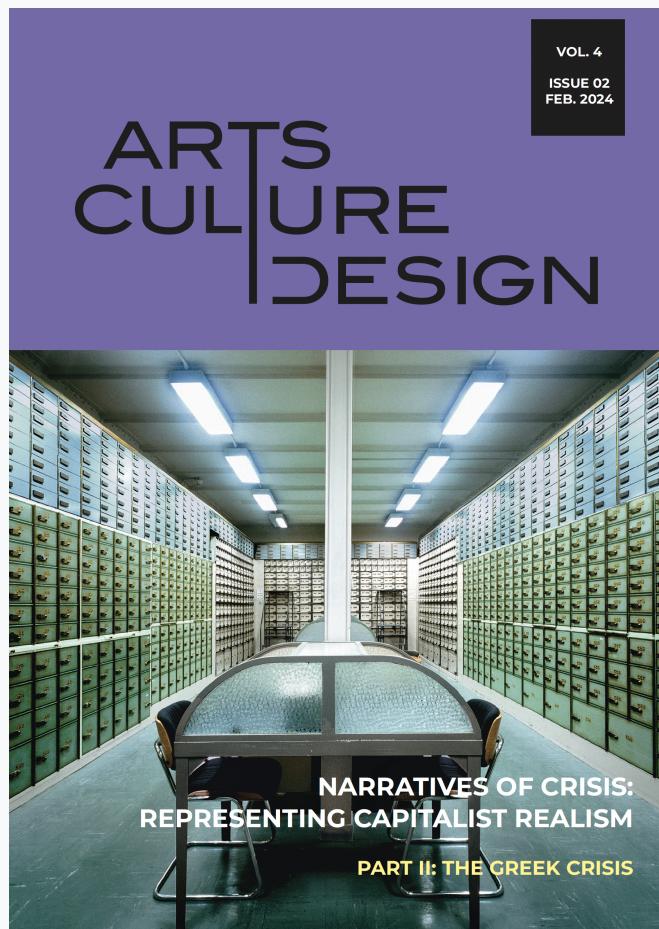


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NARRATIVES OF CRISIS: REPRESENTING CAPITALIST REALISM PART II: THE GREEK CRISIS



Interpretation of a difficult heritage about the internal exile of political opponents in Greece.

Myrto Marini

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# INTERPRETATION OF A DIFFICULT HERITAGE ABOUT THE INTERNAL EXILE OF POLITICAL OPPONENTS IN GREECE.

## THE CASES OF THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS OF ISLANDS AI-STRATIS, CHIOS AND ANAFI.

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### ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Difficult cultural heritage

Political prisoners

Concentration Camp

Ai-Stratis

Chios

Anafi

The practice of internal exile in Greece, inaugurated during the aftermaths of the National Schism (1915-17) and continued by the Pangalos' dictatorship, was generalized after the vote of the anticomunist "Idionymo" law of the liberal Venizelos' government (1929), during the Metaxas dictatorship (1936-1940), during the Greek civil war (1946-49) and the political repression that followed and finally during the Greek Junta (1967-74) and applied mostly against the communists and other political opponents. The political transition of the Metapolitefsi (1974) marked the end of this practice, but the decades of turning dozens of Greek islands into places of exile and "disciplinary camps" for the "enemies of the State" is something that have created a multitude of political and social experiences of great historical importance. Though, this is a kind of "difficult cultural heritage" to deal with for the local communities and for the Greek State itself. The obvious duty to preserve and promote the memory of these historical sites is undermined, on the one hand by the fear to revive political conflicts from the past that still appear thorny, and on the other hand by the fear that this preservation and promotion would darken the sunny and pleasant brand name needed by the islands in question for tourist purposes. Thus, the exile sites on Greek islands have been consigned to oblivion, an oblivion that recent efforts to transform such sites of memory into museums and to promote them, try to overcome. Using an on-the-spot investigation at the exile sites on three of these islands (Ai-Stratis, Chios and Anafi) and desk research of relevant literature (books, historical achieves, photographic records, oral testimonies) the present article reconstitutes the very hard but also very rich in cultural forms of resistance and in creativity life of the exiles, stresses the importance of these three exile sites for the Greek political history and also for the local history and identity and advocates for more state action aiming the preservation of this heritage..



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Figure 1: Ruins of the Concentration Camp in Ai-Stratis (Archive Marini Myrto).

and subjectivity prevailed in the interpretation of historical events. For many years, the sites of memory were sites of oblivion.

Based on the events of the last century, Europe could be considered a Memory Land, as a very geographical point has its own story to tell. That story is not a result of materials, but oral testimonies that compose the history of the past, composing identities. Within the context of the aforementioned events, new definitions have been devised, such as fever memory, mania memory, crazy for memory, etc. (Pantzou, 2010).

Only specific historical projects have been considered sites of memory and mainly those that transform memory in some fundamental way or provide repetition for educational purposes. Memory lands are created by the marriage of history and memory and their goals are many: to stop time, prevent oblivion, represent the intangible and give substance to what belongs to the past (Macdonald, 2013).

The last two decades have been marked by an explosion of interest in modern history not only in Greece but in Europe and other continents as well. It seems that the citizens are trying to learn about those events that for so many years have been forgotten or hidden in secret historical records, aiming to understand and create their own identity. Especially in Europe, because of its heavy heritage, there is a strong interest in the historical events of World War II since many citizens believe that they do not know enough about that period, due to ignorance or concealment of important events. This interest is expressed in several ways, such as the study of relevant publications, watching documentaries, films, etc. (Droumpouki, 2014). This search, however, hides inside intense controversies, as the rival memories of the different camps of the War come into conflict.

What do we do when the dark traces of the past cannot be buried within a national negotiation but constitute an element of transformation of the world-historical memory? What do we do when the unpleasant material of the past is of such a scale that it can be neither ignored nor silenced? (Macdonald, 2009a, Macdonald, 2009b).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 MEMORY

Memory is not a static storage space from which we retrieve unaltered past experiences but an active process of constructing meanings (Portelli, 1991). Addressing traumatic and painful aspects of the past, especially recent ones, is a complex process determined by the politics of memory and oblivion (Burström, 2009). After all, according to psychologists, "the memory of traumatic events seems to be susceptible to oblivion" (Masoura & Kargopoulos, 2008, Georgiadou et al., 2021). In each site of memory, there is a multiplicity of interpretations, symbols, historical narratives, represented social and cultural practices. The role of the museum as an institution and a place of collective memory that is directly related to national history and politics is the cause for intense debates and political interventions (Droumpouki, 2014).

It is a given that the different social groups living within the borders of a nation identify with the centre of government and must show obedience to it, whatever its form. This results in a national identity that is in fact imposed by the power of the state (Kaplan, 2012). In post-war Europe, collective oblivion was a cornerstone of the structure of stability, especially in the West. In 1989, the overthrow of the socialist system in the USSR had multiple consequences, especially through the crisis of political consciousness. De-politicization

## 1.2 RECOUNTING HISTORY

Disputes over history cannot be understood without taking into account the specific conditions under which they take place, i.e. without examining their political and social context (Liakos, 2007). Depending on the era and the socioeconomic conditions, we can perceive the past and transform it into history change. Thus, under the influence of the major political overthrows that took place in the last century, in certain cases, the formation of contemporary identities requires a rupture of the dark contemporary past (Macdonald, 2009a, Macdonald, 2009b).

All around the world, historical issues and sites still creating conflicts within society are part of difficult heritage, and from time to time they have been addressed differently as factors conveying specific impressions, emotions or ideological messages. Thus, various measures have been taken in order to form the desired consciousness, such as the partial or complete destruction of buildings, an attempt to neutralize others by dismantling Nazi symbols, the demythification of a location by integrating daily activities and the museumification of some parts of it (Macdonald, 2009a, Macdonald, 2009b).

## 1.3 WORLDWIDE INTEREST IN THE DIFFICULT CULTURAL HERITAGE

From the late 20th century to the early 21st century, there is a growing trend around the world to publicly display those stories and cultural heritage that are difficult and potentially capable to cause ruptures in the established contemporary identities and social relations. During the 1990s – a milestone in the revision of history – a fruitful debate began around the difficult heritage and the historical events that it subsumes. That shift could not have left unaffected the museums and the way they used to address the difficult heritage until then (Macdonald, 2010).

A museum is linked to the society and operates by promoting its cultural heritage. These sites can play a key role in the cultural life of a place through the activities they offer. The role of a museum should not be limited to collecting, preserving, studying

and displaying the material evidence of the cultural heritage of a place with the sole purpose of promoting scientific research. Museums are organizations that preserve and present the objects of cultural heritage from one generation to another whilst teaching, educating, and entertaining their audience (Michaelidou, 2002).

Museums are organizations that need to decide which notions of the past, the present and perhaps the future deserve public space (Black, 2010). Museums engaging with the topics of difficult cultural heritage and controversial stories often raise important and, at the same time, unpleasant questions about the role they play. "Should museums deal with controversial stories? Could they do so without entering into troubled, contemporary social and political relations? Could they do so without taking the side of one or the other? And how appropriate is the museum as a means of dealing with a dispute, raising or addressing questions?" (Macdonald, 2010).

## 2. THE SITES OF MEMORY IN GREECE

In Greece, modern history had not been a subject of a museum narrative for a long time. History museums and especially the difficult heritage of contemporary historical events have not been the focus of systematic research and evaluation by historians and museologists (Hatzinikolaou, 2010). Undoubtedly, the subject of compulsory displacements and political persecutions, as well as repression measures against the political enemies, is part of the country's difficult heritage. The commonest way of prosecution was the displacement to distant locations (internal exile) and the internment to maximum-security prisons. The study of which was avoided for decades or only certain fragmentary events of that period were presented. Those are events that do not cause ruptures in the cohesion of society.

Regarding Greece, dozens of islands were turned into places of exile and "disciplinary camps", whilst many prisons were created for the "enemies". At the same time, the methods of repression that the state implied on its political opponents (radical citizens,

left-winged, communists), from the '30s to the political transition in 1974 (Military Junta), have been consigned to oblivion. These sites of memory in Greece - political prisons and concentration camps - have been consigned to oblivion since there is no state support for their maintenance and enhancement.

Museums and memory are some of the topics that sparked discussions amongst specialists, and which continue to this day (Hatzinikolaou, 2010). Recently in our country, important steps have been taken not only for the study and protection of the traumatic past but also for its promotion, driven by the need of the ever-increasing interest of the public, and the flourishing of a new type of tourism from 1990 onwards, the so-called dark tourism (Pantzou, 2010). In Greece, more and more people seek for information, study historic books and visit these places. Making visits to sites associated with atrocity is for many people a meaning through which they can preserve their own promise to remember and, thus, to strengthen to avoid bad history being repeated (Macdonald, 2009a).

## 2.1 WHERE TO FOCUS

In this article I will study three emblematic cases of displacement for political exiles, that of Ai-Stratis, Chios and Anafi. These places of exile, among many others in the country, are considered milestones in the history of the last century, each for separate reasons, as we will see below.

The Camps of Ai-Stratis, Chios and Anafi were places which operated as repressive measure mostly against political and secondarily criminal exiles. The purpose was to ideologically reform those who were dangerous for the proper functioning of the state. Thousands of souls were exiled cause of their ideology. Many of them were famous such as poets, writers, actors etc and their persecution was the cause of producing art. Many books, paintings, songs, poems were created in the Camp, talking about the passion for life and the hardships of exile.

The reason why we chose the specific sites and theme is, on the one hand, the historical importance of these memory sites, and that, on the other hand, after thorough research on the museum mapping of the country, is recorded

the complete absence for the preservation and promotion of these places. Also, an important incentive has been the growing research interest recorded in recent years in sites of detention and exile, in repressive policies but also social and ethnic conflicts (Carman & Carman 2001).

The institution of displacement and internment based on the political beliefs of the citizens was a difficult subject to investigate. Until recently, in Greece, the only ones who dared to address it were the exiles themselves and their remaining associations creating some small thematic museums. However, there is a recent dimension to the studies regarding the prisoners and exiles. These studies in the new context of internationalized research have highlighted privileged areas for discussion, such as confinement, discipline, the techniques of subjection and the reaction to them (Voglis, 2002).

## 3. THE EXILE IN AI-STRATIS

### 3.1 THE INTERNAL EXILE THROUGH HISTORY & THE CONCENTRATION CAMP OF AI- STRATIS

Internal displacement as a politically-motivated administrative measure began to be used intensively in consequence of the first vertical political division of Greek society, the so-called 'National Schism' of 1915. However, the practice of administrative exile on a large scale was used against cadres of the trade union movement and socialist parties.

The first politically internal deportations took place in the 20th century. In 1914 Abraham Benaroya and Samuel Yiona, two trade unionists from Thessaloniki who were leading members of the Socialist Labour Confederation, commonly called 'the Federation', were exiled to Naxos after a strike by tobacco workers.

In 1929 was enacted the "Idionymo" law by Venizelos, which was clearly aimed at suppressing trade unionism and communism. This year the "Concentration Camp of Discipline Living" in Ai-Stratis was opened. It is estimated that about 3,000 Greek citizens were sentenced to internal exile due to the "Idionymo" Law. The political crisis of the 1930s led to bloody strikes and workers' riots in May 1936 in Thessaloniki.

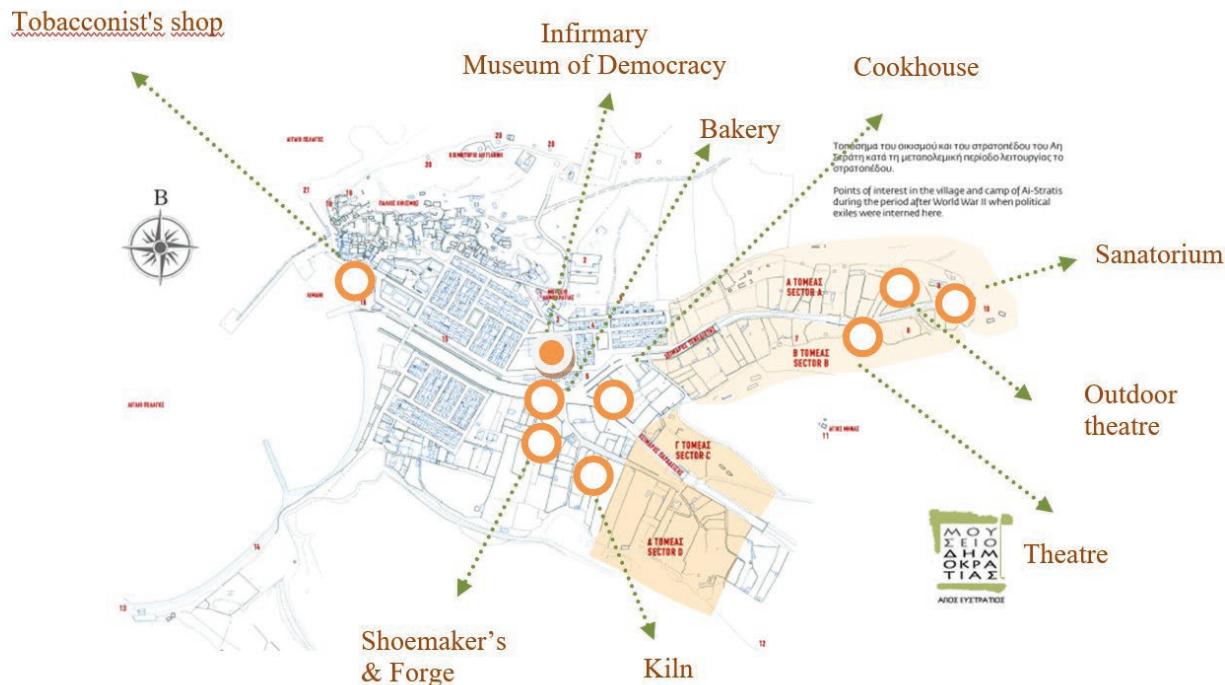


Figure 2: A walk along the route marked on the map will take you to the historic sites and surviving buildings. Also marked on the map are some of the names given by the exiles to certain places in the area (the map has undergone processing). Available at: <http://www.mouseiodimokratias.gr/greek/exhibition2.asp> (Accessed April, 2022).

Ioannis Metaxas seized dictatorial power by dissolving Parliament and suspending the Constitution on 4th August, suppress the revolt. The exile phenomenon culminated in Metaxas's dictatorship, when hundreds "opponents" of the nation were exiled. The Metaxas regime enacted a mass of legislation directed against "enemies of the state". These laws provided the legal foundations for measures that would have a far-reaching impact on Greece's social and political life right down to the fall of the military coup: measures such as formal recantations of Communism ("declarations of repentance"). The only way for a political prisoner to win his release was by signing a recantation. The security forces applied extreme psychological pressure and brutal physical tortures to gain recantations, namely the political prisoners must disown their ideals and ideology (Kazakos, 2013, Varnalis, 2014).

Although political prisoners and political exiles asserted to be allowed to go and fight the Nazi invasion, the security forces of Greece handed over the political prisoners and exiles, as hostages, to the German occupation army. Especially, in the Camp of Ai-Stratis the security forces attacked and killed three of the exiles. After Nazi invasion, the internees were confined in the Infirmary by invaders. Finally, 33 exiles died of starvation during the terrible winter of

1941-1942. After the liberation, in October 1944, the Camp closed and the last exiles were set free.

In 1947, during the Civil War, the Camp of Ai-Stratis opened again. When the Civil War was over, many detainees were released, but about 3,400 civilians remained in exile in 1951. In April 1952 the number has fallen to 2,000. The downward trend continued over the next few years: in 1955 there were 950 inmates on the books, in 1956 only 820, and by 1959 the number had dropped to 470. However, it is not possible at present article to calculate safely the total number of exiles. From then on, Ai-Stratis was the sole place of exile until early in 1963, when the last of the internees were finally released. Overall, between 1947 and 1962, more than 9,000 exiles were displaced on the island. Hundreds of men and women lingered in exile for five or ten years or even longer.

The interval of the years 1963-1967 was brought to an end by the military coup on 21st April 1967. In the early hours of 21st April thousands of people were arrested. After the military coup of 1967, the Camp reopened and operated as place of exile for political detainees until 1974, hosting a small number of exiles. This year the "Left" – communist party was officially recognized as a legitimate political organization and



Figure 3: The exiles' bakery. Available at: <https://www.ertnews.gr/wpcontent/uploads/2016/10/MSB1.jpg>



Figure 4: Exiles in Ai-Stratis, 1950s. Contemporary History Archives (ASKI)

therefore persecutions were paused.

Nowadays, there are only ruins of Camp, because the residents cleaned and cultivated their fields after its closure. Also, there wasn't any state support to preserve them. Both the residents and the state, desired to forget. Demolishing buildings or certain architectural features aimed to forget particular political regimes and social orders (Macdonald, 2009a).

### 3.2 LIVING IN THE CAMP

In the places of exile, as in prisons, the deportees took steps to organize their life collectively. To deal with the problems of undernourishment, illness, despondency and depression, as well as the most unlikely restrictions imposed on them at the whim of the local police chief, they organized "Political Exiles' Coexistence Groups" (known in Greek by the acronym OSPE) (Theodorou, 2006).

The first exiles rent houses, when the Civil War began the exiles were thousands, so the forces created the Camp in a valley with oaks. In the period of Civil War the valley was full of tents and every tent housed 8-10 exiles. In the first period, before Civil War, only men lived on the island, but in 1947 the first women were displaced in Ai-Stratis renting small houses to stay safe - a decision of OSPE.

The exiles received a minimal allowance from the State, which was barely enough for one meal per day. The capital grant was low, so the relatives of exiles sent money to support them. Everyone put his money to the kitty. The internees managed to get some provisions for themselves by growing a few vegetables, keeping poultry, fishing etc. In the periods of sowing, the exiles worked on the farmlands of natives

and their salary was money or vegetables, fruits, grains. Many times the exiles fished with residents by using their boats, into the sea far away from the military forces, the internees seized the opportunity to discuss with the locals about their ideology and socialism (Varnalis, 2014).

The tinplate workshop and the machine-shop on Ai-Stratis provided the exiles with utensils, tools and other everyday objects by making a different use of everything that could be reused. Often the exiles taught the natives new methods of agriculture, husbandry, architecture or water supply. For example, for the first time in history of the island the water – the most important public health measure – was chlorinated by exiles. In this way, everybody was survived endemic typhoid (Kazakos, 2013).

Unfortunately, the internees were already in poor health when they arrived on the island, because of the successive internal displacements. Local conditions exposed them to new illnesses. About thirty doctors and twenty medical students were exiled to Ai-Stratis until 1954. Although even the most basic requisites for diagnosis and treatment were unavailable, many of the exiles and permanent residents were saved from death by the doctors' determined efforts.

In the beginning, the locals were skeptical about the exiles. However, progressively they trusted them and there was a peaceful cohabitation. The most important issue for the residents was that exiles support the economy of the island. But, also the locals appreciate the exiles because they brought something new to their backward island, such as medicine, technical know-how, arts etc.

### 3.3 EDUCATION CIRCLES & CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Many internees were workers and farmers, thus the majority of them was illiterate. Consequently, discussion groups, further education classes and elementary education had been established since the inter-war period. Although the Military Police imposed strict censorship on books and other study material, the political exiles found ways to smuggle books and newspapers into the camp and built up a lending library. A lot of the books were in languages other than Greek, as the exiles wished to learn foreign languages (Kamarinou, 2005).

The experience of exile imprisonment left its mark on the work of numerous Greek artists and writers. Especially, in the years 1950-1955, when Ai-Stratis had its largest number of male and female internees, the Camp ran a very flourishing programme of cultural activities. The exiles who lived in the Camp included leading figures in the world of the theatre such as Manos Katrakis, Kostas Baladimas et al., poets and writers such as Yannis Ritsos, Menelaos Loudemis, Titos Patrikios, Tasos Livaditis et al, artists like Christos Danglis et al. Others were taught in painting and engraving on the island and subsequently became famous artists, included Yorgos Farsakidis and Takis Tzaneteas.

The exiles organized theatrical performances, poetry readings, satirical sketches, choral concerts and performances of traditional dances from all the regions. Every festive occasion (Christmas, Easter, Carnival, national holidays) was an opportunity for a kind of cultural activity (Tsellos, 2002). Over fifty theatrical performances were held on island. The classes and the theatre made a good impression at residents. Especially, the theatre because as was the first time that the locals saw a performance. But, the military forces prohibit to listen in, because they were afraid of proselytism to socialism. Nevertheless, the kids managed to slip in the theatre.

Nikos Margaris was the chorus master of the exiles' first choir, which was a great success and had a repertoire that included classical music, as well as folk songs, popular songs and

so on. The musical instruments were made by the exiles, such as guitars, mandolins, mandolas, violins etc. In this period, Kostas Triantafylou wrote down all the dance melodies that the exiles could remember and orchestrated them. "There was a period in 1952-1953 when the camp danced literally all day and all night, regardless of age" (Voglis, 2002).

## 4. THE EXILE IN CHIOS

### 4.1 THE CONCENTRATION CAMP OF CHIOS ISLAND

The Chios Women's Camp was created in the midst of the Civil War in order to isolate the hard core of the political activist once belonging to the Resistance Organizations of the German Occupation period and especially the unrepentant members of the Communist Party, who were considered dangerous to public order. It was made exclusively for women, many of whom were mothers of young children, so their children also found themselves in exile. They were women of all ages and professions. In many cases we meet the whole family in exile on the island: grandmother, mother, daughter and child.

The first women got transferred to Chios Detention Camp on March 17, 1947. The first shipment of detainees consisted of 90 women, who previously were in other places of exile or detention centers, among them 17 small children. The Camp was established inside the barracks of Chios, known until our days as "Giala Camp", located at the edge of the town on a small hill. It consisted of three large two-story buildings that the exiles called the first, second and third buildings respectively; there were still the kitchens, the baths and the stables. Around the structures a large plot of land with few trees, that served as a place for walking during the hours when it was allowed for the detainees to leave the buildings (Theodorou, 2006).

On June 2, 1948, the Red Cross registered 1.050 women and 57 children up to the age of twelve (Koundouros, 1978). The missions continued; the exiles had become so numerous that the buildings could no longer accommodate them. Thus, as the time, the prison administration made the decision



Figure 5: Exiled women with their children.  
Available at: <https://www.koutipandoras.gr/article/i-giorti-tis-25is-martioy-sto-stratopedogynaikon-hioy/>  
(Accessed May, 2023)

to house the exiles in military tents within the Camp's courtyard. The conditions in the tents were unbearable, wanting in this way to exert pressure on the detainees to declare repentance. The stay in the tents lasted about 20 days. During this period, the administration placed female informers inside the tents to reveal the most dangerous communists. This operation paid off greatly, so overnight the administration removed about 100 women and placed them in "Saint Thomas" Primary School. The detention at "Saint Thomas" school lasted only two and a half months, from July to mid-September 1948, as the school had to reopen. The most dangerous exiles were taken then to the warehouse in the original Camp (Leuka, 1964).

The Camp was closed after the end of the Civil War in April 1949, when the exiles were transferred to another exile place close to the continental Greece, the tiny island of Trikeri in the Pagasetic Gulf off the end of the Pelion peninsula (Gavriilidou, 2006).

Today, the building of the ancient Chios Detention Camp belongs to the Army General Staff and functions as an Army Unit. Unfortunately, no citizen has access there. The Primary School of "Saint Thomas" is still an operational education unit, without the architecture of the place having changed.



Figure 6: The "Giala" Camp  
Available at: <https://astraparis.gr/sto-stratpedo-giala-apo-tin-96-adte-o-eortasmos-tou-agiou-georgiou/>  
(Accessed May, 2023)



Figure 7: The preserved iron door of "Saint Thomas" Primary School.  
(Archive Marini Myrto)

## 4.2 LIVING IN THE DETENTION CAMP

The division of labor was established among the detainees; each ward had its own schedule for cleaning the chambers, the toilet, the kitchen and finding water. The sick and the elderly were exempted from this procedure. The aid from the state was 3.000 drachmas per month, of which 300 were kept for the building's water and electricity costs and the remaining 2.700 were given for the mess, with the result that there was nothing left for the prisoners. The living conditions were harsh, the food minimal and of poor quality. The meal consisted of pulses, pasta or potatoes and salted fish. Water was scarce and dirty, even during the summer months. Also, there was no special concern about feeding the children; instead, they had to eat what their exiled mothers ate (Gavriilidou, 2006).

The courtyard was fenced with barbed wire. The exiles had no contact with the local population, leaving the Camp was forbidden. After all, there was a regulation that exiles should not approach the barbed wire, as well as local passers-by. Often the exiles spent their days in detention, without food and deprived of mail communications, in an effort of the camp administration to break their morale and make them sign a statement of repentance. Also, savage beatings have been recorded that ended up mostly in the island's hospital, while they led a 23-year-old exile to lose her life (Apostolopoulou, 1979).

Exiles' health was already very weakened by their previous stay in exile and detention centers. So very quickly many of them fell ill from tuberculosis, while remaining in the same wards with the healthy ones. The administration did not provide medicines, only the Red Cross did, with the mess remaining the same even for the seriously ill. All the children slept in the same wards, the healthy among the tubercular ones. The medical care was assured by doctors and nurses who were also detainees with the island's doctor visiting the camp sometimes (Staveri, 2006, Gavriilidou, 2006).

The primary school of "Saint Thomas" was comparatively a model prison, it was a rather beautiful building for anyone passing by from

outside. It was a modern two-story building and had six wards. When the prisoners were courting, they were not allowed to raise their heads outside the fence, and if any of them violated this rule faced discipline measures from the administration. The mess was worse than the one in the Chios Camp and there was no care for a special alimentation for the sick. But their main problem was the torment of thirst. After many protests the exiles managed to get access to water (Leuka, 1964, Theodorou, 2006).

## 4.3 EDUCATION AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

In the Chios Camp, the opportunities for entertainment and education were few, due to the strict surveillance of the administration. There was censorship on the books that entered the Camp, they had to be read by the administration first, approved and then given to the exiles. The books were forbidden even to female students, as -according to the administration- they presented subversive ideas (Gavriilidou, 2006).

Among the exiles Lisa Kotou, a teacher and a writer, organized classes to teach reading and writing to the illiterate girls. Later she took charge of the university students too. Meanwhile, Katina Mameli, an elder communist teacher, who had lived in exile from the time of the Metaxas' dictatorship, undertook to give lessons to the young children (Mastroleon-Zerva, 1985). Even the elder exiles were making an effort to learn to read, you could hear them spelling out in secret words from small pieces of newspaper that had passed the gendarmerie check (Staveri, 2006).

The most enjoyable time for the exiles in Chios Camp were the evenings when the younger girls took charge of the entertainment with dances from their homelands and songs. Despite the difficult conditions, the exiles did not lose their courage and organized celebrations for national holidays, creating sets and costumes. The same happened during the Christmas celebrations for small children. However, their favorite pastime was the "tsibida", parody skits improvised by younger exiles, full of railleries about the

gendarmes and about each other. On the other hand, in the annex of "Saint Thomas" every kind of entertainment was forbidden. Activities like chess, singing, dancing were not allowed, even the "tsibida" parodies of the prisoners were not tolerated (Staveri, 2006).

The exiles were particularly pleased when a camera passed through the inspection hidden inside a sack of sugar. The photographic record of the exile is an important piece of evidence in our study and helped a lot in the identification of the sites (Mastroleon-Zerva, 1985).

## 5. THE EXILE IN ANAFI ISLAND

Anafi is a small island of the Cyclades island group, nearby Santorini, which was to become one of the most important places of exile in the interwar period. On the island there was one sole settlement on top of a mountain, consisting of about 300 houses.

The first political exiles were displaced to Anafi under the rule of Pangalos' dictatorship in 1925, while the rest of the detainees were criminal law defendants: thieves, robbers and smugglers. In 1929, with the passing of the Idionymo law, more and more political activists were displaced to Anafi Island. With the advent of the Metaxas' dictatorship, the shipments had multiplied and the exile number reached 500, while the permanent population of the island was approximately 1.300 inhabitants (Tzamaloukas, 2002).

Most shipments arriving on the island during this period consisted of detainees from the Northern Greece's cities Kavala and Serres. There had worked before in the tobacco and silk mills industry and most of them were trade unionists, with some women among them, who were exiled for their trade union activity and their participation in the bloody strikes of 1936.

In 1935 a hunger strike was held for several days, demanding the government to grant a general amnesty to the exiles and release them. Almost all of the exiles participated in these hunger strikes except for the patients and the office of Coexistence Group, so that it could take care of the hunger strikes. The

hunger strikers were gathered in a ward, holding a banner with the slogan "Amnesty or Death". In the beginning of this action the authorities required exiles to sign a statement of repentance in order to be released. After 14 days of hunger strike and while the exiled strikers were completely exhausted, the state granted a partial amnesty and released 75 of them (Xatzidimos, 1990, Birtles, 2002).

After the Axis occupation of Greece during World War II (April 1941), there were still 220 exiled communists and trade unionists in Anafi. Then, one of the most impressive escapes of exiles was organized, as the detainees had to take part in the resistance against the conquerors. The escapes were members of the Communist Party, among them Electra Apostolou (Gritzanas, 1985).

Life during the German Occupation was very difficult for both the locals and the exiles and both sides suffered from hunger. In the islands' registry office one can find several death certificates testifying several deaths from food deprivation and starvation, while other causes were pneumonia, tuberculosis, bronchitis and typhus. It is worth noting that during this period there was no provision for the shipment of medicines by the state. In the Spring of 1942, the new Italian commander of the Cyclades island complex visited Anafi (Tzamaloukas, 2002). The exiles seized the opportunity and carried the most seriously ill to their camp beds, protesting about the miserable living conditions. During the protest of the exiles, many villagers, among them the priest and the mayor, stood on the street with them asking the new governor for medical care and food. The Italian commander was shocked by the condition of the exiles and agreed to transfer them to hospitals in the capital. Unfortunately, by the time the transfer took place, some had died (Birtles, 2002).

From the handwritten newspapers of the exiles, we get the information that until the Spring of 1943, there were few exiles on the island. Most of them had been transferred to other places of exile or prisons. It is worth noting that of the 200 executed on May 1944 by the Germans at the Kesariani Shooting Range, 70 were former exiles from Anafi (Birtles, 2002). The shipments with exiles to Anafi



Figure 8: The exiles' kitchens. (Archive Marini Myrto)

stopped for a few years, until the beginning of the Civil War when they started again. In 1946, Manolis Glezos (hero of the Resistance who took down the Flag of Nazi Germany from the Acropolis, along with Lakis Santas) was also sent into exile on the island. After the end of Civil War, the exiles of Anafi were transferred to other places of exile. In 1967 after the Coup of the Colonels a few political prisoners were again sent to the island.

Today, the settlement of Anafi hardly bear witness to its history. The ruins and the remains of the old houses of the exiles are few. Most of the buildings are not saved, some collapsed and others were demolished, and in their place were built modern residences or guesthouses for tourist accommodation. Two years ago (2021) the Municipal Council decided to build a historical museum on the island, which would also include the thorny heritage of the exile. The State approved the plan, giving a fund of 80.000 euros for the realization of the museum. However, some time ago these plans were canceled, and the content of the museum was limited to folklore excluding the memory of the island as a place of exile. The local authorities settled on that issue that a museum including the theme of exile would not be attractive and would darken the image of the island.

### 5.1 LIVING IN ANAFI

The exiles rented houses in the settlement (the Chora) of the island, ten to twenty exiles

lived in each one of them and each house had its own organization, they elected a three-member bureau consisting of a chamberlain, a treasurer and a person in charge of education. They had given the houses names such as: Marx, Gorgi, Lenin, Luxemburg etc. Stalin's house served as a school; Engels' house served as a kitchen and as a guest house (Birtles, 2002). All the exiles, regardless their ideology, belonged to the OSPE (Group for the cohabitation of political exiles). Thus, all of them had to comply to regulations, anyone who did not was expelled from the team. The OSPE had a president and a secretary, who were elected through democratic procedures, while general assemblies were held regularly. The only ones who did not join the OSPE were the convicts, who were mostly animal thieves and poachers. Also, there were about ten exiled political activists belonging to the Archio-Marxists (Trotskyite fraction) who had their own cohabitation group, as they did not want to become members of the OSPE (Gavrilidis, 1997).

The regulations were strict, the first and foremost being the behavior of the members, both among themselves and with villagers. As far as the locals were concerned, special care was taken, as no one was to give reason for complaint. They had to respect the manners and the customs of the inhabitants, regarding their religious and political beliefs, so it was forbidden to discuss these matters with them. However, the issue on which OSPE was absolutely strict and disciplined was



Figure 9: The mill where the exiles ground barley.  
(Archive Marini Myrto)

the behavior with women. Love relationships between the exiles, as well as between exiles and locals, were expressly forbidden (Kenna, 2004).

The pension given by the State was set at ten drachmas, which not everyone received, as some were considered well off. Each exile gave the half of his money to the common treasury. The sick were excluded from this procedure, as they needed a special diet. Special diet was, also, provided to the women, giving them some milk and some eggs for those who had their children with them.

There was an apportionment for all jobs: for woodcutting, for cleaning, for finding water etc. In addition to the daily services, there were some crews: cooks, barbers, tailors and carpenters, who dealt with the needs of the group. The sick, mostly from tuberculosis, were excluded from the services. The island faced a serious- water shortage problem, so the exiles built cisterns to collect water when it rained or dug wells. The crew of builders and plasterers often worked for the locals and the income from their work went to the fund of OSPE. The exiled tanner Lefteris Matsoukas made shoes and sold them to the villagers to strengthen the treasury of OSPE (Tzamaloukas, 2002).

Resident's property was completely respected and any case of theft resulted in the guilty being excluded from the Group. An agreement had to be reached with the landowners concerning the herd's pastures. Suitable

slopes of hills and mountains were used for the cultivation of barley and wheat (Mpirkas, 1966). The exiles grounded their own barley in a mill. They also had a few vegetables, chickens and a few sheep. Meals were simple, usually consisting of beans, lentils, spaghetti, potatoes and rice (Gavrilidis, 1997). The exiles faced a difficulty in learning the news of the mainland. Thus, with the permission of the gendarmerie, an exile could visit the unique café (kafenion) in the settlement that had a radio in order to listen to the news and inform his co-exiles (Mpirkas, 1966). Trying to counterbalance these limitations, the OPSE had organized its own café, where the exiles could chat, discuss political and philosophical issues and play chess and backgammon (Tzamaloukas, 2002).

## 5.2 EDUCATION AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

In Anafi, as in the other places of exile, there was an intense activity concerning education and entertainment. The exiles considered that this kind of activity would steel their beliefs; after all it was also a pleasant way to pass the time on the island.

Electra Apostolou was responsible for the education activity. Courses were organized in each ward. They were taught political economy and Marxist-Leninist philosophy, courses on trade union issues and agricultural problems in Greece. The reprinting of courses and books was facilitated by an illegal polygraph owned by OSPE. Also, there was a graded educational

program covering Greek language and history, mathematics, geography, accounting and foreign languages (English, French, German, Russian), but the main target was to reduce illiteracy as most of the exiles were illiterate workers from northern Greece. Books and newspapers like "Rizospastis" (the journal of the Communist party, the KKE came from the capital), hidden into sacks with supplies. That's how the camera and the polygraph must have been smuggled.

The exiles also edited weekly handwritten newspapers. The most important, the "Antifascist", was a handwritten four-page newspaper, which played a serious



Figure 10: The exiles' handwritten newspaper "The antifascist".

role in the personal partisan and political development of the exiles. The editor-in-chief of the newspaper was the exile Manolis Perlorentzos, a typographer from Athens. He was exiled during the Metaxas' dictatorship. He died on February 22, 1942 from starvation.

The entertainment program was also rich. The OSPE had created a choir of 25 members and a musical group from those of its members who had managed to take their musical instrument with them. From the photographic archive we can identify a mandolin, guitars and a saxophone (Mpirkas, 1966). The leader of the band was the tobacco

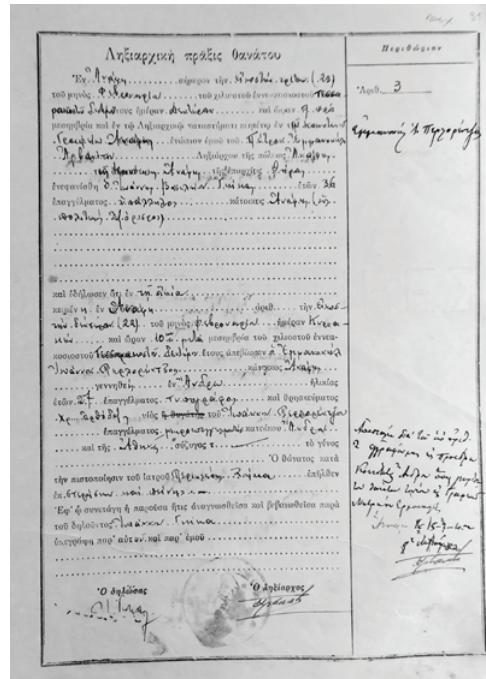


Figure 11: Death certificate of Perlorentzos, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper "The antifascist" (Archive Marini Myrto)

worker Goulios, who played the saxophone (Tzamaloukas, 2002). The repertoire was traditional and European music. Every Sunday they organized dances in the village square. An exile of Armenian origins, Kivork, was the group's dance teacher (Mpartziotas, 1978).

The exiles organized theatrical performances and recitations of poems, directed by the young exile Spanos. The scenographer of these performances was Apostolos Apostolidis, a painter from Thessaloniki. They also organized celebrations for the national holidays in the village's square. Shadow play performances (Karagiozis) were also given by the young exile Topekitzoglou from Athens. These performances made a special impression on the locals, as they had never seen an artistic performance in their lives. It is worth noting that illiteracy on the island was much higher, as the Greek State rarely sent a teacher on the island (Tzamaloukas, 2002).

## CONCLUSION

The idea that sites of difficult heritage –especially sites of atrocities, traumatic memories or crimes– should be preserved and treated as “cultural heritage” has been controversial in many parts of the world. Difficult heritage prompts usually raise ethical concerns. But this is partly the reason that motivates many people to make educational visits to such sites. This provides an opportunity not only to learn about the local history, but also to engage in broader moral consideration and self-positioning (Macdonald, 2009a).

The Concentration Camps of Ai-Stratis and Chios, as well as the Anafi island as case studies present some interesting aspects. They have in common that they represent a rather thorny issue for the collective memory, reminding a difficult period of the modern history of Greece, an issue that may provoke controversies. The aim of this paper is to offer an objective approach to a sensitive period of the modern history of Greece that still divides society since it concerns a not so distant past and the memories are still fresh.

Undeniably, the Concentration Camps of Ai-Stratis, Chios and Anafi have been consigned to oblivion, since there is not enough State support for their promotion as historical sites and on the other hand local communities seem rather hesitant to promote the memory of a dark period of the local history that is considered as contradictory to a sunny tourist brand name. Thus, State action and funding aiming the preservation of this heritage is deemed necessary. A first step would be to restore the remaining ruins and then to place educational materials and explanatory panels in the buildings, so that the visitor of each place knows its history. Through historical walks the visitors could imagine and understand the life in the camp and its structure and that would offer to them a unique experience very useful to anyone who is interested in history and in its marks on a place. On the other hand, in this way, the locals would get closer to their own history and would reevaluate even the most difficult parts of their heritage as a source of self-consciousness.



Figure 12: V. Manikakis, Exiles in Ai-Stratis, 1950s. Contemporary History Archives (ASKI)

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