Inside Out and Outside In: Gossip, Hospitality and the Greek Character

Sofka Zinovieff

Journal of Mediterranean Studies, Volume 1, Number 1, 1991, pp. 120-134 (Article)

Published by Mediterranean Institute, University of Malta

Journal of Mediterranean Studies, 1991. ISSN: 1016-3476. Vol 1, No 1: 120–134

INSIDE OUT AND OUTSIDE IN: GOSSIP, HOSPITALITY AND THE GREEK CHARACTER

SOFKA ZINOVIEFF

University of Cambridge

Gossip and hospitality whilst representing antithetical aspects of 'the Greek character' and involving 'closure' and 'openness', share many underlying features. Both are exchange relationships and concern appearances and both involve a tension between people protecting or constructing their own and family's reputation and status. Yet in practice when the two are combined in the same act. The effects can be ambiguous.

Although they are features of many Mediterranean communities, gossip and hospitality are rarely seen as having much in common.[1] In the beautiful and historically important port of Nafplion in southern Greece, most of the approximately 11,000 inhabitants would probably argue that gossip is as negative as hospitality is positive. While hospitality is lamented as dying away, gossip is said to be flourishing. However, it is their very differences that allow the two phenomena to represent opposing and contrasting sides of the archetypal Greek character, or to define 'Greekness'. 'We are hospitable' (*imaste filokseni*) is said by many with a nationalistic pride, but it is also declared that 'we gossip' (*koutsoumbolevoume*) or 'we are gossips' (*imaste koutsombolidhes*) with an air of self-critical disapproval. Hospitality is linked with openness, generosity, and a warm heart, whereas gossip is associated with closed communities, spitefulness, and petty mindedness.

Having established gossip and hospitality as two poles of the stereotyped Greek national identity, they can also be seen to be based around similar concerns. Both concern definitions of social, spatial and moral boundaries, and their articulation between the levels of individual, household, community, and nation. In both there is a constant tension between people protecting or constructing their own and their family's reputation and status, and their ultimate reliance on society for this. Moreover, gossip and hospitality are ways of forming alliances and reciprocal bonds, and of providing amusement or entertainmet.

Gossip

1. The Threat of Gossip

Few Nafpliotes are untroubled and unaffected by gossip, which they see as a disagreeable, destructive and petty way of behaving, and its potential threat leads people to adjust their behaviour accordingly. Notwithstanding their antipathy, there

are few Nafpliotes who do not gossip. Many enjoy it as a form of conversation, some have a need for it in relation to their work, others in association with social or political relationships. In a small town such as Nafplion, a vital part of understanding the community depends on having access to gossip.

Gossip is hard to define; it varies from people discussing a common friend, to malicious scandal mongering. Bok gives the traditional meaning of gossip as 'trifling, often groundless rumour, usually of a personal, sensational or intimate nature' (Bok 1984:89). However, it is also part of 'the whole network of human exchanges of information, the need to inquire and learn from the experience of others' (ibid:90). The first definition is not applicable in Nafplion, as gossip as often concerned with far from trifling matters (indeed it revels in crises and drama) and it is commonly based around actual events and not rumour. A Nafpliote definition would perceive gossip as talk about others when they are not present, especially if it involves private details which would not be mentioned in front of the person in question.[2] Gossip is allegedly exchanged 'with badness' (*me kakia*), stemming from petty curiosity, jealousy, or simply bad will. But in reality it is just as likely to be based on simple curiosity. Most people see themselves as potential or actual victims of gossip, and do not admit (often even to themselves) that they are enthusiastic perpetrators of the very activity they deplore and describe as shameful.

When I first arrived in Nafplion I could not understand why people complained about gossip, but later, I too felt the claustrophobia that the existence of gossip can produce. It seems as though *nothing* one does may remain secret, and that even the lack of gossip-worthy activities do not prevent the creation of wildly imaginative scenarios. Certain people feel themselves to be more liable to be gossiped about: especially women, with a focus on young, unmarried women. Nevertheless, most individuals with any good name or reputation to lose are keen to avoid being gossiped about. Some women claim that they have no female friends because other 'women gossip', and the apparent friend might be treacherous or indiscrete. Male friends are out of the question for women, because other people might gossip. Teenage girls describe how gossip restricts their movements when they go out in the evenings; they know that anything unusual will get reported back to their parents. Even worse, they describe their parents as forbidding them to behave in certain ways or go to certain places because of their fear of gossip, not because of any inherent danger.

Gossip can create a lack of trust between people, forcing them to focus on appearances rather than reality; it relies on what the world sees and deduces, not on actual events and motives. People are worried by 'what the world (or people) will say' (*ti tha pei o kosmos*), and are concerned to adjust their behaviour to fit common expectations. Gossip provides a common source of input to ongoing reputations; as 'entries in individual dossiers' (Haviland 1977:120). A person's dossier will be pieced together from bits of information gathered in varying circumstances, 'crucially including gossip' (idem).

Gossip acts as a deterrant for actions which are not approved of in society, or which are unusual. A divorced woman confided that she would not risk having a lover because of the way that people would talk about it; which might upset her children if they were told. Other women declare that it would be impossible to have an adulterous affair, due to the threat of gossip and its results. Thus gossip appears to work as a powerful force in maintaining socially correct behaviour, and upholding

the morals of the community. This functionalist view upholds Gluckman's argument, which defines gossip as 'a culturally controlled game with important social functions', such as uniting social groups, and maintaining their morals and values (Gluckman 1963:308–312).

Although gossip may help to maintain moral behaviour, it does not necessarily maintain morals. The insider of a social group (in this case Nafplion) normally realises that he or she cannot go against the norms and the weight of the community. However, this frequently is not a belief in the moral values which are upheld, but merely a superficial cooperation with the rules. The divorcée decided against having a lover because of gossip, not because she believed it to be morally wrong. Gossip can encourage people to devise defences and to keep up appearances. A good reputation may well be kept through cunning, lies, and supposedly unethical or even immoral means. Thus a person may behave scandalously, and yet maintain a good social position, if he can control and restrict the knowledge of his actions (cf. du Boulay 1976:406).[3] A young engaged couple spent some time telling people their holiday plans, and details of where they were travelling to, to disguise the fact that they were going to Athens for the woman to have an abortion. However, skill at lying can also be the dividing line between a good and a bad reputation.

The highly developed sense of self-protection, and preoccupation with restricting other peoples' knowledge can aid the formation of trust-worthy allies and friends in the united fight against gossip. A married man may flirt with women while out with a group of close male friends, or be known by them to commit adultery. He will rely on his friends' discretion that his wife (or his friends' wives) will not learn of his activities. It can even be in his favour for a limited category of people to gossip about him; envious or impressed friends may gossip about his conquests with women, so long as the group is self-contained enough to prevent the information leaking out. Similarly, teenage friends unite in opposition to outsiders; gossip may flourish within groups, but secrets are protected within the boundaries. Rather than acting as a simple functional force to uphold social morality, gossip pushes people to act for themselves against society (and implicity, its morality). Gossip represents the community against the individual, and so implicity emphasizes the lack of integration and unity of society. Furthermore, the notorious unreliability of gossip allows people to break the rules, and dismiss accusations as scurrilous lies. A significant margin of manipulation exists, because everyone knows that only a fool believes gossip unconditionally.

Nafpliotes fear gossip because it has the potential to produce a number of harmful results; in particular that people will laugh at or tease someone, or consider them lower in esteem, or less dignified. Petty issues may create surprising anxiety, as with one woman who preferred to suffer carrying heavy shopping bags from the weekly market, rather than wheel a shopping trolley. Her reason was that her (bourgeois) female friends would laugh at this supposedly common (*laiko*), working-class habit. Sometimes to be laughed at is even worse than scandal (which at least has some drama), as it confers shame, and therefore humiliation. In Nafplion, whereas women often fear gossip about alleged sexual misdemeanours, men fear gossip about their lack of manliness. A man who is dominated by his wife, may well be teased and criticized by other men for lacking the strength and control which a man should have. Eccentricities or ideosyncracies, and not conforming to well defined, stereotypical images of male appearance are also themes for gossip and

mockery. Homosexual or bisexual men are very vulnerable to gossip; they are discussed at length, and people jeer and mimic effeminate gestures or ways of talking behind their backs. Du Boulay discusses the strongly felt presence of mockery as an 'agent of social control' in the village of Ambeli. 'Children are told, "don't do such and such, people will laugh"' (du Boulay 1976:395).

The worst kind of gossip is that which has spite and 'badness' (*kakia*) behind it: trouble-making by giving away secret information, the distortion of events, and the spreading of untrue stories. One Napfliote woman argued characteristically that 'the people of Nafplion are bad (*kaki*)', and that they want to harm others through gossiping. While some gossip is innocent, it may escalate into harmful scandal-mongering, encouraging stories to spread rapidly. One popular recent scandal involved a respectable professional man who was arrested for possessing canabis. While searching his house, the police were said to have found home-made pornographic video tapes featuring various respectable married women ('*pandremenes kiries*') of Nafplion. It was later rumoured that the police were hiring out the films to certain citizens, and an exaggerated number of Nafpliote women were then labelled as having taken part.

With such scandals, it is always hard to discover what degree of truth exists, and the victim of the gossip no longer plays any part in the story once it has been told and spread. I experienced this sense of furstration when I discovered that fictitious stories had been spread about me. Untrue gossip can be a particularly unpleasant form of attack, because it is anonymous in its source and it becomes a weapon in the hands of society rather than individuals. 'Gossip is evil because it is hard to repay effectively'; like other forms of anti-social behaviour, it violates the principle of genuine reciprocity, as there can be no retaliation (Herzfeld 1985:228). Social institutions such as gossip, ostracism, and nicknaming always involve 'the people' or the town, and not a single tormentor- 'the audience is a single collective organism: the entire community acting as one' (Gilmore 198:33).

2. *The Act of Gossip*

To gossip in Nafplion is one way of expressing that a person belongs to the community to some degree, and it is a way of being sociable with other members of the community. Anonymous outsiders are unsatisfactory subjects for gossip, as there is little chance of preceding episodes; and are normally unable to gossip, as they do not know the characters, or their histories. Similarly, an insider who never gossips makes himself something of an outsider. Thus gossip defines a community (cf. Gilmore 1987:57). Correspondingly, Nafpliotes say that 'gossip is much worse in the villages, where everyone learns what everybody else is doing'. Athens is pointed to (perhaps incorrectly) as being the opposite extreme to the villages, and that in the capital 'people do not gossip', and 'nobody knows you'. This alleged anonymity cannot apply to Nafpliotes in Athens, who may be spotted and their behaviour reported back to Nafplion; the question is one of moral rather than physical space and community. Gossip about Nafpliotes who live away from their natal home is also common.

Various levels of social grouping within the community are also marked by patterns of gossip. Just as there is little or no gossip about strangers, it is disloyal and incorrect to tell stories or secrets about people who are very close through

blood, ritual kinship (godparenthood etc.), or friendship. Indeed, these people are protected from gossips, who become the outsiders and the common enemy. The ideal range for gossip is the middle level of friends and aquaintances, particularly within the same class and social milieu; they are near enough to be interesting, and far enough to be undeserving of protection, and they cannot only be gossiped about, but gossiped with. Certain groups of people are usually blamed as being gossips, especially old women and men who spend time in coffee houses. However, in my experience, most people gossip and, for information to spread, there has to be an interested chain of people.

Gossip is a form of exchange between two parties and, as with most types of exchange, it has its own rules and morality. Some sort of pact or alliance is involved in most gossip, and an air of conspiracy may well accompany the act. Revealing gossip can establish intimacy, and implies that the two parties of the conversation are closer than either of them are with the subject of the discussion.[4] Gossip resembles a verbal gift and, as such, demands reciprocal behaviour, whether or not the gift is desirable or useful. Gossip can be a precious resource: people in businesses learn about their competitors; politicians require details about their rivals and supporters; citizens discover who are their friends and who their enemies, and so on. Gossip becomes a piece of property which is alienable in unusual ways. To gossip takes something away from the original 'owner' or perpertrator of the event, which then may be traded in. Many Nafpliotes object to being gossiped about, even if it is only about acitivities which are not secret. It is the loss of personal control, and the taking into the public sphere what belongs to the private one that is upsetting.

The gift of the gossiper is information, and the thirst for all sorts (who knows what might be useful?) is unending. The longer I stayed in Nafplion, the more I instinctively used techniques of not giving away information, which I had seen my friends using. I also learned to turn the tables on the inquisitive stream of inquiries, and to press my own curiosity on others. Enthusiasm for gathering information is the first step in gossip, but it is also a basic step in anthropological research, and frequently in establishing friendships. It is what is done with the information that marks out gossip. As mentioned, gossip can be useful: not only to uncover information, but also to promote, help, humiliate or criticize other people. Individuals may promulgate positive gossip about themselves or their friends, for instance, when young, unmarried men spread rumours of sexual prowess and conquests, which are fueled rather than hidden by the subject.

Paine rejects Gluckman's functionalist theory, and argues that rather than maintaining the unity of the group, gossip is 'a cultural device used by the individual to forward his own interests' (Paine 1967:282). It is the individual, and not the community, that gossips about 'his own and others' aspirations, and only indirectly the values of the community' (ibid:281). Although this argument is applicable in Napflion, it only allows for a certain aspect (especially the enacting) of gossip, and not for the fear and threat of gossip, which carries the weight of society. To avoid gossip, it is necessary to avoid any behaviour that provokes it, which endows it with a more punishing character than it may actually have. Gossip becomes personified, as a thief (of one's secrets), a liar (for anyone unlucky), and a fickle, unconquerable enemy (of anyone wanting privacy). It is also a friend and ally of those with rivals or enemies, or those who wish to promote themselves or others. Individuals gossip

for any number of personal and emotional reasons (what people gossip about is a 'good index of what they worry about'—Haviland 1977:68), but it is the effects of the group that turn gossip into such a powerful and dangerous force.

Theories about gossip usually fail to recognize that it is a significant form of entertainment (with the important exception of du Boulay 1974:208). The person who gossips may have motives (to warn, to criticize, to promote, etc.), but often enough it is merely a pleasurable way of interacting with others. Some Nafpliotes suggest that gossip is due to the boredom of a small, provincial town; critics claim that Nafpliotes love disasters and dramas because they have nothing better to think about. News (and the circulation of rumours) about accidents always emerges very rapidly, usually before the facts are clear, indicating the fascination which people have for death or destruction.[5] International media gossip also illustrates the entertainment value of gossip: the famous become familiar, like characters in myths, in television soap operas, or like neighbours in the community, facing problems similar to those of ordinary people who are gossiped about at home. That gossip can act as a moral censure is not the reason why gossip in the press is read, nor why everyday gossip is eagerly listened to. Rather, it is amusing, interesting, and offers the unending diversion of pondering the trivia and crises of human existence.

A 'good' piece of gossip includes surprise, shock, or scandal, or is diverting enough to make a good story. The listening party is entertained, as it would be by a fictional tale, or even a myth. Indeed, gossip resembles a living, secular equivalent of myth-telling, from a number of different perspectives. Like myth in simple or non-literate societies, gossip is a spoken narrative that must be understood in relation to society; the meaning does not exist in isolation, but in the totality that has preceded and will proceed from the particular item. Gossip has little meaning for a foreigner or outsider, as it is necessary to know the persons, the history and the places (just as one must know the heroes in a myth). It can also be argued that it is wrong to attach a fixed or static purpose or connotation to gossip or myth, as both are open to variable and individual interpretation.

As with myth in non-literate societies, gossip can legitimize social institutions and present a 'charter' for morality (in the Durkheimian and Malinowskian tradition). This may operate in many ways, but in general the illustration of exceptions, outrages, crimes and non-conformities, ultimately gives a guide to how society should be. 'Patterns of deviation' in myth may serve as projected models and norms, and there is often a reintegration of traumatic experience to normative order (Turner 1969:36). Neither in myth nor in gossip is the 'charter' too explicitly defined, but may change along with society; it is interpreted according to each individual's position within society. Leach has shown how myth in Highland Burma can be 'a mechanism of destruction' as well as of integration in society (Leach 1954:278), and the same applies to gossip. Competition, quarrels, and hatred can be fueled and validated by gossip.

Both gossip and myth have an emotional power over the listener; he may relate the narratives to his own behaviour and life. As with dreams, suppressed feelings may be aired and expressed, making it less surprising that the stories of mythology and of gossip are filled with details of death, sex, incest, deceit and so on. Furthermore, people are given the opportunity to discuss and analyse morality, and human behaviour. Jackson shows how narratives and folktales among the Kurako of Sierra Leone 'allow an investigation of correct action and moral discernment, and are not

only a naive vehicle for advancing orthodox moral attitudes' (Jackson 1982:1). Although story-telling may involve more fantastic or mythological concepts, the process, as with gossip, allows people to 'actually participate in interpreting and constructing their social milieu' (ibid:3). Similarly, Berger writes of a French village that the function of gossip (which is 'close, oral, daily history') is 'to allow the whole village to define itself'. Gossip provides 'raw material' for a 'living', 'communal' portrait of the village, in which 'everybody is portrayed and everybody portrays' (Berger 1979:9).

The skilled story-teller (the gossip or the relater of the myth or folktale) produces suspense, intrigue, interest, and makes the story complete and satisfying for the audience. The knowledge of the speaker may endow him with some kind of power, as does the gift of the giver. However, this power has to be carefully managed; the morality of gossip must be adhered to, and the speaker should not overstep the delicate limits too much or too often, or he is charged with immorality himself. In Nafplion, a gossip (the person) who does not handle his knowledge properly, and gives out too much information, will gain a bad reputation. Once someone is labelled as a gossip, some people may stop giving him information, so it is in his interest to deal it out only in small doses.

Once the speaker has told his story (be it folktale or rumour), the words take on an independent status, and are received and interpreted by each individual listener. As with religious myths, spells, curses, or prayers, there may be a degree of power and even danger in the words of gossip. Words do things, as well as being spoken. It is therefore logical that people are sometimes afraid of words, even in the apparently mundane context of gossip. People sometimes try to prevent others from gossiping, claiming that it is a 'bad' and destructive occupation. Similarly, there is fear of provoking jealousy in other people, for fear of spite, gossip and even the evil eye. 'The eye' (*to mati*) is at least half-believed in by many Nafpliotes, and is a visual equivalent of the verbal revenge which gossip may wreak. A sudden headache or fit of tiredness is often blamed on 'the eye', and a scenario is established: that someone saw the individual; felt jealous; and knowingly or unconsciously 'eyed her' (*tin matiase*).[6] The eyes, like the tongue, are 'organs of naked aggression', and they can penetrate as well as being penetrated (Gilmore 1982:164). The seer incorporates or dominates the object, and 'ocular trespass' provides ammunition for gossip or shaming (Gilmore 1987:147–8), as well as for harming with the evil eye. In Nafplion, merely to be seen can make one vulnerable, and the infamous 'peeping Toms' (*banistiritzidhes*) are evidence of the eroticism and power associated with seeing.

The fear of words and their power is not unfounded. Gossip can change behaviour, relationships, and even affects social mores and values, by affecting the person gossiped about, but more often by influencing others who hear the gossip. Gossip can lead to the breaking up of marriages, friendships, and political or business alliances. It can also establish certain people as socially unacceptable, or as professionally untrustworthy. For example a doctor who is reputed to seduce his female patients, is rejected by many potential clients. Gossip may instigate social change in a more insidious way. Directly or indirectly, gossip usually concerns change: relationships beginning or ending (rather than just continuing as they were); birth, marriage and death; losing and gaining money; success or failure; and accidents, dramas and disasters. Although the discussion and gossip of these subjects

may be disapproving, or shocked, the existence of conversation makes the events de facto. 'Through dialogue, gossip allows rules to change: it redefines the conditions of application for rules, thus keeping them up to date' (Haviland 1977:170). Gossip can be seen as a kind of 'cultural grammar', or a 'map of (the) social environment', it does not just appeal to norms or rules, but applies and manipulates them, and provides an opportunity to 'bend the moral order' (ibid:8–10).

Activities which are worthy of gossip are changing, indicating the flexibility of this mode of expression. For instance, 20 years ago, teenage girls could not go out in the evening with a group of friends including boys, without arousing shocked gossip. Today this is a normal activity, and would probably not be gossiped about to any great degree. No one in Nafplion believes that gossip is decreasing in quantity or power. Nevertheless, it would appear that the general social changes that are occurring in Nafplion (and in Greece in general) are conductive to a fading significance, or to alterations in gossip. The increasing privacy that surrounds family and individual life, the tendency for home entertainment such as television, and the enthusiasm for new characterless neighbourhoods full of blocks of flats, are all reasons for a diminishing focus on the practice of gossiping.

Hospitality

1. The Implications of Hospitality

In opposition to gossip, Nafpliotes see hospitality as a positive activity, and in describing themselves as Greeks, they claim that they are hospitable (*filoxenoi*) people. While gossip is supposedly spoken with 'badness', hospitality is claimed to be given 'spontaneously' (*afthormita*), with warmth and openness.The word 'hospitality' (*filoksenia*) means literally love (*filo*—ancient Greek for love) of the stranger (*ksenos*), and strangers have supposedly been given hospitality since ancient times. Hospitality differentiates Greeks from northern Europeans, who are classified as 'cold' (*krioi*, or *psichroi*) like their climate, 'closed' (*kleisti*) as they are in their houses, and unfriendly.[7] Travel agents are quick to use this 'Greek' quality in advertising and brochures, to lure tourists to Greece.

When I arrived in Nafplion, I was sometimes overwhelmed by the number of kind invitations and the warm welcome that was given by many. Indeed, I realised that I was becoming a more normal feature of town life when the level of hospitality dropped; I was then no longer a stranger to be entertained. Hospitality is not just given to strangers, however, and the principle is at work in as simple an act as offering a drink in a cafe, or inviting friends to one's house. Nevertheless, it is to the stranger that hospitality is most archetypal; the more a person is a stranger, the more the code of hospitality. Strangers are anonymous, and hold certain qualities in common; they are 'not conceived of as individuals, but as strangers of a particular type' (Simmel 1950:407). Strangers are an unusual mixture composed of 'distance and nearness, indifference and involvement', and this allows 'an abstract nature' to apply to the relation (ibid:404–405). In contrast, offering hospitality to a particular friend or relative has all the implications and obligations of a shared past.

Hospitality may appear, and be claimed to be a spontaneous gesture of generosity, but in fact it is a complicated process, with hidden rules, and a particular morality. Herzfeld shows how hospitality may be altruistically given, but that 'at the

level of collective representations'... 'it signifies the moral and conceptual subordination of guest to host' (Herzfeld 1987: consulted when in press). The host may be 'politically subordinate' (especially to a foreigner who is stereotypically perceived as a richer more powerful person), but he has the 'moral advantage' (idem). Following Mauss' seminal work 'The Gift', giving may be seen as endowing the giver with power, and as putting the receiver in a dependent or indebted position. In Nafplion, one often overhears, or becomes part of arguments at tavernas, over who will pay the bill. If someone manages to pay unseen, or finally argues his right to pay, the others grumble 'then we'll pay next time', and are unlikely to say 'thank you'. They see themselves as being in a difficult position, of being patronized (which may symbolically negate friendship), and may even show mock anger.[8]

Entertaining in a restaurant is a variation on hospitality inside the home, but the treating of others involves the same principles. Certain people (particularly men who have or desire political, social, and sexual power) insist on paying for others; and when strangers are treated and paid for, they are being kept in their position, with the host or giver having the upper hand. Whenever I felt uneasy at being paid for, when I was still a relative stranger in Nafplion, I was told 'you will take us out, or have us to stay when we come to England', even when there was little likelihood of this. As well as implying that the relationship should be long term, it indicated that one should be the host in one's own country, that the stranger must submit to being a guest.

The other side to the power of the host is the indebtedness, and the obligation for the guest to reciprocate hospitality or any gift of this kind. This delayed reciprocity changes the relationship of the two parties back to one of greater equality. Hospitality may be given freely to a stranger, but then followed by demands for an indirect repayment. Herzfeld describes how people in a small Cretan village 'see no contradiction between their truly lavish hospitality and the many requests they make to strangers for material and political favours' (Herzfeld 1987: consulted when in press). I was bewildered, when after being treated generously by a family, invited for a couple of meals, and given small gifts, the man of the household suddenly requested some favours, from smuggling a video machine and other electrical goods from England, to giving him regular English lessons. To give (hospitality or whatever) justifies expectations of a return, and a friend may ask for favours with no qualms; 'I'll be in your debt' (*tha me ipochreoseis*) is said at the time of the request, and implies a further, indirect return. Usually, demands are not as crude as in the above case and, for many people, the fact that I (and other foreigners) provided potentially useful contacts abroad was enough to negate the need for more direct repayment of their generosity.

When I first encountered it, the practical side to Greek friendship offended my British sense of friendship as unadulterated by material considerations. Later, I realised that there is a different basis to this type of relationship; the system of free but reciprocal demands does not necessarily exclude genuine feeling and generosity. Some Greeks criticize other Greeks for being 'cunning' (*poniroi*), and for using friends too obviously, but in many instances this is not applicable, as friendship has its own codes and friends are willing to help and give to one another. It is necessary however, to qualify the broad label 'friendship', and to distinguish between 'instrumental 'instrumental friendship' and 'friendship of the heart' (*kardhiakí filia*) (Papataxiarchis 1986:1). In contrast to the former type (which includes many of the

relationships described above), Papataxiarchis describes the latter (in two Mytilenian villages) as being functionless, structureless, exclusively male, and removed from implications of exchange and reciprocity, and 'independent of any material proof' (ibid:26).

Acts of hospitality are graded, and the more someone is a close friend or relation, the lesser the degree of formal hospitality, which is never given to family, and is less ritualized and specific with close friends. This is in direct relation to gossip: the closer a relationship, the less the gossip, which is never disclosed about one's family, and rarely about close friends. There is a code of practice in hospitality; for instance, a woman cannot invite a male guest to her house (or vice versa) without there being strong implications of sexual intentions. Inter-sexual friendship is incomprehensible, and always indicates a sexual liaison to observers (cf. Papataxiarchis 1986:1). Hospitality is offered according to the 'rules', and is not offered indiscriminately, as it might appear. Certain categories of people never qualify as guests, such as gypsies (who are avoided at most levels of interaction) and certain tourists (particularly those in large groups, or poor, scruffy foreigners). Very few of these people are ever welcomed or entertained without direct pecuniary interaction taking place, and hippies (*chippidhes*) and 'layabout tourists' (*alitotouristes*) are believed to 'abuse the system' (Herzfeld 1987: consulted when in press). They invert 'the frame of reference that opposes the poverty of Greeks to the wealth of foreigners' (idem), and may well 'fail to appreciate that the bestowal of hospitality is not only a privilege, but one that confers a reciprocal obligation to offer respect' (ibid:13). This also applies to hospitality given to Greek friends and aquaintances, and a guest should not accept hospitality unless he or she is able to return the privilege in some way. It is also good manners to take a small gift or offering (some cakes, chocolates, or a bottle of alcohol, for example) when visiting a household.

The ability to give hospitality well is a social art, and an indication of social standing, and propriety; it shows that the household is economically comfortable enough to give away generously (cf. du Boulay 1974:38). While a woman is necessary to make hospitality as it should be, to refine it, and to offer refreshments (which as nourishment in the home, is the realm of females), it is the man who often overwhelms the stranger with his generosity, and who can emerge as the hero of the performance. Giving reckless hospitality to strangers, who are unlikely ever to be able to repay the favour, can be viewed in terms of the Greek 'heroic ideal'; the host abandons the ordinary routines of daily life, to assume a 'heroic pose' (MacNeill 1978:18). In the theoretical structure of 'honour and shame', hospitality is inevitably a manifestation of a noble spirit which can contribute to a person's honour (although I have preferred to talk about 'good name' or 'good reputation'). If gossip detracts from honour and brings shame, giving hospitality does the reverse.

2. *The Act of Hospitality*

In contrast to the underlying tensions and issues, there is often a genuinely 'spontaneous' pleasure in being hospitable. One feature of hospitality is certainly the entertainment (*dhiaskedhasi*) value; the host not only entertains the guest, but is entertained in turn. As with gossip, there is interest and amusement in giving hospitality; the stranger is a diverting way of making 'the hour pass' (*pernaei i ora*), just as television or reading may be. The novelty value of the guest is reflected in the

curiosity that is directed towards strangers: answering questions, and giving information is a kind of repayment for the hospitality; the guest entertains as well as being entertained.

In Nafplion there are fewer reasons for offering hospitality than in villages, and there is consequently less hospitality. Napfliotes are known, and describe themselves as 'closed' and 'inhospitable' (*afiloksenoi*) compared with other Greeks. Although I rarely experienced this alleged coldness, it could be attributed to the particular urban quality of the town: the established and historical presence of outsiders (including soldiers, traders, sailors, and tourists) denies them novelty status, the wealth of many citizens gives the potential of new alliances less charm, and there is more entertainment (such as cinemas, organized societies, and places in which to drink and dine out) than in most villages.[9] Notwithstanding the lower degree of welcome extended to some outsiders, giving and taking hospitality is a well established way of passing riented space of the 'inside' (*mesa*). There is a confrontation of the (at least symbolically) disordered, insecure 'outside' (*exo*), 'of the road' (*tou dhromon*), with the ordered, secure, safe 'inside' of the home.

The solution to the vulnerability of the family in giving hospitality is implicit in the strictly defined procedure, and the space in which it occurs. Until recently, every house in Nafplion (except for the very poorest) had a room especially intended for offering hospitality—the *saloni or sala.* An approximate equivalent to the outmoded front parlour of British homes, it is reserved almost exclusively for entertaining, and is otherwise kept shuttered and unused. The *saloni* is the front or the show piece of the household, and contains the best furniture. Normally part of the wife's dowry, this always includes a three-piece suite, and a heavy sideboard or dresser. Framed photographs are displayed of the family at various stages of their life: at weddings; as babies; in uniform; and in formal poses in studios. These pictures resemble the religious icons owned by many houses, only they stand for the sacred and secular ideals of the family rather than Orthodox Christianity (Crawford 1984:215).

The *saloni* is always kept spotlessly clean; it reflects a housewife's ability as a home-maker, and indicates her financial position to outsiders. The hostess uses her best services (especially small, dainty dishes and glasses), which are appropriate to her social status. Family silver and china (in addition to furniture and decoration) are displayed as evidence of economic strength and class, and not only homely virtues. Most families do not use the *saloni,* but sit, watch television and live in the *kathistiko* (an informal 'sitting room'). If a guest is a friend or visits informally (as I often did), the host or hostess will ask (or even assume) whether 'inside' (*mesa*) is not preferable to the *saloni.* This implies that formal hospitality can be done away with, and the guest may enter further inside the privacy of the household's physical and symbolic or moral space. The *saloni* is always used if a guest is formally invited, or if there is any distance in the relationship.[11] The room demands dignified behaviour, and is associated with propriety, politeness, and the more official functions of the household.

A hostess takes special care of her own appearance when using the *saloni.* Most Nafpliote housewives wear contrasting home clothes, and good, smart clothes for when they go out. Inside, they wear an old dress, dressing gown or night-dress, slippers or casual shoes, and no make-up. When they return from a trip outside in the town in their smart outfit, they will usually change into house clothes and

remove the make-up. Therefore, unlike the rest of the house, the *saloni* corresponds more to the outside realm. When guests arrive, they are shown into the *saloni*, and are served some refreshment. The classic offering is a 'sweet of the spoon' (*gliko tou koutaliou*) on a small saucer, with a glass of water, and served on a tray, like anything consumable. Alternatively, coffee or a liqueur of some sort is drunk, and the *saloni* often contains small dishes of biscuits (*koulourakia*) or chocolates, which are permanently ready for visitors. In the past, housewives made their 'sweets of the spoon', liqueurs, and cakes, but today these are normally bought from patisseries (*zaharoplasteia*). Furthermore, many households have a selection of alcoholic drinks, and whisky or some commercial liqueur may be drunk.

The guest is offered the best that the house can offer, though always food and drink for entertaining, rather than 'real' food (*fayito*) such as the family eats at meals; and the consumables are mostly sweet. It is relatively rare in Nafplion to invite people to dine at home, and while a host many provide 'some snacks' (*kanena meze*), friends tend to go out to eat. The hostess encourages her guests to consume as much as possible, and will repeatedly press him or her to eat more, rather like the archetypal Greek mother persuading her child to eat. As with children, the hostess feels satisfied only if her guests eat a great deal, and do justice to her food.

Hospitality takes place in a liminal, marginal space, and the food and drink served is not of a nourishing, life-giving sort. The *saloni* prevents the outsider from entering the real family space, focussed in many houses on the kitchen; the female-dominated room where most families eat. A couple or family perform with one another to achieve the desired effect, which is a form of idealization, epitomized by the family photographs (Goffman 1969:31–43). Giving hospitality to a foreigner may be an opportunity to emphasize Greekness, to explain Greek customs, to offer 'Greek food' (rather than just food), and to discuss Greece or the Greek character. In contrast to the front stage in the theatre of hospitality is the backstage region, where the performer may 'drop his front' (Goffma 1969:97). The more of an outsider the visitor is, the less he is allowed inside the physical and symbolic space.

Nafpliotes are not alone in complaining that hospitality is decreasing in Greece. They link this with other social deteriorations, especially the selfishness that they say characterizes modern life. Hospitality does not appear to exist as much as it used to, and a number of factors in contemporary Nafplion (and Greece) cause it to be less necessary, and of less interest. First, the ever-rising standard of living has given people greater security, especially in the case of the ideal work as a state employee (*dhimosios ipallilos*), with a secure wage and a pension. There is therefore less need for the potential help or reciprocal favours, or the link to the 'outside' (outside the community or abroad) that a stranger may represent for a poor person or a villager. Second, the increasing privacy of modern Greek life, with nuclear families living in blocks of flats, is having an effect. There is more emphasis on the family, and less on the neighbourhood, such as in the new district of Nafplion, made up of little but blocks of flats. Moreover, many flats are now built without a *saloni*, and it is considered more 'European' and more 'modern' to have one living room for both family and guests. This alters the whole tone of hospitality; as guests must come right inside the privacy of the family, more distant aquaintances or strangers are less welcome—there is no safe, liminal area in which to conduct hospitality.

A third factor is that the house is becoming less of a refuge for the chastity and virtue of women in Nafplion. A fourth change is that entertaining (particularly the stranger) is now much less of a novelty. Improvements in communication, technology for entertainment (such as television and video), and travel facilities, make contemporary life faster, fuller, and with more distractions. Finally, tourism makes the stranger a common place, everyday category of person, as thousands of them pass through Nafplion constantly. Few tourists have much to offer, not just financially (and increasingly with cheap, mass tourism, many are relatively poor), but in terms of their status and their interest. Moreover, few Greeks can afford to be hospitable with tourists in the more indiscriminate, trusting way of some villagers, as it would be prohibitively expensive and time-consuming. Surprisingly perhaps, hospitality does still exist, and in spite of mass tourism, many tourists are generously helped and entertained.

Conclusion

Gossip and hospitality are represented as antithetical aspects of the Greek character, but they share many underlying features. Both concern appearances: gossip forces people to conform to social expectations and to take care of what outsiders (from the household) see, and hospitality allows people to present themselves in a certain way to outsiders. They differ, in that the individual is passively gossiped about, whereas he or she actively gives hospitality. But gossip is also exchanged, and can be given or withheld, and a host or hostess is in an ideal situation to give or receive gossip. While hospitality promotes the good reputation (or honour) of the host, gossip is associated with the bad reputation (or shame) of the individual who is gossiped about, and who gossips. In contrast, it can only be shameful *not* to give hospitality. However, gossip can be used to establish an honourable reputation, as well as a shameful one, so the issue becomes clouded.

Gossip and hospitality both allow interactive, reciprocal relationships. A gossip reveals his story as a verbal gift, and creates a situation of conspiracy and allegiance with the listening party. A guest receives far more from hospitality than information, but is obliged to repay this, at least with respect for his host. In contrast, the receiver of gossip may dislike and object to the gossip being exchanged, and may even despise the giver. Entertainment is a quality shared by gossip and hospitality, and both are alternatives to the everyday, possibly dull or monotonous work or home environments. Furthermore, they are ways of defining insiders and outsiders, and of fixing social boundaries, and moral codes and boundaries. Both gossip and hospitality exist more in villages, and less in cities, and both are changing with modern, urban life—the absence of the *saloni* in the new flats alters the practice of hospitality, and the absence of a sense of neighbourhood in the new districts inhibits gossip.

Finally, gossip and hospitality are directly related to the anthropologist and fieldwork. I relied on the propensity of Nafpliotes for both during my stay: without gossip I could not have learned innumerable pieces of information, and hospitality gave me a valuable opportunity to enter households. I was welcomed in Nafplion as a stranger-foreigner (*Kseni*), and later as a friend, and throughout I received much generosity and kindness. It was almost more of a privilege, however, when I was considered enough of an insider by certain people, to be gossiped with. Also, in common with insiders, I had to contend with being gossiped about, but as someone

keen to hear gossip, an anthropologist cannot complain about this participation in addition to observation. It is appropriate that the ancient Greek word for gossip is *anthropologos*, the same as the modern Greek for anthropologist.

Notes

1. This article is based on a chapter of my Ph.D. thesis (Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, 1989). The research was carried out for two years, from 1985–1987.
2. Du Boulay suggests that the etymology of the Greek *koutsombolio* (gossip) is from *koutsos* (lame) and *boliazo* (to graft); implying an imperfect or false piecing together of conclusions (du Boulay 1974:201).
3. This is comparable with many discussions of 'honour', in Greece and the Mediterranean, which is both self-regard, and the way that others perceive the individual (and his family), and recognise his status. In the discussion of gossip in Nafplion, the idea of 'reputation' (*fimi*), or 'name' (*onoma*) is more appropriate than that of honour (*timi*); it would be rare for someone in Nafplion to mention honour in this context.
4. McFarlane makes a similar point about a Northern Irish community. In determining who can be gossiped about, the 'relationship between the gossipers is all-important.' Gossip can be used as a means of creating close friendships, or as a means of gauging the intensity of a given relationship' (McFarlane 1977:117).
5. This is not limited to Greece, but is displayed in the fascination of the world media for disasters: the worse and more gruesome the disaster, the 'better' the news story, and the more people want to know about it in every detail.
6. A common expression used to compliment someone on their good looks is to caricature a spit: 'tsou to you' (*tsou sou*), which is said to keep off the evil eye, in case people see such attractiveness, and are jealous.
7. Friedl writes how people living outside Vassilika (a village in Boetia) were described by the villagers as thieves and as inhospitable (Friedl 1962:104). Thus the lack of hospitality is used to denigrate outsiders, in contrast to hospitable insiders (whether at the level of nation, region or community).
8. The Polish word for hospitality is the same as that for revenge, thus indicating the alliance of the two phenomena and sets of emotions in other societies (Bruce Dakowski: personal communication).
9. Nafplion has a strong bourgeois culture, and is comparatively wealthy. Its citizens are largely white-collar workers or merchants: employees in state-run bureaucratic organizations; shop-keepers; entrepreneurs and employees in the large tourist industry; and professionals. The working class is a small minority.
10. The Kuranko of Sierra Leone see gift giving to guests as a way of disarming them; by making them indebted, and thus disinclined to do anything inimical to the hosts (Michael Jackson: personal communication).
11. The *saloni* is automatically used on certain occasions such as celebrations, birthdays and namedays, engagement parties, during the 24 hours after a death and before a funeral, and at memorials for the dead (*mnimosina*). In the past (and to a certain extent today) some of the grander, or more well-off households would 'receive' (*dheketai*) visitors, and be 'open' (*anoikto*) for friends, aquaintances and relations, at fixed times (known by the French 'jours fixes'), usually on a Thursday or a Sunday.

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