

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

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Abstract

In this paper I explore what the Cretan highland village means for people and what experiences it generates in contemporary Greece. By focusing on residents' perspectives and on those of tourists and cultural producers, I examine the ruptures but also the dialogues that exist between locals and external onlookers. I further unpack what the fantasy of the highland Cretan village is about and relate this to circumstances of the so-called Greek crisis. I finally look at local visual practices and assess how these constitute political breaks while conforming to certain normativities. 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? These are some of the questions that I pursue in this essay.

Keywords: Village, Tradition, Architecture, Imagination, Crete, Photography, Tourism, Greek crisis, Material Culture, Romanticism

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Introduction

In my paper 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; 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. Though, 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, 242). Sfakia 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, 330) and 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 both rural economies and the Greek global political position are often lamented by Greeks over their loss of stature. And this builds on Sfakia’s pre-existing globality and central role as an imaginary for urbanites. My emphasis

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on the dialogue between onlookers and Sfakian residents extends thus the focus on the village as something more than a point on a map (see also Shneiderman 2015: 319) given 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 from a rather 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 paper and I will be returning to them throughout. The first is that of continuity-and-rupture. I am referring to how constructions of the village by urban cultural producers and visitors correspond, 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 and thus complexify 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 or defy dominant definitions of that category.

In my paper, I draw on ethnographic fieldwork in the mountainous Sfakia area in southwestern Crete; a region with dozens of coastal and highland villages, mostly comprising hamlets set spatially apart which reflects an older patrilocal settlement pattern (currently entailing 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 which 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 into what we conventionally call the Greek crisis; a term with various limitations such as its implicit distinction to a pre-existing non-crisis (see also Roitman 2014: 4, 70) but which in this paper I employ to speak of a particular historical phase. It started in 2010 with Greece's bailout deal by the EU and the IMF and entails among other things, a reimagining

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I have been working on Sfakia since 2005 when I first set to explore the tension between onlookers' expectations and Sfakians' own desire for the traditional through 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...

of notions that are semantically kindred 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 coffeehouse and ordered soft drinks. They were immediately treated to *raki* (strong unflavoured liquor made from grapes, seen as 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 juxtaposed to 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 and feeding the notion of a backstage that's 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 the

guest's containment (Sfakians paid for the Athenian man's drinks who admitted he was unable to match locals in drinking, see also Herzfeld 1987). Finally, the scene is embedded in a sexualized geography of imagination whereby Sfakia is identified with masculinity and urbanized Greece with feminization.

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 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's 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 site 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 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 buildings which some called concrete boxes. The villages, they said were "not traditional," which partly refers to the fact that they consist of dispersed hamlets, and they lacked the open space with the plane tree and pedestrianized pavement known as the square [*plateia*]. Hence, I noted earlier that the poplar under which the Athenian family drank *raki* made the setting look like a square as in actual physical

parameters it wasn't 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 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 idyllic couldn't 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 which creates tensions with Sfakians' own simultaneous desire for the traditional. I explore the tension at length elsewhere (Kalantzis 2019: 209-245) but it's useful to briefly ponder it here as it introduces the theme of rupture.

So, let me ask, what is this village idyllic 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. These 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. And it is a distinctly Greek preoccupation which indicates how 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 to their expectations of ruggedness and tradition and in fact some of them even suggested to me that the presumably "anarchistic" building landscape indexes 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 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 complexifies their 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-spaceness [*stenohoria*] of lowland Cretan villages which tourists find picturesque, to an Ottoman architectural pattern. Thus, they ascribe their picturesque to Turkish corruption and 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 to interlocutors and discussing about it (figure 1). I had purchased the postcard at a tourist-souvenir shop in the town of Chania. Such postcards are ubiquitous throughout Crete and a significant percentage of them depicts old men as emblems of rurality which resonates especially for visitors on Crete because the island is identified nationally and internationally with a male whiskered figure, in contexts ranging from film to tourist guides. 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 of 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 of 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, 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 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. People's commentary was in keeping with Sfakians' reactions to other postcards I discussed with them, which despite the appreciation of sitters they triggered they also elicited criticisms of urban producers' tactics and of covillagers' complicity in the photographic act.

Utopia and Displacement

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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-style equation of mass culture with manipulation and false consciousness, Jameson argues that films have ideological functions (per a Marxian perspective), but they are only able to manage collective sentiments and anxieties by mobilizing specific longings; this is their "utopian" function (1979: 141, 144). Francis Ford Coppola's films, *The Godfather*, 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 with political and institutional structures and the role of profit in their design (1979: 146). The way in which the film achieves 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, Sfakia's veneration as a place of rootedness that occurred in the 1960s onward entailed 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 which additionally gives them cultural capital for surviving it

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(e.g., Nehring 2005; Lakopoulos 2007). Threat encompasses the treacherous hiking conditions of the sublimely arid, rocky White Mountains, the residents' blood feuds, the dangerous roads sprinkled with roadside shrines marking accident sites, the looming 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 it is 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." We are not necessarily dealing thus with a deadpan, solemn acceptance of the notion of the traditional, but 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's also a deep desire for the village as a place where truer community life materializes.

And this fantasy is enacted daily in Sfakia, for instance when locals feed guests and situate them in familial positions where 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 say typically that the hospitality ethic no longer exists in sites of urban modernity and they present their 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"

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[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 \(Shryock 2012: 23; Sorge 2015: 264\).](#)

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These observations respond in part to an important question, that is how do Greek visitors sustain the fantasy of tradition in Sfakia without the spatial markers of picturesque village traditionalism? My suggestion is by displacing exactly the fantasy of the traditional village onto the male figure. This has a long history in Sfakia. Take for instance how state-commissioned photographer Nelly focused in 1939 on whiskered men in formal attire as *the* image of the picturesque Cretan hinterland that the Metaxas regime would approve of (figure 2; on Nelly, see also Zacharia 2015). In the genealogy of 18th and 19th-century travel writing to 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. A second component of displacement thus 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 his 2006 article that the core allures of Crete are the charmingly dangerous residents, their hospitality and 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 2001 \[1992\]: 4-10\). In the scene, the previously blind girl comes to realize that the tramp who just walked in 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 were a wealthy, handsome young man) and the actual object, naked of symbolic support, that disturbs this fantasy; a tension the film leaves unresolved since it ends before the heroine reveals if she will accept her benefactor (Žižek 2001 [1992]: 4, 8, 9). We can think of the Greek tourists' disappointment with Sfakia's dispersed settlements sprinkled with modern materiality (often 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 achieves sustaining exactly Sfakia as a symbolized, unitary image. The visual plays a key role here as is also evident in the lineage 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 may be argued is key to 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 by preserving details in the frame that may even defy the photographer's agenda and render these sitters recognizable relatives (for their kin) beyond their role as national symbols which enables a partial critique of such symbolization (as it happened with the coffeehouse postcard; see also Kalantzis 2019:101-109). The demand for a unitary image that would secure Crete's fantasy place as an Ur-rural-land is also evident in Greek visitors' search for typical village signifiers (such as stone and tile roofs) which again operates reductively on the complex history of local architecture, with its material differences between households based on income.

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builders' style, altitude zone, period of construction, etc., in favor of a uniform (national) palatable format.

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Continuities and the poetics of stone

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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 favour of the village as pastoral, traditionalist manhood¹. 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 in festivities and competitive alcohol drinking in 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.

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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 picked up and further inflated pre-existing native idioms in a series of historical

interactions thus blurring the boundaries between the outside and the inside (more on this, 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 I witnessed while working in one Sfakian highland location was the 2006 construction of an artery linking the north to the south of Crete which replaced the old road that went through the coffeehouse area where the *raki* scene that I opened with happened. There were various consequences to the bypass: e.g., some male residents lamented the loss of ocular control on who's driving into the region, while coffeehouse proprietors disappointedly noted the decrease of passer-by 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 while 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 decade it becomes apparent that locals gradually present stone technique as a core element of their village and associate it with the notion of tradition. This includes the expression of pride for local stonemasons, some of whom post their construction jobs on Instagram and Facebook receiving congratulatory commentary by people throughout the region. Stone-building becomes inseparable from the touristic here; it's that point of merging external and internal desires. Even more, Sfakians did not just copy stone-building but revisited it, as it did exist in pre-1960s buildings, but they did so via what they made of tourists' desires.

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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

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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 against the much-averted idea of village-emptiness. Sfakians, especially in highland areas with little landbuying activity, formally describe locals’ selling as the ultimate betrayal of the devotion to patrilineal property, descent and pride in the village [as well as moral corrosion by monetary logic \(when selling happens in the highlands they attribute it to property inheritor owners who haven’t lived in the village and are thus not properly infused with a sense of commitment to it\)](#). They also see it as a disruption to the geography of kinship which characterizes their navigation of the district, 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 was sold he kept returning there at his regular hour and ordered coffee to the amused German [new](#) owner who reportedly prepared the beverage for him! A commonplace approach explained away the man’s stance to 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 coffeehouse’s² (an institution that is key to traditionalism) transformation into a private residence owned by a German man.

So, contemporary stone building like that done on the main road is 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 appeals to tourists. This goes along with an imaginary of that 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 2005 [1997]: 147; Knight and Stewart 2016).

And to add tension to this dynamic, many Sfakians claim that today's stonebuilding lacks technically and aesthetically compared to that of the past which in its purism corresponds ironically with certain urbanite educated commentators (e.g., archaeologists and architects) who express doubts over the recent stone trend and question its "authenticity" and taste.

Sfakians' doubts express a certain 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). An eloquent local critic and builder who has lived for long periods outside Sfakia told me thus that stones are now used as mere veneer on concrete walls, which has material drawbacks (e.g., potentially lets in humidity). He insisted on the fact 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, among others, locally produced quicklime) while today the veneer is visually even but functionally inferior. If the evenness of the new wall can be taken to be a critical comment on how (national) homogeneity impinges on local inventiveness, note also the detail he added which he signified as a sort of negated 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 view 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 been in conversation historically with modernist sensibilities that inform various disciplines, from folklore studies to architecture. At the same time, it's a slippery resemblance between the external demand for the traditional

Commented [KK2]: shares with architects: concern with indigeneity (local distinctiveness) and the idea of functional harmony of the past, local distinctiveness. In that sense the demand for traditionality is a demand for nationalization? (so the fantasy for 'the village' is a fantasy again for a single. Unitary image)—

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Among my most eloquent local critics of the stonebuilding: veneer, says exactly that the homogenous surface of outside on new walls: product of new technique: lacks in functional properties (takes in humidity) and aesthetics and is a mere veneer PLUS political unconscious= brought by Albanian migrants in the 1990s to Crete-

Sfakian Baudrillardian sensibility: laments the present as a second life of a realer past- (applies to shepherding. Etc. etc)

The complexity is that locals partake in this as the set of external demands converses with their desires for the traditional- even though as I have argued in a different context: their actual performances of tradition (including the delightfully scary gunshootings) also disturb the expectation

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and locals' traditionalism, the key difference being that despite their uncertainty most Sfakians take pleasure in materially enacting an idealization of the past via stone building 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, that is, offering insulation and hygiene (which epistemologically recalls Sfakians' traditionalist selectivity 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 in that though it would be neat to have a situation whereby Athenians wanted stone but Sfakians wanted concrete and resisted the outsiders' demand, one is instead confronted with a messier interweaving between the internal and external desires for the traditional which only partly correspond with each other.

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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 resisting native Greekness against the perceived humiliation caused by the financial and political monitoring of the EU and the IMF. Continuing a trend, I recorded since the mid 2000s, utopian *Crete* attracts people of different political backgrounds, that is beyond those embracing a patriotic anti-colonial front that became a distinctive constituency in the early years of the crisis and which is increasingly critiqued by those identifying with an Occidental liberal aesthetic. Crete's resonance among different audiences is captured by the following example. Following the

onset of Greece's bailout deal, head of centrist party (non-leftist, anti-nationalist, Occidentalist and liberal), journalist Stavros Theodorakis dedicated an episode of his documentary-style TV show to Crete. The show framed Crete and particularly the village as the ultimate cultural resource against the financial and social despair of the crisis but also against the economic logic of a bureaucratic urban world. During the same period, Sfakia's then mayor, Pavlos Polakis, ascended the parliamentary scene and became one of SYRIZA's (governing party) key figures and an Alternate 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 since 2010 in the public sphere, as in defending his smoking in press conferences against the EU commissioner's February 2019 damning commentary which is an ideal metaphor of oppressive Western tutelage. Theodorakis' summoning of the Cretan village is an indication of even Greek Occidentalists' reliance on the village as symbolic resource which is further visible in centrist (liberal) post-crisis celebrations of urbanites' return to the village to found start-up companies and export high-quality farming goods (for a criticism of this celebration, Vamiedakis 2011). 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 treated again metonymically, that is as an idea embodied by a human figure: an old man at the coffeehouse who holds the wisdom of rhyme-making in Theodorakis' 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 ethnography drew (see Stewart 1989; Anagnostopoulos 2014), the crisis reiterates key imaginaries concerning the village's power to conjure an unadulterated (and certainly enjoyable pleasurable) demotic world. And if one were to think of such imaginaries

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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 vis-à-vis 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, 28), can be taken to represent Greece with the moral attributes of the (“traditional”) village vs. the West as modern, alienated and urban. The parallel potentially reinforces however a certain Greek anxiety concerning the country’s place in a global configuration as it risks placing it in a position of lack concerning its efficacy in realms deemed modern (e.g., financial organization), reminding one of how a traditionalist self-definition may be fraught with uncertainty yet be simultaneously pleasing.

▼ *Indie Romanticism, self-imaging and normativity* ▼

I will finish the paper by turning to Sfakians’ own photographic envisioning of the area which has radically expanded since the post-2010 proliferation of smart phones and fast internet tying social media to everyday photographic practice. To account for, publicize and understand this explosion of local photography I organized an exhibition entitled “The Sfakian Screen: Looking and Living in the White Mountains of Crete³³” in three venues in Sfakia, in the summer and autumn of 2018. I framed the exhibition as a platform that heeds the recent digital social-media photography boom which I understand to be a historical break involving a society that has until recently only been represented by urban specialists (folklorists, photographers, etc.) and which now engages in diverse self-imaging practices. The event and its reception merits detailed exploration elsewhere, but it will be instructive to

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mention here some issues that relate to the representation of the village. First, none of the images submitted to me by some 43 participants (upon my invitation for photos of Sfakia) featured the village as a built structure that would resemble normative images of Greek villages in magazines and tourist guides. I only received one image that included buildings and that was a photograph [taken by a drone](#) depicting a mostly abandoned hamlet. The image performs the traditionalist idealization of the past (e.g., it featured old stone houses) which is strong among residents of that area. The idealization goes along with the photo's avoidance (the image was taken from high up) of the present-day village material landscape whose visual noise and messiness arguably destabilizes 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 of the visual formula of posing in the mountains as a transcendental zone of manhood which enacts late 19th-century imagery of male warriors fighting against the Ottomans (see Kalantzis 2019: 79, 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 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 amidst peaks and they represent the village as an affect-generating site and a place of entertainment, as in strolling around, sitting down under trees to chat, smiling to the camera [or even visually blurring their bodies](#) (figure 5). In this re-imagining of the village in young women's photographs' there is one element that is common with male and 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

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photographers were the “children” whose 2007 drawings depicted the region as (male) figures in mountainous backdrops. This shows how digital photography doesn’t necessarily deliver the unprecedented but enables tweaked continuation of older motifs while enhancing pre-existing 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 with 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, 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 \(with its depiction of being in the mountain through modalities of tender friendship, sentimental contemplation and affect\) compared to the formalist, folkloric Romanticism informing the region’s representation until now.](#)

The new genre by women is in keeping with global social-media iconographies of landscape experience, friendship, and free time. It can be therefore argued that though it is tempting to suggest that digital photography 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 is rather commonplace in the context of Facebook’s global iconography of leisure and friendship.](#) Rather than conceiving therefore of local

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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 renovated the coffeehouse area which with its pedestrianized stone pavement, 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 in the periphery of the coffeehouse area mimicking the normative village square (the 1980s is another key period for resignifying the demotic rural). That space was throughout my fieldwork in the 2000s left unused by local men who preferred coffeehouses for socializing (figure 6). Following the 2010s renovation and certainly during the exhibition, which was framed by many residents and especially expat women as 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 centres holding another promise of village renewal. The area enabled, with its slight distance from the androcentric coffeehouses, a spatial co-existence and conversation between men and women which breaks with the norm of public commensality in Sfakia. Notably, different young women had told me in the past that they avoid passing in front of the coffeehouse, conceived as a strictly male space generating a critical gaze on bystanders. The coexistence of people on 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

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children's recent pajama party. The shock, an ostensible result of the expectation that Sfakians be 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 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 tourist guides. As with digital photography's political possibilities then, 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, that is the vision of the village as a touristically palatable space of leisure.

Conclusion

In this essay I explored what the highland Cretan village signifies and what it enables experientially among Greek and non-Greek visitors as well as local residents in the period before and during the so-called crisis. I set 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.

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The relationship between representations of the village by visiting outsiders and residents features both dissonance (rupture) and continuity. For instance, the material form of Sfakian villages seems 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 is possible by displacing the notion of the traditional onto men and onto the mountainous landscape. By 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.

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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 stone building. 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

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spatial entity break with normative versions while simultaneously adopting normativities at another level.

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NOTES

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

² On coffeehouses' role in rural sociality see also Panopoulos 1999, Papataxiarchis 1991.

³ The exhibition flyer can be accessed here:

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/>

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