

## Dealing with Disadvantage The Construction of the Self and the Politics of Locality

### Politics and the Self in the Anthropology of Mediterranean Europe

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Politics has been one of the founding themes of Mediterranean anthropology and also a domain of major contributions by the Anglo-Saxon pioneers who introduced the paradigm of 'honour and shame'. The very establishment of this ethnographic field has been realized by the application to southern European cases of some of the theoretical tools and hypotheses with which the British africanists have tried to solve the enigma of political order in stateless societies. And the first ethnographic studies of political relations by the forefathers, J. Pitt-Rivers, J. Campbell<sup>1</sup> and others, have opened the field to other disciplines providing a rich terrain of cross-fertilisations.

The historical development of the ethnographic studies of the political in southern Europe, no doubt, has been shaped by wider theoretical concerns as it has been effected by the major political changes that have taken place in the area during the last decades. However, the most important factor in these developments has been the transition from the 'honour and shame' paradigm to the gender paradigm and the varying definitions of culture and the self which are employed by these perspectives.

From the theoretical viewpoint of 'honour and shame' politics pragmatologically referred primarily to 'patronage', a rather ambiguous<sup>2</sup> analytical category which, among other things, suggested the use of the language of kinship in 'modern' political processes or the matching of uneven qualities and the bridging of hierarchies through contact. However, in the first classics of the 50s and 60s, patronage was analysed not just in the structural-functional style, as an institutional framework of hierarchical incorporation through contractual exchange,<sup>3</sup> but primarily as a culturally specific option which is available to those standing at the political margins. The moral values that constitute the family into a socio-economically separate world, thus giving rise to social atomism and to the politically problematic fragmentation of the social fabric by particularistic kinship allegiances, are similar to the values that

and replaced by a more open and dynamic theory of multiple and competing discourses and a broader understanding of the self as socially constructed in the various fields of action.

In the course of these theoretical shifts, new domains in the study of the political emerged and, in a way, old ones became peripheral. The theoretical premises of the 'honour and shame' model fitted well the analysis of the inchoate yet stable forms of political life under the post-war authoritarian regimes of southern Europe. On the other hand, the processes of democratisation and extreme politicisation in the middle 70s coincided with the emergence of the new theoretical paradigms and the gradual shift of focus away from the central political institutions and their workings at the local level.<sup>7</sup> Despite the important exceptions to this trend, the feminist and constructionist rethinking of the last two decades has left us with a vacuum in the study of this type of politics.<sup>8</sup> Yet the new constructionist views of self and emotion and the symbolic analysis of political process provide an analytically powerful framework for the study of new forms of political mobilisation, the resistant qualities of political action and the multiple and often contradictory cultural foundations of party and municipal politics in the democratic regimes of southern Europe. If politics is not just institutionally given from above but socially and symbolically made and contested from below, then the shift from 'honour and shame' to gender is a theoretical development that should be exploited in the study of these 'new' politics.

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This paper is part of the theoretical rethinking that gender has brought in southern European ethnography. Here I try to link culture to politics and consider the construction of alternative viewpoints, the differentiation of culture in the context of social hierarchy and marginalization. In particular I want to analyse the cultural foundations of local/municipal politics, to show how different notions of belonging to the locality are juxtaposed as alternative models of accommodation or resistance to the political and economic penetration of the state.<sup>9</sup> More generally I would like to discuss a cultural model of protest that is informed by gender ideology and operates on two levels: in marriage and the household on the one hand, in economic and political relations with the state on the other. The focus on local politics will enable me to approach from a new angle the broader issue of coffeeshop heterodoxy.

My approach owes a lot to recent developments in anthropological theory, and particularly to a new, important emphasis on the study of emotions as cultural constructs. According to a post-Jamesian view, emotions are core elements of moral systems. In the verbal and non-verbal display of emotions lies a political potential to be exploited by socially marginal categories of people, who are often found in a muted position. Emotions therefore are "ultimately tied to politics in its broadest sense."<sup>10</sup> This perspective has yielded impressive results as it has been primarily applied to the study of the social practices of women at the margins.<sup>11</sup> Here I will distinguish emotions of

necessarily sex-specific ideas, but that ideas about femininity and masculinity are marked separately on various levels of social thought, and that the application of these ideas keeps genders apart. These multiple definitions of the self could be described as aesthetic orientations: they are ways of sensing the place of the self in the world, of feeling one's path in life, of assessing the whereabouts of one's existence and the doings of others. In a culture that speaks a lot about emotions and, as we shall see, makes a lot out of them, the gendered self is primarily perceived in terms of emotion. For the sake of my overall argument I will focus on two emotion-words: *agapi* and *kefi*.

*Agapi*, to be translated as 'kinship love', is a core symbol of femininity. Women are thought to have a distinctive 'natural' capacity for displaying a strong emotional interest which involves care, nurture, or total devotion bordering on 'altruistic sacrifice' (*thisia*), and 'pain' (*ponos*). *Agapi* is ideally unconditional, that is to say does not rely on the expectation of immediate return and unilaterally flows down the generations to their offspring. Women grow love for others, and the way to do it is as mothers. 'Kinship love' therefore organises women's personhood as a relational domain, with women at the centre and the recipients of love, obliged, at the periphery. Kinship love morally binds: it is an enduring material to construct ties that are hierarchical and can be extended, though only to a certain degree.

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To fulfil their destiny and to be complete as persons, women are expected to become mothers in the only socially appropriate way: get married, make a *nikokirio* ('household'), raise a *ikoyenia* ('family'). Marriage brings together the separately defined genders, and in this capacity it serves as a storehouse of symbols of accommodation, the most important of which is *nikokirio*. *Nikokirio* is an ideally autonomous, economically corporate household of conjugal complementarity. Yet the ideal of conjugal balance depends on social class. Among the numerous wage labourers and the small producers considerable domestic power is held by women. *Nikokirio* makes possible the extension of the female self in an exclusive and highly particularistic set of allegiances. These allegiances are built on *ipochreosi*, 'obligation'. 'Kinship love' obliges women more than men. It also fosters morally accepted dependencies. Yet as love obliges, so it divides. 'Kinship love' may flow over the boundaries of the household—'family' and 'household' are not coterminous—but in any case it divides the social realm into opposed entities. As a model of the social order *nikokirio* symbolises division and social atomism.

On the other hand, *nikokirio* provides a model of social action in terms of (differential) social placement. If, from the viewpoint of marriage, the self is relational, then this suggests that action should be organised in terms of these external references of the self. *Sinferon*, 'self-interest', is what brings the self together with the (external) constituencies of identity: this is the only modality of action perceived in terms of marriage. It is, however, a negotiable state of affairs for men who may or may not opt for the role of 'householder' (*nikokiris*): the 'householder' corresponds to the image of the calculating man who puts

opposition between *kefi* and *sinferon* to define a masculinity endangered by and thus antithetical to two kinds of external forces: the household dominated by women and the impersonal realm of the market and the state.<sup>19</sup> In this sense gender preservation is invested with strong metonymic qualities and *kefi* constitutes a powerful idiom of protest.<sup>20</sup>

How can we account for the social distribution of these ideas about the self? There is no doubt that far from being structural determinations of identity, these ideas could better be described as *alternative strategies* of selfhood. Women have little scope for manoeuvre outside the 'destiny' inscribed in the household model. Only few women, primarily outsiders, entertain the idea of a 'woman at the coffeeshop', a kind of proto-feminism. Most men on the other hand, find themselves divided by two opposite imperatives, each carrying its own protocol of legitimisation and its own limitations. On the one hand, there is the danger of symbolic effeminisation that is brought forward by a close identification with the household at the expense of the coffeeshop. On the other hand, avoidance of marriage may create suspicion of escapism suggesting inability to cope with the burdens of life. Age, social status and marital status are some of the factors which determine which attitude will be chosen, at which stage and in which context. The young, the poor and the long-standing bachelors are social categories that more systematically apply the coffeeshop model, yet in everyday sociability, *kefi* remains always an utopia to be partly reached, and never fully lived.

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The extent to which these ideas are systematised as models of the self depends very much on the context and the degree in which they are politically used in the service of hegemonies or counter-hegemonies. In the context of the family and everyday sociability, *kefi* privileges same-sex relatedness and a uni-sexual, autonomous world of men from which women are excluded as lacking the *kefi* type of agency. *Kefi* discourse, therefore, culturally constructs patriarchy. This political potential of *kefi* is used by 'householders' who may try to combine *kefi* with *sinferon* and consolidate through coffeeshop practices their patriarchal hegemony within the household.<sup>21</sup> Poor, landless men, on the other hand, who are marginal in matrifocal households dominated by their property-owning wives, employ *kefi* as a strategy of separateness and autonomy from the household, thus stressing and systematising the resistant, anti-structural qualities of *kefi* discourse.

Here I will focus on another plane, the politics of locality, in which these ideas are used and the resistant potential of *kefi* is fully exploited. The central question is how these ideas, these alternative strategies of selfhood, inform group identity and how social identity is applied and constituted in political action. More particularly, I will try to show how these ideas—that symbolise an identity born of out of difference, incorporation and dependence but also an identity of similarity and moral unity,—provide a model of conformity and accommodation and alternatively a model of protest and contestation in the political dealings of the local society with the state.

mostly identified with its 'secretary', an official who is appointed by the prefecture, often an outsider who enjoys the status of a civil servant and is the local expert on dealings with the state authorities and especially on applications for loans and compensations, for pensions, securities and welfare payments. He 'holds the books' as the Mouriani say, and has the power to interpret them. It is in the above sense that *kinotita* is most closely identified with the state. In co-ordination with other state authorities—the judge in Mytiline, the gendarmerie stationed in the nearby village, or the agronomists and other state officials—, it provides a powerful mechanism that resolves conflicts and accommodates opposed interests. Its political effectiveness is guarded and sanctioned by the law.

The gloss *chorio*, literally translated as 'village' and etymologically deriving from the Byzantine Greek *chorion*, which is a diminutive for *choros*, space, refers to the geographical sense of locality. The 'village' symbolises a point on the map, *ena meros*, a place, or *ena topo*, a land, a locality which embraces both the nucleated settlement and the surrounding land and which is very specific in that it bears a name and is often stepped on, *patiete*, by its neighbours. This core meaning of the notion 'village' remains culturally inactive as far as it is not associated with symbols which refer to the nature of social life in this particular geographical spot. The 'village' is linked to two primary images of society. The one derives from the field of kinship and is best captured in the statement, 'here we are all relatives', 'here we are one family'. The other is associated with the domain of commensal friendship and is reflected in the assertion, 'here we are all equal'. 'Villageness' derives from birth. A person who is born in the village is thought to have it; he is considered Mourianos. Further, *chorio* is symbolically portrayed as a womb from which its members emerge and it is metaphorically equated with a 'family', an image that, by reflecting the practice of village endogamy, evokes kinship sentiment to describe the solidarity between villagers. Among other things the place is registered in the name of the individual, providing an equally powerful idiom of reckoning individual identity with that of genealogical kinship, particularly when an individual moves away from his/her natal community and settles in a new locality, where kinship as a basis of personhood cannot be recognised and therefore becomes inactive. 'Village' however rests on a 'de-genealogised' version of kinship. More generally, 'villageness' is governed by the principles of commensal friendship rather than of domestic kinship.

'Villageness' is a graded identity, to a certain degree given, to another degree achieved, and is therefore an identity that can be both acquired as well as lost. Those who definitely have 'villageness' and are referred to as *veri*, 'true', Mouriani, are the ones whose ancestors were born and lived all their lives in the locality. Those who are in danger of losing 'villageness' are the ones who left the village to settle away from it and somehow 'forgot' it. Migrants who retain their links and visit Mouria are awarded second class membership, they are referred to as co-villagers to 'outsiders', and in terms of their place of

not tired because allegedly they do not have to work hard in the fields. Nearby Aryiniotes are considered as *ziliarides ke memitiki*, jealous and imitative, *dichasmeni*, divided according to their political allegiances, with *tiranismenes yinekes*, women who work painfully in the fields. More distant Kliotes are renowned for their women: the expression *kliotika gamimena* implies the libertarian sexual ethics of women. Kapiotes are thought of as *zitiani*, beggars and *kalivites*, living in huts! - both marks of their extreme poverty. Even more distant Mantamadiotes are considered *afloxeni*, lacking in hospitality, a term that straightforwardly juxtaposes them to the Mouriani.

The close association of *chorio* with the principles of male commensality adopts sharp focus in the idea that 'here we are all equals', in the image of the 'village' as a collectivity of equals, emerging as a projection of the *parea* of drinking friends. *Chorio* is the site of a generalised commensal solidarity. The expression *kanoun chorio*, 'make village', suggests sympathy and mutual understanding that does not depend on external mediation, while the opposite implies a non-correspondence of character or feelings. *Chorio* then stands for an open, latitudinarian, interpersonal moral order of people whose imagined equality is also founded on the assumption that they derive character from the same locality and that, therefore, they are fundamentally similar. *Filotimo*, literally translated as 'love of honour', an individual sense of place and of the rights and obligations that arise from it, promises the transcendence of differences and safeguards moral unity by portraying the self as a source of accommodation and understanding.

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To sum up: as a notion of belonging, *kinotita* refers to a socially differentiated community of opposed interests that are brought together with the intervention of the state. It is an image of a formal and corporate yet pale solidarity, based on interested reciprocity and sanctioned by law. *Chorio*, on the other hand, is an imagined egalitarian community of shared moods and shared character as well as shared roots, a community based upon similarity. It is a collectivity of equals bound together by a sense of individual moral responsibility.

### The Politics of Locality

To grasp adequately how these two notions of belonging are linked, and particularly to understand how they are systematised into juxtaposed models of political action, the one integrational and the other oppositional we will have to put them in historical context and consider some recent economic and social transformations and also the political conjuncture with which my fieldwork coincided. Since the late nineteenth century, Mouria's commoditised agricultural economy and polity has been dominated by a small group of big landowners and merchants. These men owned a large percentage of Mouria's olive groves as well as the factories for processing the olives. Thus they held a virtual monopoly over

Resistance to the penetration of the state provides the context in which the ideas about individual and social identity become more fully articulated. Yet counter-hegemonic discourse and behaviour does not take an implicit form, it is not a 'hidden transcript', the offstage dissent of the dominated categories studied by J. Scott,<sup>27</sup> but it rather takes the form of an open, public, fully-fledged opposition. Nor does it have the disemic qualities that M. Herzfeld<sup>28</sup> notices in the case of Greek anti-statism, this 'contest between ambiguity and order' that develops as everyday usage subversively turns against the official discourse. Instead of adopting this subversive strategy of destabilisation through ambiguity, a number of men opt for the opposite route of clarity and consistency in articulating a philosophical alternative, a politically promising kefi fundamentalism.

To grasp more fully why these oppositional attitudes are explicitly politicised and systematised, we will have to put them in the context of recent political processes as well as specify in more detail the political ingredients of resistance. Mouria and the region of North Lesbos have a long and rich history of political mobilisations against the central authority of the state. This goes back to the so called 'National Resistance' against the Nazi occupation, when institutions of local self-administration were established under the aegis of the regionally dominant Communist Party (KKE) and its allies in the National Liberation Front (EAM). It continued in the course of the first decades after the civil war, a period of political suppression and authoritarianism, when the Communist Party was outlawed and new, covert and informal forms of opposition to central authority developed. And it took a new momentum, in the course of the 1970s, with the restoration of democratic institutions and the legalisation of the Communist Left, the 'opening' of the political arena to new social categories, the extensive breakdown of traditional clientelistic networks in the countryside, the wider political mobilisations and the overt 'politicisation' of public life. During this last phase, these historically enduring, yet often informal modes of resistance took sharper and clearer political expression.

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From the viewpoint of recent, post-war Greek political history, therefore, the time of my fieldwork was rather unique. It coincided with the climax of major political transformations, when PASOK came to power at the beginning of the 1980s. In this conjuncture, the cultural meanings that historically inform resistant action became increasingly homogenised and systematised at the regional and national level. They took the form of genuine political alternatives, of political propositions on political action and organisation that were juxtaposed to the canon of the state. It was the moment when the historic counter-hegemony became officialised as the platform of political opposition and a future hegemony.

Here I will concentrate on one domain of action where the effects of the process of systematisation of resistance are more visible, the field of local politics. These counter-hegemonic meanings inform what could be called the

This was the case of the annual spraying of the olive groves with pesticide, aimed against *dakos* (*dacus olei*), an insect which destroys the olives. There are two usual techniques for spraying: by plane or by teams of men who spray each landholding individually. Because of an ongoing argument on the side-effects of aerial spraying, the district officers passed the jurisdiction of deciding on the method of spraying to the 'community'. Both camps agreed that the best way to proceed is by the direct, open vote of all men who own land or animals and were directly affected. The camp of the 'householders' adopted the opinion of the district officers that the aerial spraying is a safe method and voted 'yes'. The other camp, however, reacted on a number of points. First, the technical language and the outside authority backing the 'yes' argument increased their suspicion that something else lay behind it. If *kalpia* (lie) is an attribute of the civil servant, then one cannot trust the opinion of the state officials, even in technical matters. Further, aerial spraying is carried out by the agricultural office of the prefecture in Mytilene, while land-based spraying is done by local men who are paid a wage. Thus aerial spraying meant the loss of seasonal jobs for the community. Examples of bees dying and sheep getting ill in neighbouring villages were mentioned to support the empirical foundations of a counter argument. Thus the direct vote on a purely technical issue, which in principle should have been decided by the responsible expert agronomists, quickly turned into a plebiscite on the standing and the general credibility of the state and its people, and eventually the 'no' camp triumphed.<sup>30</sup>

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The politics of locality, illustrated by the above examples, derives its logic from the model of protest practised in the coffeeshop. Its programme is essentially anti-statist: to promote the moral unity of the undifferentiated political subject that the 'village' is against the incursions of a domineering state.<sup>31</sup> *Chorio* is the coffeeshop's version of the political subject. In this form of political action, allegiance is a matter of emotional attachment, clearly separated and juxtaposed to self-interest and the interested reciprocity that governs clientistic politics. Representation is direct, unmediated: the 'village' speaks for itself an opinion which is perceived as the sharing of verbalised moods. The direct democracy of plebiscite politics is the preferred style. Last, leadership belongs to the big men, it is primarily a matter of symbolic status achieved in the agonistic demonstrations of *kefi*. Symbolic masculinity is a source of political legitimisation. The evident structural similarities between coffeeshop style politics and the so called 'populist' politics are suggestive of the insights that can be gained by micro-anthropological studies of politics, especially when they unravel the cultural logic of allegedly 'irrational' forms of political behaviour.

In this paper I did not apply the mainstream discourse of sociology and political science on populism, a discourse that is often committed to disciplining rather than analysing the emotional contours of politics. Nor did I take the classic route of 'honour and shame', one that has been so productive in the study of southern European post-war clientelism. The focus was instead on the cultural foundations of populist forms of action at the local level. And



## Abstract

Politics and the integration of rural localities within states have been founding themes of Mediterranean anthropology. Here, populist forms of local politics are studied, on the basis of the theoretical rethinking that gender has brought in southern European ethnography and through a consideration of alternative concepts of the self in the context of social hierarchy and marginalization. The author focuses in particular on the cultural foundations of local politics and shows how, in the course of the 1980s, two different notions of belonging to the locality were juxtaposed as alternative models of accommodation or resistance to the political and economic penetration of the state.

## Résumé

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La vie politique et l'intégration des localités rurales dans les Etats ont été des thèmes fondateurs de l'anthropologie méditerranéenne. Sont ici étudiées, d'une part, les formes populistes de la politique locale, en tenant compte des nouvelles perspectives théoriques ouvertes par l'anthropologie des genres pour l'ethnographie de l'Europe méridionale et, d'autre part, des conceptions opposées de la personne en fonction de la hiérarchie et de la marginalité dans la société. En particulier, l'accent est mis sur les bases culturelles de la politique locale et sur le processus qui, au cours des années 1980, aboutit à la juxtaposition de deux notions différentes d'appartenance à la localité, chacune représentant un modèle d'adaptation ou de résistance à la pénétration politique et économique de l'Etat.

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15. For an ethnographic presentation of *kefi*, see E. Papataxiarchis, 1994.

16. On the construction of southern European masculinities and the stress on their performative character see, for example, the work of S. H. Brandes, 1980; M. Herzfeld, 1986. Also see D. D. Gilmore, 1990; M. Vale di Almeida, 1996.

17. I am aware of the political implications of the analytic use of binarisms. I have to clarify here that the logical pair interest/disinterest is not used as a principle of analysis, a kind of ground rule of action. The degree to which these ideas are presented as logical opposites seems to be a direct function of the degree of their systematisation which in its turn is linked to the context of their political application.

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18. See E. Papataxiarchis, 1991.

19. In this paper I am interested in the extra-household targets of militant masculinity. Masculinity within the household does not often take the form of *machismo*, an exaggerated form that is often linked to the psychodynamics of lower-class matrifocal families. Yet the political impact of gender distinction is equally visible within the household where *kefi* legitimises an often fragile and contested male authority.

20. The rich symbolic potential of *kefi* is, for example, manifested in gambling, where money—a potent symbol of the market and commodity exchange, of the bank and of dependent labour, and also a symbol that is symbolically attached to women—is ostracised from the world of the coffeeshop. The ritual destruction of money purifies the male self and leaves *kefi* triumphant (E. Papataxiarchis, 1999b).

21. A similar type of synthesis or mixing of the values of ‘man-the-protector’ with those of male personal autonomy is discussed by D. D. Gilmore (1990, p. 48-50).

22. For an early and comprehensive statement on the ‘symbolic construction of community’, see A. P. Cohen, 1985. Also see A. P. Cohen, 1982.

23. On this reform, see the special issue of the *Greek Political Science Review*, vol. 15, 2000, and particularly N.-K. Hlepas, 2000.

24. Also see A. Caraveli, 1985.

25. J. Linnekin, L. Poyer, 1990.

26. This line of analysis is certainly connected to the recent anthropological rethinking of essentialist notions of space and their political potential. See J. Ferguson, A. Gupta, 1997.

27. J. Scott, 1990.

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