They also see it as a disruption of the geography of kinship which characterizes their navigation of the district and whereby they describe villages by mapping their habitation by particular kin groups with whom they have ties. An encapsulation of this disruption is evident in the story I heard about a certain old man who, despite the fact that the village coffeehouse building had been sold, kept returning there at his regular hour and ordering coffee from the amused German new owner—who reportedly prepared the beverage for him! The general view explained away the man's behavior as resulting from the corrosive effects of old age on perception, but a cultural interpretation would see his habit as an insistence on the village's old spatiality and as a rejection of the transformation of the coffeehouse (an institution that is key to traditionalism²) into a private residence owned by a German man.

Contemporary stone buildings like those erected on the main road are a way for Sfakians to materially enact an idealization of the village of the past through renovation that is in their hands and not others' and that they think will appeal to tourists. This goes along with an imaginary of the past as an era of social unity and tradition, an idea undermined by the simultaneous rejection of that past as an era of poverty and animosity (on Sfakians' nostalgia, see Kalantzis 2019, 209–245; see also Herzfeld [1997] 2005, 147; Knight and Stewart 2016). And to add tension to this dynamic, many Sfakians claim that today's stone construction is technically and aesthetically deficient compared to that of the past: in its purism, this point of view ironically corresponds with that of certain urbanite educated commentators (e.g. archaeologists and architects) who express doubts over the recent trend toward stone architecture and question its authenticity and taste. Sfakians' doubts express a sensibility that represents the present as a twisted and degraded version of the past, a notion with some kinship to Western social theory, as in the work of Jean Baudrillard (e.g. [1981] 1994). Thus, an eloquent local critic and builder who has lived for long periods outside Sfakia told me that stones are now used as mere veneer on concrete walls, which has material drawbacks (e.g. it potentially lets in humidity). He insisted that up until the 1960s, when concrete became available locally, stones

were the primary building material and were taken from adjacent areas, carved and stacked on top of each other on the basis of how securely they fit. This created walls that were often uneven externally (and were usually plastered using locally produced quicklime, among other materials) while today the veneer is visually even but functionally inferior. If the evenness of the new wall can be taken as a critical comment on how (national) homogeneity impinges on local inventiveness, note also the detail he added which he mentioned as a sort of denied substratum: the new stone technique was allegedly brought to Crete by Albanian migrants in the 1990s and so, it follows, the traditional(ist)/nativist pride harbors a disavowed import at its core. Arguably, the urban, conservationist architects partly share with such local views a concern with indigeneity (the idea of local distinctiveness) as well as a belief that the technique of the past was functionally and aesthetically superior to the present. The correspondence speaks to how Sfakian idioms have historically been in conversation with modernist sensibilities that inform various disciplines, from folklore studies to architecture. At the same time, the resemblance between the external demand for the traditional and locals' traditionalism is a slippery one, with the key difference being that most Sfakians, despite their uncertainty, take pleasure in materially enacting an idealization of the past via stone construction even if they simultaneously challenge its authenticity. The contemporary technique actually allows the combination of stones (deemed traditional) with concrete/painted interiors that are locally considered properly contemporary in that they offer insulation and hygiene. Epistemologically, this recalls the Sfakians' selective traditionalism, which I explore elsewhere through the concept of "montage logic" (Kalantzis 2019, 238–239; for comparable incorporations of technology into ideas of tradition in a Hong Kong village, see Creighton 2015, 291). An insight here concerns the conflictual nature of traditionalism: the situation would be simple if Athenians wanted stone and Sfakians wanted concrete and resisted the outsiders' demands, but one is instead confronted with a messier interweaving between internal and external desires for the traditional which only partly correspond with one another.

Imagining Crete in the crisis

In the current historical phase of the so-called crisis, Crete's utopian function, to recall Jameson, has become even more resonant nationally. For many people, Cretanness as an imaginary assemblage of rural idioms inspires ideas of a native Greekness resisting the perceived humiliation caused by the financial and political monitoring of the EU and the IMF. Continuing a trend I have

recorded since the mid-2000s, Crete-as-utopia attracts people of different political backgrounds, even beyond those embracing a patriotic anti-colonial front (a distinctive constituency in the early years of the crisis which is increasingly critiqued by those identifying with an Occidentalist liberal aesthetic). Crete's resonance among different audiences is captured by the following example. After the beginning of Greece's bailout deal, Stavros Theodorakis, the head of a centrist party (non-leftist, anti-nationalist, Occidentalist, and liberal) and a journalist, dedicated an episode of his documentary-style TV show to Crete. The show's exaltation of the creative power and socialities of Cretan rhyming distichs (*mandinadhes*) framed Crete and particularly the village as the ultimate cultural resource against the economistic logic of a bureaucratic urban world as well as against the financial and social despair of the crisis (which became especially apparent in the epilogue). During the same period, Sfakia's then mayor, Pavlos Polakis, ascended the parliamentary scene and became one of the key figures in the governing party SYRIZA and Deputy Minister of Health (until the July 2019 elections, when SYRIZA lost). Polakis was to be known later for embodying the anticolonial nativism that has become meaningful in the public sphere since 2010: in February 2019, for example, Polakis defended his smoking in press conferences in the face of damning commentary by the EU Commissioner for Health and Food Safety—an ideal metaphor for oppressive Western tutelage. Theodorakis's summoning of the Cretan village is an indication of even Greek Occidentalists' reliance on the village as symbolic resource, a reliance which is further visible in centrist (liberal) post-crisis celebrations of urbanites' return to the village to found startup companies and export high-quality farming goods (for a criticism of this celebration, see Vamiedakis 2012). Polakis, and the way in which both his opponents and his sympathizers discuss him, animates the myth of the intransigent native clashing with an urban regime. Both examples speak to the resonance of Crete as an imaginary entity today. The village here is again treated metonymically—that is, as an idea embodied by a human figure: a whiskered man at an old courtyard who possesses the wisdom of rhyme-making in Theodorakis's show or the masculinist minister who discharges his weapon in feasts and challenges the authority of Western surveyors. If the village is that prime imaginary site of nation building on which both 19th- and 20th-century folklore studies and literary genres such as *ethnographia* drew (see Stewart 1989; Anagnostopoulos 2014), the crisis reiterates key imaginaries concerning the village's power to conjure an unadulterated (and certainly enjoyable) demotic world. And if one were to think of such imaginaries as “instantiation(s) of a larger pattern of engagement,” as Herzfeld's village model of concentricity implies (2015, 340), then it is instructive to remember how, during the crisis,

certain Greek commentators (some with parliamentary positions, embracing a leftist traditionalism) conjured Greece itself as a morally superior, gracious, and in a way traditional entity valuing friendship and hospitality, in contrast to its relentless Western lenders (e.g. Douzinas 2018). The parallel, which exemplifies an abstraction of the idea of hospitality across scales from household to nation (see also Shryock 2012, 23 and 28), can be taken as endowing Greece with the moral attributes of the (traditional) village while the West is seen as modern, alienated, and urban. The parallel potentially reinforces, however, a certain Greek anxiety concerning the country's place in the global configuration, since it risks placing it in a position of inefficacy in realms deemed modern (e.g. financial organization); this reminds one of how a traditionalist self-definition may be fraught with uncertainty yet be simultaneously pleasing.

Indie Romanticism, self-imaging, and normativity

I will conclude this essay by turning to Sfakians' own photographic envisioning of their area, an activity which has radically expanded since the post-2010 proliferation of smart phones and fast internet's tying of social media to everyday photographic practice. To account for, publicize, and understand this explosion of local photography, I organized, in three venues in Sfakia in the summer and autumn of 2018, an exhibition entitled "The Sfakian Screen: Looking and Living in the White Mountains of Crete."³ I framed the exhibition as an opportunity to take account of the recent social media digital photography boom, which I understand as a historical break involving a society that until recently has been represented only by urban specialists (folklorists, photographers, etc.) and now engages in diverse self-imaging practices. The event and its reception merit detailed exploration elsewhere, but it will be instructive to mention here some issues that relate to the representation of the village. First, although I asked for photos of Sfakia, none of the images submitted to me by some 43 participants featured the village as a built structure that resembled normative images of Greek villages in magazines and tourist guides. I received only one image that included buildings, and that was a photograph taken by a drone and depicting a mostly abandoned hamlet. This image performs the traditionalist idealization of the past (in that it featured old stone houses), which is strong among residents of that area. The idealization goes along with the photo's avoidance of the present-day village material landscape whose visual noise and messiness arguably destabilize the idealization of the past—a local, more lenient version of Greek tourists' aversion to present-day materiality. Among young male participants there was preference for variations on the visual formula

of posing in the mountains, representing them as a transcendental zone of manhood and enacting late 19th-century imagery of male warriors fighting against the Ottomans (Kalantzis 2019, 79 and 159–170). An element that I was interested in capturing in the exhibition was how women engage this warrior iconography and how they complicate the notion of the mountain as a strictly male register. They do this explicitly when they playfully comment on the apparent contradiction of a subject's posing on the mountain but not being a man. But they also do this in tacit ways. Images in the new genre introduce female bodies in gestures that creatively deform the iconography of austere men with weapons amid peaks, and they represent the village as an affect-generating site and a place of entertainment—strolling around, sitting down under trees to chat, smiling to the camera, or even visually blurring their bodies (Figure 5). In this reimagining of the village in young women's photographs there is one element that is common with male and with more formal national depictions: these images privilege bodies placed in mountainous landscapes and they omit material assemblages (e.g. houses) that allude in Greece to the notion of the village. It is important to stress that some of the exhibition's photographers were the former children whose 2007 drawings depicted the region through (male) figures in mountainous backdrops. This shows how digital photography enables tweaked continuations of older motifs while enhancing preexisting possibilities of imagination (see also Miller et al. 2016, 8). These photos continue the emphasis on the motif of bodies on the mountain, as registered in the 2007 drawings, but they also introduce new elements that subvert key androcentric formulas. As in historian Joseph Koerner's analysis of Caspar David Friedrich's paintings, the insertion of these female bodies presents the (village) landscape as something subjectively experienced ("something seen" rather than "something there") and Sfakians' digital images also rework certain romantic tenets such as an interest in the rugged natural as mystical and unique (Koerner [1990] 2014, 29 and 213). The fact, however, that these women's bodies smile, or playfully engage each other and the surrounding environment (e.g. by jumping up in the air) offers an alternative range of social experiences of what Cretan village life may encompass beyond the dominant Cretan village iconography of men in coffeehouses, rural labor, and warrior poses. Theirs is a sort of indie Romanticism (with its depiction of being in the mountain through modalities of tender friendship, sentimental contemplation, and emotional affect) compared to the formalist, folkloric Romanticism informing the region's representation until now.

The new genre produced by women is in keeping with global socialmedia iconographies of landscape experience, friendship, and free time. It can therefore be argued that though it is tempting to suggest that digital photography



Figure 5. Photograph by Artemis Karkani, c. 2017. This image is featured in the photographer's Instagram page and is part of the imaginative visual reworking of the village landscape by Sfakians with smartphone and other digital cameras. Young women critically and often humorously insert female bodies in a landscape that was until recently dominated by male formal poses in national and local representations. Their intervention generally retains the visual formula of bodies posing in a mountainous landscape.

envisions the unimaginable by breaking with dominant norms, it also adopts formulas that are normative at other, more-than-local levels. In other words, an image of girls smiling to the camera under a tree may be revolutionary in the context of Sfakian visual history, but it is rather commonplace in the context of Facebook's global iconography of leisure and friendship. Rather than conceiving therefore of local photographic production as a question of radical (new) vs. complacent (old) aesthetics, it might be more fruitful to view it as encompassing competing normativities: female compared to male, localized compared to national.

The aspect of the exhibition to end this paper with, however, is something happening outside one highland venue—right by where the 2006 *raki* scene happened. Since the mid-2010s, the municipality had renovated the coffeehouse area which, with its pedestrianized stone pavement, now resembles the nationally normative village square aesthetics. This also coincided with the installation of a road sign designating the entire hamlet as “traditional.” The renovation aesthetically accentuated a certain square-like space that had been built in the 1980s on the periphery of the coffeehouse area, mimicking the normative village square (the 1980s is another key period for resignifying the demotic rural). Throughout my fieldwork in the 2000s, that space was left unused by local men who preferred coffeehouses for socializing (Figure 6). Following the 2010s renovation and certainly during the exhibition, which was understood by many residents and especially by expatriate women as a form of modernizing renewal for the village, this space was in constant use. This coincided with the restoration of three adjacent buildings to be used as cultural centers, yet another promise of village renewal. The area, with its slight distance from the androcentric coffeehouses, enabled a spatial coexistence and conversation between men and women which breaks with the norm of public commensality in Sfakia.⁴ Notably, various young women had told me in the past that they avoided passing in front of the coffeehouse, conceived as a strictly male space generating a critical gaze directed toward bystanders. The coexistence of people in this new square is made more politicized by the fact that local women framed their visit to the exhibition and this space as a claim to participating in what we might call urban modernity (see also Cowan 1991). During one gathering, these women's exasperated yet humorous commentary spoke of a supermarket cashier in a Cretan city who was shocked upon hearing one of them describe her children's recent pajama party. The shock, an ostensible result of the expectation that Sfakians are structurally immune to Western urban idioms, is what annoyed these women who were also involved in non-traditionalist cultural events. While using this square, they also described the village through idioms



Figure 6. The new “square” created originally in the 1980s but increasingly used after the mid-2010’s renovation of the surrounding area and particularly during the “Sfakian Screen” exhibition. The statue of Tsontos Vardas, early 20th-century nationalist fighter and politician was installed in the 1990s. Chairs and tables were brought by a coffeehouse proprietor to accommodate clientele opting to sit in this area. Photo by the author, 2018.

of cozy attractiveness (e.g. the winter fireplace overlooking snowy fields) to be found in representations of a global aesthetic of leisure on platforms such as Instagram and in tourist guides. As with digital photography’s political possibilities, therefore, the contestation of dominant Sfakian ideas of the village as an androcentric space articulates something novel and politically consequential even as it adopts another form of normativity: the vision of the village as a touristically palatable space of leisure.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have explored what the highland Cretan village signifies and what it enables experientially among Greek and non-Greek visitors as well as among local residents in the period before and during the so-called crisis. I set out to understand what the national fantasy of the village is about and how national constructions relate to locally-embedded experiences. I further tried to grasp the political possibilities of recent local imaginings of the village as registered in visual and material practices. The Sfakian case reminds us of the importance

of retaining a focus on *the village* not merely because village experiences persist (see also Creighton 2005: 297) and residents glorify the notion of locality, even if they may lament rural economies' increasing dependence on external financial structures, such as EU subsidies. Such a focus can particularly illuminate the village's role in emerging definitions of the (Greek) nation and in how urbanites imagine the country's standing in a global configuration.

The relationship between representations of the village by visiting outsiders and residents includes both dissonance (rupture) and continuity. For instance, the material forms of Sfakian villages seem to spark urban Greeks' bemusement due to their departure from a normative aesthetic, while many Sfakians deride Greek nationals' fantasies about the village. Given Crete's resilient resonance as an archetype of demotic rurality, I tried to understand how visitors retain the fantasy of Sfakian traditionality without the standard markers of village picturesqueness. I argued that this becomes possible through displacement of the notion of the traditional onto men and onto the mountainous landscape. Building on Žižek's Lacanian reading of *City Lights*, I argued that there is a tension in visitors' experience between the search for Sfakia as a symbolic, unitary image (the man on the mountain) and a material environment that partly undermines this. I traced the history of the displacement in historical and contemporary representations and I correlated it to local visions that partly share an emphasis on (male) bodies in a rocky environment.

In understanding what the image of the Cretan village does for non-local viewers, I drew on Jameson's analysis of film's mobilization of utopian longing to argue that a key desire among (Greek and non-Greek) tourists is that of joining a community of rugged men and of bypassing the putative dangers involved in it. The crisis represents a high point of cultural investment in Crete (and the demotic more generally) and here I showed how Crete and the village become crucial symbolic resources for agents with different self-images. I further explored the element of continuity and dialogue between visitors' and locals' visions which complicates the clear-cut distinction between an internal and an external level, particularly as it relates to recent traditionalization approaches through the construction of stone buildings. I finally turned to local photographic practices and showed the radical reimagining these enable but also the ways in which newer constructions of the village as a conceptual and spatial entity break with local normative visions while simultaneously adopting normativities at another level.

NOTES

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¹On children's photographic practices as politics, see also Varvantakis and Nolas, forthcoming.

²On the role of coffeehouses in rural sociality, see also Panopoulos 2001; Papataxiarchis 1991.

³The exhibition flyer can be accessed at https://www.academia.edu/37095488/The_Sfakian_Screen_flyer_English. For two articles about the show in the Greek online press, see: <https://m.popaganda.gr/i-sfakiani-othoni-ekthesi-fotografias-konstantinos-kalantzis/> and <https://mikropragmata.lifo.gr/listes/ta-sfakia-opos-ta-vlepoun-oi-katoikoi-tous-8-fotografies-tis-zois-sta-syghrona-lefka-ori/>.

⁴One particular coffeehouse proprietor served beverages to people sitting in the new square (it fell within the establishment's lease), but the area was also seen as distinct from the coffeehouses.

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