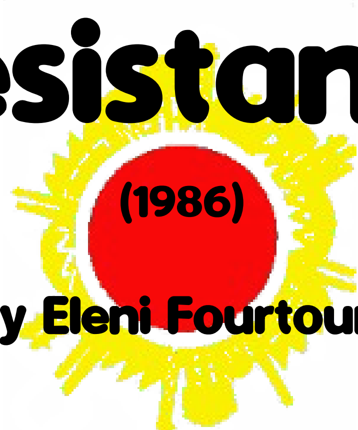
Greek Women in Resistance



(1986)

By Eleni Fourtouni

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For my children, Rusty *and* Rachel.

May you never forget how to resist,
may you never cease your struggle to create

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PREFACE

In January 1974 I returned to Greece with my family. My husband had a sabbatical, and we were to spend at least nine months. My excitement knew no bounds. For the first time in twenty years I was going back in the winter. Throughout the summer and fall I counted the months, the weeks, the days. Finally I was going to see again what I had missed above all else: the almond trees in bloom. It was the affirmation I needed during ice-bound New England winters, as I would watch the tiny forsythia buds slowly swell.

Almond trees bloom in mid-January, when weeks of cold and rain have drained every trace of blue from sea and sky; when driving northern gales whip up the waves and send them crashing over wharfs, piers, and concrete embankments. The cold and rain will last through March. But in mid-January there is a change. For a few days the temperature rises almost imperceptibly, then overnight the bare, gnarled almond tree is transformed – a fragile, vulnerable, exquisite miracle. A promise.

"The mad almond tree," a poet calls it, comparing it to a foolish virgin who gives herself at the first sign of love. Cold and rain, even freezing temperatures, are certain to return. Most of the blossoms will be destroyed before the fruit has formed. Even so, come summer, there is always a harvest of almonds.

The almond trees were white in the gardens of Glyfada, where the international airport is located; the sky was bright blue. But the prevailing color in the airport, the streets, the squares and parks of Athens and its suburbs was khaki. Uniforms, guns, soldiers, and silent, hurrying crowds. Greece had been under a military dictatorship for almost seven years.

It took me but a few days to realize what "stability and peace," a key phrase the New York Times used to describe the situation in Greece, meant. Oppression was palpable everywhere, affecting everyone, but especially students, writers, performers, and the politically active. Some of my old friends had been imprisoned or exiled for years. Almost everyone I knew had been "interrogated" at local police stations. I felt like a traitor, a prodigal, for having lived in complacent safety for so long. I wanted to become involved, to do something that would contribute to the struggle going on despite these harsh measures.

To defy or resist was vital, whether by political organization or in simpler but equally risky individual acts, such as singing forbidden songs in the cafes or making available blacklisted books. The important thing, now as in the past, was not to accept the present conditions as permanent, to repudiate in every possible way the right of the Colonels to control freedom of expression.*

My personal involvement took the relatively safe form of the written word. I decided to translate into English Greek poets whose work had been suppressed because of their political affiliations. While translating these poems I became aware of another oppression, deeper and more lasting than any the Colonels could impose. Among the twenty or so volumes I had selected with the help of friends, publishers, and other poets there was not one written by a woman.

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* This symbolic resistance culminated in two student uprisings in 1973. Though the Colonels crushed both, they marked the beginning of the end of the dictatorship.

My search for women poets began immediately, and it resulted in *Greek Women Poets,* published in 1978. Two of the poets I translated there wrote exclusively about Greek women's participation in the resistance against the Germans during World War II, powerful poems of women guerrillas, women political prisoners, women facing the firing squads. I realized then that I must search once more, this time for accounts, diaries, histories written by women. I knew they must exist, but where?

Resistance is a tradition in Greece. Women have long participated in their country's struggle against domestic and foreign oppression, their courage and sacrifice equaling that of men. World War II, the resistance movement and the civil war that followed, provide examples of the total involvement of Greek women in a major political upheaval. An important part of the Greek resistance consisted of women, but there is no mention of this fact in the official histories. One finds only oblique references, in brief passages or briefer footnotes, to women's struggle.

I was seven years old when World War II came to Vassara, the mountain village near Sparta, where I was born, and some of my most powerful childhood memories are of the women's participation in both political action and combat. I heard women speak to crowds of villagers and high school students, transforming them into efficient resistance units. I saw regiments of women march through the village at dawn, and I saw them march back at night, battle-weary, carrying on stretchers the dead and wounded. I saw them executed, saw their bodies dragged through the village streets, their houses burned, their embroidered linen thrown in the mud, their animals shot. I remember Vasiliki, tall and stately, a weaver, famous for her designs and colors — always casting a new warp, always giving freely of her time and knowledge to women in a dozen surrounding villages. "Gifts from God turn into curses if they are sold," she used to say.

When the Italians attacked Greece, she organized supply centers and travelled throughout the countryside, this time drafting the women whom she had taught her weaving skills to make blankets, sweaters, socks, and gloves for the army. When the Germans occupied Greece, Vasiliki joined the resistance immediately. With her shuttle and her persuasive voice she continued her struggle to feed and to clothe. She held herself and the rest of the women responsible for the survival of Greece, for every child who went to bed hungry. They became the providers for the whole nation, they built Child Shelters, hospitals and schools, and organized National Solidarity groups.

I remember Argiro at the village crossroads. I remember praying that she'd look at me, that her gaze would come way down where I stood. She was the Amazon Queen, and I was thrilled with the terror of the encounter. Her voice was unlike any I had ever heard. I had seen Argiro before, when she looked like other women I knew. She used to look at me then, even talk to me, adjust my ribbons.

"No one can rape her again," I thought. "No one can rape a woman with a rifle slung on her shoulder and bullets strung across her breasts, a woman towering over everything the way she does".

I remember Maria, Diamando, Chrysanthi... Forty years later these women have become ideas, legends, regiments of furies demanding not to be forgotten.

> who will sing
> who will collect what is coming to me
> what I've lost and
> for which they shoot me down?*

asks Erasmina, executed at age twenty.

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* *Greek Women Poets,* Tr. by Eleni Fourtouni (Thelphini Press, New Haven and Athens, 1978) p. 19.

A passing poet will sing her song
I am only a sparrow inside the river reeds
I don't sing
I don't forget.
I don't leave for the winter.*

Writes the poet Victoria Theodorou.

Since the collapse of the seven-year military dictatorship in July 1974, various feminist groups have emerged. One of their priorities has been to collect, record, and make public information about the role of Greek women in the history of Greece, especially from 1940 to 1950. Most of this material consists of primary sources – personal accounts and journals. Their goal, as stated in their first publication of oral histories of Greek women in the resistance, is: "To make an opening, a beginning, to issue a call to all women who lived during those tumultuous years to retrieve their memories; to remember not only what they gave to the resistance movement but also what they received from it."** For the long struggle sparked by the Italian invasion of Greece in 1940 was twofold: to defeat the foreign invaders and to create a democratic society free from age-old double standards for women and youth. For the first time in the history of Greece, in the ranks of the Resistance movement women and young people were treated as the equals of adult men; at home, at work, in strategic planning, and in danger and sacrifice. Teenage girls of the Greek provinces, where for centuries women had been confined to the home, gained a sense of themselves as people with potentials and abilities that could be developed as much as they themselves might wish.

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* *Greek Women Poets*. Tr. by Eleni Fourtouni (Thelphini Press, New *Haven* and Athens, 1978) p. 13.

** Γυναῖκες στήν 'Αντίσταση – Μαρτυρίες (Women in the Resistance – Oral Histories) (Κίνηση Γυναίκας, Athens, 1982), p. 7. (The oral histories inserted throughout part I, come from this publication.)

Victoria Theodorou was one of those girls. I met her in 1976 when I returned to Greece to search for material about Greek women in the resistance. She showed me a book she had published at her own expense. It consisted of seven journals written by women political prisoners.* Because of her Resistance activities, she had been confined in a camp for five years, and is the writer of one of the journals. At last I had found the material I was looking for, the material I had been assured, over and over, did not exist.

From the seven journals I have chosen the three that I feel describe the events and all aspects of life in the concentration camps. The importance of these documents lies not so much in their description of torture, endurance, or submission, but in their account of resistance behind the barbed wire — an experiment in social organization under conditions of unmitigated oppression. The women were thrown into desolate, remote island camps to be broken and humiliated. Alone for the first time, for the first time without men to direct them, to determine their role, their work, their voice, they did not waste time in beating their heads against the proverbial "wailing wall." Instead they discovered that they were tough, creative, capable — they harnessed their energy, their resources and they created a microcosmic world within which they effectively resisted tyranny.

The following poem by Victoria Theodorou is, I think, a distillation of women's life in the concentration camps as she lived it.

> Women by the thousands were walled
> in this empty, nameless island
> officially declared unfit for human habitation
> infested with yellow fever and typhus
> we were the first to camp here

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* *Στρατόπεδα Γυναικῶν* (Concentration Camps for Women) Edited by Victoria Theodorou (Athens, 1976).

on this meager soil we worked, we gave birth
we buried, we sang
we abolished emptiness
we built kilns and workshops
wells and windmills
here we lived out the Clay Age
we dug for roots
coaxed the music from the reed
made a lyre from the turtle shell*

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* *Greek Women Poets,* p. 10.

GREECE, 1940-1950

I do not blame those who are ready to rule, but those who are even readier to obey.

—Thucydides

WORLD WAR II

World War II found Greece in September 1939 under Metaxas' well-entrenched fascist regime. When Hitler began to invade one European country after another, Metaxas supported him. In a speech made in Athens days before Greece was attacked, he said:

> Greece is a totalitarian state, and its political philosophy is one with Hitler's and Mussolini's. Greece is, and intends to remain, politically removed from the British, to whom we have never given, nor have we promised to give in the future, any aid whatsoever.*

But everyone, including Metaxas, knew this was empty rhetoric. Through a large national debt and the monarchy which was related to the British royal house and was established in Greece in 1832, when the country gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire, Britain had controlled both Greek economy and politics. Greece's foreign policy had been consistently pro-British throughout that time.

When on October 28, 1940, the Italian ambassador delivered an ultimatum of surrender to Metaxas, he had no choice but to call for general mobilization, despite his professed political sympathies. A few hours later Italy invaded Greece through Albania. Greece was inadequately prepared for a major military confrontation, without effective border fortifications and with practically no provisions made for supplying and reinforcing the army. The women of the Pindus mountain ranges transported supplies to the front on their mules and their own backs and returned carrying the wounded to the interior.

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* Konstantine Tsoukalas, Ἑλληνική Τραγωδία (The Greek Tragedy), (OLKOS, Athens, 1974), π. 37.

Greece's one strong point was the determination and enthusiasm of the entire population, which instantly was mobilized into a spontaneous national uprising. Within a few months the Italians were pushed back deep into Albania and were on the verge of retreating across the Adriatic. But bad weather and lack of Greek supplies and reserves brought the Greek army to a standstill. Metaxas rejected an offer of British combat troops on the grounds that acceptance might provoke Hitler. Upon his death on January 29, 1941, the British sent 58,000 troops to Greece from North Africa to counter the increasing threat of German aggression in the Balkans.

Hitler had been furious with Mussolini for opening a new front in Greece without consulting him. At the time, the Italian armies were bogged down in North Africa, and Mussolini thought a quick victory in Greece would win him prestige at home and improve his standing in the Axis. Realizing that the situation was hopeless for the Italian army, on April 6, 1941, Hitler invaded Greece through Yugoslavia, which was already under Nazi control, and through Bulgaria, which, because of its territorial interests in Western Thrace, had been an Axis ally from the start. In a matter of weeks the Greek front, weakened by months of fighting, collapsed before the superior strength and mobility of the German tanks.

Two days before an armistice was signed, Alexander Koryzis, who had become prime minister after Metaxas' death, committed suicide. Most of the British troops were transported to the Middle East, whereas the king fled to

England and his cabinet to Cairo. Later the king joined the politicians there and, under British tutelage, formed a government in exile.

Athens was occupied on April 27, 1941. By the end of May, German airborne units had also captured Crete, which had disregarded the armistice and continued to fight.* The first phase of the Greek resistance against the Axis thus came to an end. Resistance was resumed almost immediately after the Armistice was signed, however, and it continued throughout the three-year occupation.

LEVENDOKATERINI:**

told by *Argiro Kokovli*

She lives in the memories of her comrades – those of us still alive – and her story, passed down by word of mouth, fires the imaginations and inspires the lives of younger generations. She became known as Levendokaterini. Her birthplace was the village of Fourne, near Hania, Crete.

Fourne lies at the end of a fertile valley among gently sloping hills. The earth there is rich, watered by many springs, wells, and brooks. The people are hard-working and have made their land a bountiful garden in all seasons. Fourne is always beautiful, but in the spring it is splendid, glowing. The hills are green then, dotted with flowering shrubs of many colors. The fields are lush with clover, and the orange groves hum with honeybees harvesting nectar from fragrant blossoms.

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* Crete's refusal to surrender caused Hitler to delay his attack against Russia for almost two months, a fatal delay for the German army at the Russian front.

** *Levendis* signifies all that is noble and brave. It is usually applied to men.

May 20, 1941: the entire valley is a song to life. But Crete, all that remains of free Greece, prepares to die. Her people arm themselves and wait. And their wait is not long. A black cloud shadows the blue sky of that brilliant day in May. It spreads over the green hills, the fields of clover, the orange groves of Fourne. The May sun is dimmed as Hitler's paratroopers, like huge, carnivorous birds, descend on our land.

Katerini, 21 years old, war widow of Theodoros, mother of two children, is up before dawn. She is alone. Her children are hiding in a cave in the ravine with the rest of the children, women, and old men. Gunshots are heard. Katerini opens the window. The fragrance of orange blossoms mixed with gunpowder invades her blood. Fear mixed with a strange excitement, a thrill she has never experienced before, grips her heart. The house cannot contain her. She has to be *there*. She casts off her widow's black scarf, makes the sign of the cross, and wraps around her braids another, brilliant yellow with a border of blue thistles. Then she fills a sack with food and walks out of her gate.

The villagers huddle outside the cave. Her children run to her open arms. She kisses their frightened, red-rimmed eyes, wipes their noses, combs their hair.

"Stay with your sons, my daughter, they cried all night long," murmurs an old man. She notices an ancient gun slung over his stooped shoulder. Something stirs inside her. No, she cannot stay. She must go down the hill again where the fighting is. But this time she must carry more than food.

"Grandfather, give me your gun," she whispers timidly. A wild look from the old man nails her. His grip on the gun tightens. This thing he has heard is beyond imagining; give up his gun? His comrade for over seventy-five years? This living extension of his arm? "Give it to me, I will honor it," she says again, louder.

The old man stares at her.

"Give it to her, grandfather; give it where it's needed," the women urge him. "It's a sin to waste it. Katerini is worthy of it."

The old man lowers his arm and slowly lets the gun slip off. A tear falls from his half-blind eyes.

"Take it, Levendokaterini, take it, for freedom, for our island. Use it well."

Levendokaterini stands next to the men on the bridge, tucks her skirt up over her knees, chooses a hole in the wall, and takes aim.

After the liberation, she was tried for "anti-national" activities and was executed, along with other survivors of the Cretan resistance.

RESISTANCE

Ὀμπρός παιδιά, καί δέ βολεῖ
μονάχος του ν' ἀνέβει ὁ ἥλιος...

Σπρῶχτε μέ γόνα καί μέ στῆθος, νά τόν βγάλουμε
ἀπ' τή λάσπη.
σπρῶχτε μέ στῆθος καί μέ γόνα νά τόν
βγάλουμε ἀπ' τό γαίμα·
σπρῶχτε μέ χέρια καί κεφάλια, γιά
ν' ἀστράψει ὁ ἥλιος Πνεῦμα!

Ἄγγελος Σικελιανός (Anghelos Sikelianos)

The Axis established in Athens a puppet government, headed by General George Tsolakoglou, who had signed the surrender. The civil service, the judiciary, and the police were carried over from the Metaxas regime. The puppet government formed the Security Battalions– several thousand Greek volunteers commanded by Greek officers and supervised by the Germans, who helped them combat "Anti-Axis behavior." They were responsible for some of the worst atrocities and throughout Greece were feared more than the foreign enemy. The primary targets of persecution were the same as under the Metaxas regime: communists, liberals, unions, and, of course, everyone in any way involved in the resistance.

Initially the Germans tried to win the sympathies of the Greek people. Propaganda emphasized the respect and admiration Germany had for Greece, ancient and modern. In a radio broadcast from Berlin, Hitler said that a people who had shown so much valor in battle against superior Axis forces were true descendants of Pericles and Leonidas, worthy of taking part in the creation of the "New Order."* It did not take long to become obvious to the Germans that their overtures of friendship were unacceptable to most Greeks. Eyewitnesses recount the embarrassment and confusion of the Germans when they realized that the applause of the crowds in Syntagma Square in Athens was not for them but for the captured British soldiers they were guarding. Such embarrassment and confusion fueled harsh measures that severely punished all forms of resistance. The death penalty was imposed for giving fugitive British soldiers information, food, or assistance, possessing weapons, insulting the authorities, listening to Allied broadcasts, distributing leaflets, or hiding food. Armed activity, sabotage, espionage, and contact with the Allies meant death not only for the persons directly involved but also for their families. When armed resistance began to spread, there were reprisals against the population at large. Thousands of civilians were executed by Germans, Italians, and Bulgarians; seventy thousand of the Greek Jewish population (90%) died in extermination camps; approximately two hundred thousand houses were either entirely destroyed or heavily damaged; most ports, including the Corinth canal, were ruined; seventy percent of the merchant marine was lost; the telephone and telegram networks, and rail systems and most bridges and tunnels were blown up; automobiles were confiscated, crops were burned, livestock was reduced by fifty percent, and twenty percent of the forests were burned. The total cost of material damages during 1940-1944 has been estimated at fourteen billion dollars (1938 rate).*

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* Dominique Eudes, *Les Kapetanios (Arthème Fayard,* Paris, 1970), p. 140.

Despite the brutal reprisals for "anti-national behavior," resistance erupted spontaneously throughout Greece. In reality, the war did not end with the signing of the armistice. Many officers and enlisted men of the Italian campaign simply stayed in the mountains, determined to continue the fight. Opposition to the Axis began during the first week of the occupation. It took many forms: Greeks helped hundreds of stranded British soldiers escape to the Middle East; a Bulgarian ship loaded with munitions was blown up in Piraeus; an eighteen-year-old student took down the swastika from the Acropolis and replaced it with the Greek flag; a German munitions warehouse was destroyed in Thessaloniki; student demonstrations closed the universities; handbills circulated everywhere with the words RESIST printed in red letters.**

IN THE EASTERN SUBURBS OF ATHENS:
told by *Toula Mara-Mihalakea*

In the eastern neighborhoods of Athens, populated mostly by factory workers, resistance broke out as soon as the Germans came. Overnight everyone was ready to fight for freedom, just as they had always fought for bread. And the fight for bread was now more than ever before of the utmost importance. Famine was going to be our most immediate foe. There were shortages in everything. The lines of shoppers, waiting hours for fifty grams of oil, a pound of beans, or a piece of bread, were getting longer every day.

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* John Iatrides, in *Greece in the 1940s* (University Press of New England, Hanover and London, 1981), p. 20-21.

** John Hondros, in *Greece in the 1940s,* p. 37.

We realized that in order to survive we had to act collectively. Our first successful collective act was to convince the shopkeepers, by persuasion and threats, not to hoard what food supplies there were but to sell them at reasonable prices, saving milk and eggs for families with children.*

High school students, ages fourteen to eighteen, inspired by the idea of acting with the adults in planning survival and resistance, were organized into one of the first EPON (United Panhellenic Youth Organization) groups in Athens. Our enthusiasm and energy knew no bounds. We were no longer considered wards of our parents under constant supervision, always having to invent ways to circumvent the restrictions imposed on us to preserve our "good name." For the first time girls our age felt important, capable, indispensable.

By day we were still students and daughters, cramming for Latin and math exams or helping our mothers at home. But at night the streets were ours. We kept the Free Press going. We'd cover the walls of the most remote neighborhoods with resistance slogans, and through improvised loudspeakers our voices resounded throughout the city, urging people not to give in, not to be intimidated, to organize and to resist, to take their fate into their own hands. Like lightning we'd run in and out of coffee shops, distributing our handbills.

Maria, Katerina, and I had been best friends since grammar school. The three of us would go out every night together — one writing, the other holding the can of paint, the third on guard at the corner. As soon as we'd hear her whistle, we'd disappear behind a doorway or down some cellar stairs and wait holding our breath until the sound of the boots of the German patrol had passed. Each time we went out, we knew we could meet death. But we had no fear, no anxiety; nothing could stop us.

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* Hoarding was later decreed a crime against Greece, punishable by death.

In January 1943, I was denounced and arrested by the Security Battalions for anti-national acts.

In July 1941 the first concentration camps were established, and on July 5 the first guerrillas appeared near Kozani. By August sabotage activities against Axis lines of communication proliferated throughout Greece as guerrilla bands were formed throughout the mainland and on the islands. In Crete there was no respite between the official war and the resistance. Attacks against the Germans increased by the hour, and with them came harsher reprisals. Villages were razed and the whole population executed because sabotage had taken place nearby. One way of stemming resistance was massive arrests, which always included prominent professionals and political leaders, who would be held as hostages and executed at the rate of forty for each German soldier killed or wounded. In the Bulgarian occupation zone thousands were executed. In Sparta one hundred and twenty citizens were shot; in Crete one hundred and ninety-four were captured.

The failure of the Germans to intimidate the people is illustrated by the story of two hundred hostages held in the Haidari detention center, outside Athens. The Germans had announced that they would be executed at the slightest provocation. Fearing a public outcry, the guerrillas halted all activities. Germans and Greeks alike held their breath. After a week, the hostages resolved the dilemma by smuggling out a letter imploring the guerrillas to continue the resistance and not to burden them with a life of shame at having contributed to the ultimate defeat of their country. They spent the night before their execution in wild celebration, singing and dancing. Their relatives, standing vigil outside, waiting to walk with them at dawn, took up the tune and sang along.*

Guerrilla activity slowed down in November 1941, because of lack of organization among the various resistance groups and because of the threat of famine, which forced everyone to focus on biological survival. As soon as the Germans occupied Greece, they began to systematically starve the people. All food was either confiscated or looted outright and sent to Germany. What was not taken by the Germans went into the hands of profiteers who sold it on the black market. In addition, bad financial management caused inflation to go sky-high, rendering the currency worthless.

Athens and other large cities during the winter of 1941-42 were reduced to death camps. Three hundred thousand died of starvation in three months.** Skeleton-like children with distended bellies roamed the streets, searching the garbage cans for anything that could be chewed and swallowed. Before dawn city carts cleared the streets of the previous night's corpses. No one dared identify their relatives, because they would risk losing the dead person's food rations.

CHILD CENTERS:
told by *Nausika Flenga-Papadaki*

I was eighteen in the winter of 1941. Unable to bear the sight of emaciated children scavenging city garbage cans for something to eat, I discontinued my studies in

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* Themos Kornaros *Στρατόπεδο Χαϊδαρίου* [Concentration Camp of Haidari] (Difros, Athens).

** Tasos Vournas *Ιστορία της Σύγχρονης Ελλάδας* (History of Modern Greece), (Tolides, Athens, 1980), p. 138.

Athens and returned to Mikro Horio, my village in Evrytania. But famine was not only a city occurence. Because of the inaccessible terrain, my village and the surrounding ones had escaped the terror of the German occupation and had remained essentially free territory. But the monumental ruggedness that protected them against the enemy also meant a lack of fertile, arable land. The meager harvest from the small, rocky fields provided the average family with bread for about three months.

The major source of income for the area had always been money sent by those who had emigrated—to Australia, America, Africa. As a result, Evrytania, though poor, was in touch with the outside world, and its people had acquired a progressive way of thinking, an openness of mind unlike that in other isolated regions. The German occupation cut off outside income, plunging Evrytania into an economic crisis more desperate than that in the urban centers, where at least one had bread rations. Here, as elsewhere, the children were the first victims of malnutrition. I tried to help by taking whatever food we could spare to a couple of neighboring families who had less than we did, and whose children were slowly and quietly starving. It was not enough. My individual, well-meant efforts could never make any difference. I could not personally reach out to the dozens of starving children dragging themselves in the streets.

Only collective effort could save the children from starvation and disease. In Athens I had seen soup kitchens for children opened and operated by disabled veterans. Why not here, too? The next Sunday, as soon as the service was over, with my heart racing and my throat dry, I gathered my courage, got up, and began to speak. My first incoherent words fortunately went unheard in the initial confusion and shock at my act—it was unheard of for a woman to speak inside a church. But I managed to regain my determination, and my voice commanded the people's attention and touched their hearts. I talked of the danger and explained to them the only way to save the children from extermination, the only way to preserve our new generation of Greeks, our only hope for continuity.

The first meal for the hungry children was ready that night. Everyone with even a morsel to spare contributed. Generosity and co-operation by far surpassed mere human duty. "Save the Children" became an inspiring slogan that transcended politics. The first step was taken that day in establishing the Association for the Protection of Children and the National Solidarity Association.*

The resistance needed strong leadership which would consolidate the various groups, and direct and plan strategy. Most traditional politicians were in Cairo, those remaining were unwilling, as they had been during the Metaxas era, to assume the responsibility of organizing resistance. The only viable alternative, now as then, was the KKE (Greek Communist Party). Many of its leaders, imprisoned by Metaxas, had been handed over to the Germans by the collaborationist government and were executed. Those who managed to escape, quite naturally, turned to resistance once more. Living in danger and risking everything had always been a way of life for them; their contact with the people had been on a close human level; their language was direct, understandable by everyone; their experience in organizing anti-government activities amply qualified them to lead the resistance. But most importantly, having proved again and again their devotion to democratic ideas, they had gained the trust and admiration of the people. Within a short time they managed to unite the Greeks into a single force under the banners of EAM (the National Liberation Front), ELAS (the National People's Liberation Army), and EPON.

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* Both developed into nationwide organizations, serving as lifelines throughout the occupation and the civil war, primarily through the efforts of women.

EAM was the major decision-making body. It organized political action in the cities and directed much of ELAS' military strategy. Its stated objectives were to fight the enemy and establish democracy at the end of the war. Its two immediate priorities were to make food and medicine available to everyone, especially to children, and to unite all existing armed groups by providing a network of supply and information.

THE GREEK GIRLS ORGANIZE:

told by *Diamando Grizona*

I was fourteen when the Germans came. We were five sisters. In the village lived a man who was said to be a communist. We didn't know exactly what this meant, except that he had been the only one to openly oppose the Metaxas dictatorship and had spent many years in exile as a result. People respected him for this. They listened to him and asked his advice about politics.

A few days after the occupation, his daughter, who was as old as I was, began to talk to me and to my sister about resistance. She said that we must organize and fight the enemy, that the only way to survive was to stay together. We formed a group and got in touch with other high school students in nearby villages who had also begun to form small groups to plan ways to resist. We knew about the men who had stayed on in the mountains after the collapse. They needed supplies. We decided it was up to us to provide them.

But before we could really do anything, we had to convince our parents – a difficult task for all of us, especially the girls. For the first time we were stepping outside the home, taking on roles other than those assigned to us by our fathers and strictly enforced by our mothers. "You are girls," they cried. Our reputations would be ruined, no one would want to marry us, we would shame our fathers' names. There was no end to the calamities we would bring upon our families. But we had decided to do this, nothing could dissuade us. We persisted and slowly managed to bring about the miracle of our parents' believing in us, seeing us as people, respecting us for our determination, seeing that our struggle would spare us all the shame of submitting to the enemy.

We formed a group of six girls and three boys, then visited every village in our area. We had two priorities: to provide food, clothing, medicine, and information to the guerrillas, and to convince other parents to allow their daughters to join the struggle. Our example was our most eloquent ally. Parents could see that we were serious, dedicated, and, most important, modest. They began to understand that this was not a ruse to escape their supervision but an effort to ensure the survival of everyone. We organized EPON groups in every village we visited.

Yiannoula was fifteen – tall, slender, and very beautiful. She wanted to join us, help organize EPON in Karagouni. At first her mother would not even let her talk to us. Her village is located in the inaccessible, snow-bound mountains of the north. Life there is as harsh as their moral code. The women, as famous for their strength and pride as for their beautiful hand-embroidered dresses and their scarves fringed with gold coins, do not even pass by the coffee shops where men congregate.

Our seriousness and modesty again spoke for us. Yiannoula's mother listened attentively to what we had to say. Yes, she agreed, of course everyone had to fight for freedom – even the women. But when we explained the goals for after liberation: democracy, justice, and equality, even for women, she shook her head sadly. "The English won't let you", she said and gave us her blessing.

Yiannoula's courage became a legend among her people. Throughout the occupation she fought in the ranks of ELAS, always wearing her Karagouni dress and her scarf fringed with gold coins. Her mother did not live to see the imprisonment of her daughter for "anti-national acts" or her own predictions about the English come true. She was shot by the Germans for giving information and shelter to a group of guerrillas. She was a good woman.

In April 1942 the first strike in occupied Europe took place in Greece. It was organized by EAM, and it involved the communications workers in all major cities. Though the government was forced to give in to the strikers' demands, the Axis decided to ignore its political message and to consider it an "economic" event. But as general strikes increased, causing the Axis operations in Greece to be frustrated and often crippled, the Germans were forced to see them as political acts of resistance.*

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* John Hondros, in *Greece in the 1940s,* p. 40.

The situation in Athens was tense. The people were ready for a major confrontation. The crisis reached explosive dimensions on February 22, 1942, when the labor mobilization order issued in Berlin was published in the government's newspapers:

> Adolf Hitler, the leader of the Third Reich, wishes to express to the Greek people his high regard for the bravery and integrity they displayed on the battlefield. He desires to make them part of the New Order and requests their support and active participation. Therefore it is decreed that: (1) All Greeks living in Greece, age 16-45, are herewith obliged to perform whatever labor deemed necessary by the Axis authorities. (2) All workers must observe the work hours and must perform in a way that will fill the productivity quotas prescribed by the Axis. (3) Male workers will be obliged, when necessary, to work outside their place of domicile, either in Greece or abroad.*

AFTER THE DECREE:
told by *Demetra Lambraki*

February 23, 1942: Overnight, the walls of every house and storefront in Athens were transformed into newspapers of the Free Press. The headlines, printed in red and blue letters, proclaimed the sentiments of every Athenian against Hitler's "New Order."

DOWN WITH THE GERMAN WORK-CAMPS
NO TO WORKERS FOR THE THIRD REICH
NO TO FORCED LABOR
NO TO COLLABORATION, CAPITULATION, DEFEAT
ALL GREEKS SUPPORT THE NATIONAL STRIKE

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* N. Svoronos, *Ἱστορία τῆς σύγχρονης Ἑλλάδας* (History of Contemporary Greece) (Athens, 1969), p. 116.

One word, one sign, one slogan was enough to transform every passerby into a demonstrator. It was barely dawn, and freezing rain mixed with snow and sleet had began to fall, when the first demonstrators poured into Syntagma Square. By nine the place was packed. German and Italian machine guns formed a fence around the crowd, which marched toward the Ministry of the Interior where the government was housed. The demonstrators stopped in front of the monument of the Unknown Soldier, where they knelt and began to sing the National Anthem:

Σέ γνωρίζω ἀπό τή κόψη
τοῦ σπαθιοῦ τήν τρομερή,
σέ γνωρίζω ἀπό τήν ὄψη,
πού μέ βία μετράει τή γῆ.

Ἀπ’ τά κόκαλα βγαλμένη
τῶν Ἑλλήνων τά ἱερά,
καί σάν πρῶτα ἀνδρειωμένη,
χαῖρε, ὦ χαῖρε, Ἐλευθερία!*

Gunshots drowned out the last stanza, but the crowds repeated it, over and over, until it resounded throughout the city and its rhythm, taken up by church bells, echoed from every belfry.

The demonstrators returned the bullets with wild oranges, which they plucked from the trees bordering the square. They stormed the ministry, broke down the

* I know you by the sword's terrible blade,
I know you by the fierce gaze
that takes the earth's measure.

Born from the sacred bones of Greeks,
you remain forever powerful.

Hail, O Freedom, Hail.

> doors, and burned the files. The city streets teemed with people marching toward Syntagma Square. They pushed through the machine guns and surrounded the ministry, shouting encouragement to those inside. The gunners, half-dazed, began to shoot into the crowd. People picked up the bodies of those who had fallen; using them as shields, they pushed forward shouting "AERAAAA".* The ministry was destroyed. Fire raged through it and began to spread to the neighboring buildings.

The demonstration was followed by a national strike of all government employees and communication workers. The Axis operations were paralyzed. The labor mobilization order for Greece was revoked on March 6.

The streets of Athens were no longer safe for the Germans; they would no longer venture out singly in pursuit of loot or pleasure. They stayed away altogether from the remote city neighborhoods noted for political activism, except when, aided by hooded informants, they patrolled at dawn in armored units to arrest citizens involved in the resistance. Such arrests usually ended in on-the-spot executions.

But nothing could stem the tide. Every opportunity to demonstrate against the Axis was seized upon. Funerals of poets or politicians – regardless of political leaning – would spark massive demonstrations, where poems and songs of freedom and revolution would be heard.

By 1943, ELAS was fifty thousand strong, and controlled all Greece except the large cities and major highways. However major roads were frequently sabotaged. The German military commander for southern Greece concluded that "ninety percent of the population opposed the Axis and that the situation verged on a general insurrection."* On July 1943, the German Command issued the following statement about EAM's role in the resistance:

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* Storm, delirium, victory; the battle cry that had sent the Italians running.

> Because of its organizational capabilities, EAM is responsible for all hostilities against the Axis. Because of its political leadership and the popular support it enjoys, it constitutes the one great threat to the occupation forces in Greece.**

At the beginning of the occupation, the Germans had turned most of the mainland and the islands over to the Italians, Thrace and two nearby islands to the Bulgarians. To escape the systematic terror practiced by the Bulgarians, many fled to other parts of the country or to neighboring Balkan states. When the Germans ceded Macedonia to Bulgaria violent demonstrations occurred throughout Greece.

NO TO PARTITION:

told by *Maria Karra*

In the summer of 1943, when the Germans gave Macedonia and Thrace to Bulgaria as a reward for its cooperation with them, the people came out into the streets in massive demonstrations of protest.

I was living in Athens with my uncle at the time. He felt responsible for me and, fearing that I would be arrested, did not approve of my affiliation with EPON. He'd wait up every night until I returned from our meetings. He always looked worried and sternly warned that one night they'd bring me home on a stretcher. I was not afraid of the Germans; they couldn't stop me. But I was afraid of my uncle, who could. Convincing him to let me go to the EPON meeting on the night before the demonstration was my most difficult task. His only argument, which he kept repeating over and over, was that I was a girl. But I was a very determined girl, and in the end he relented.

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* John Hondros, in *Greece in the 1940s*, p. 40.

** N. Svoronos, *Ἱστορία τῆς σύγχρονης Ἑλλάδας* (History of Contemporary Greece), (Athens 1969) p. 140.

July 22, 1943: We met before sunrise at Monastiraki. Everything was ready – hundreds of handbills and first-aid kits; stretchers folded and casually tucked under our arms; cardboard megaphones hidden inside shopping bags. The streets were filled with casual passers-by, who at the appointed moment poured into Syntagma Square like a human torrent. We scattered handbills, recited poems, and sang songs of freedom. The crowds marched down Athenas street, declaiming poems and singing songs with us. Just before we reached Omonia Square the soldiers began to shoot. Someone fell, then another, and another. "Damn the murderers," a woman shouted. Dozens lay dead or wounded. We piled the wounded onto the stretchers and rushed them to nearby hospitals. Huge banners unfurled, reading: "Death to Fascism," "Freedom and Democracy," "Bulgarians, stay out of Greece." On the same streets where thousands of famine victims had fallen in the winter of 1941, on the streets that had echoed with the cries of hungry children, we were now fighting without weapons, without shields, to prevent a much worse catastrophe – our country's death by partition.

At the corner of Panepistimiou and Hippocratous streets, they hit us with artillery. The sound of machine guns . . . a tank coming toward us . . . on Homerou street we met it . . . it began to spout fire . . . shouts of pain . . . the whole street was covered with bodies. A

> young girl lay crushed at my feet. Her fair skin and blond hair were drenched in blood. Through her torn dress I saw a bullet hole between her breasts, and a bloody mass where her belly had been. Her name was Panayiota Stathopoulou. She was my schoolmate and a member of our group. We saw two Germans photographing her from the tank, laughing. We shook our fists at them. They continued to laugh, pointing their camera at another young woman lying in a pool of blood a few yards away. It was Koula Lili. She had jumped on the tank and kicked the gunner in the face when she saw him pointing the gun at Panayiota. He fired at her with his pistol at the same time as he was machine-gunning Panayiota. He turned and pointed the machine gun at us. We put down the stretchers, joined hands, and stood in front of the tank, guarding the wounded with our bodies. We stared at him until he slowly turned the mouth of the machine gun away from us.
>
> Fearing an even greater demonstration at their funeral, they did not let us bury our friends, and threw thousands of us in prison.

Despite the strong and popular position the KKE enjoyed during the years of occupation, it did not attempt to force its political ideology on the people. Party membership was not obligatory, nor was its absence considered a reason to distrust members of the resistance. In 1943 only twenty five percent of the ELAS forces were official members of the Communist Party.* EAM's objectives publicized when it was first formed – to fight the enemy and to establish the foundations of a democratic system – continued to be the focal points throughout the occupation.

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* John Iatrides, in *Greece in the 1940s*, p. 200.

EAM, besides organizing political and military resistance, also brought civilization to the mountain villages. By introducing community discussions and community action, it helped the Greek peasants gain a new consciousness – the knowledge that they had a say in their lives. It reopened schools and local courts which had been closed down when the war broke out, and established new ones where they had never existed. Theaters, poetry readings, medicine, and social services came to the village for the first time. Inaccessible rural areas were connected with the rest of the country by telecommunication, roads were built and maintained by collective initiative. But the most important achievement was the establishment of Child Centers, operated and supported by young people and women.

"SAVE THE CHILDREN":

told by *Nausika Flenga-Papadaki*

Our original EPON group consisted of four women, aged eighteen to twenty: Stella Yiannakopoulou, Pipitsa Polyzou, Tasia Zaharopoulou, and myself. In two months we had organized Child Centers in a dozen villages, making available not only food but also clothing and health care.

To assure a constant flow of supplies, we formed theatrical and musical groups that toured the villages. The plays we staged ranged from simple tales of shepherdesses in distress to dramas by Sophocles and Euripides or the antiwar comedies of Aristophanes. Admission was warm clothing, blankets, beans, flour, oil, and so on, which were contributed willingly by enthusiastic audiences who for the first time were seeing dramatic presentations.

By our network of messengers, we heard that in Korishhades, a village located in a remote and wild area, many children were starving. Even though the Germans did not venture deep into the mountain regions, the Security Battalions did. I would be tempting my luck to make the trip there alone. At our next meeting I requested an armed escort. Manikas offered to come with me, but I hesitated. My father, who had been very supportive and had provided us with food and advice, was reluctant to let me go with him. "Manikas is a good man, but he's a communist, and communism has ruined his life," my father cautioned me. (Manikas had been imprisoned and tortured by the Metaxas regime.)

Reading about the Russian and French revolutions and about the Paris Commune had made me curious. The idea of talking with a "communist" fired my imagination, and I decided to risk disregarding my father's advice.

The five-hour walk to Korishhades passed very quickly. Manikas spoke of dialectical materialism, of revolution, of Marx and Engels, of equality. Lacking all formal education, he had acquired his knowledge in prison, and he spoke from his heart. In his enthusiasm to share his ideas, he illustrated the coming equality by saying: "You, for instance – when the Germans leave you could be driving a tractor, and all your book-learning will be worth nothing." I was taken aback, but I understood later that he meant women would be equal to men, able to do a man's job.

Manikas had made me even more curious about communism, and, when I arrived at Korishhades, the first thing I asked the village teacher was "What exactly is communism?"

"Never mind that for the time being, Nausika," he said, laughing. "Why are you here?"

"I heard that the children are hungry. I am here to find out what you are doing about it."

"Nothing," he replied curtly. "But I have heard of your efforts to feed the children. Child Shelters – an excellent example of socialism."

"What do you mean? What is socialism?" I demanded.

"You'll learn all about that when you read the books I'll give you – about the theory of it, that is. You already know the important thing. Now let's call a meeting of the village girls. Tell them what must be done."

We started the soup cauldrons boiling that night. We visited every village, no matter how remote, and always left behind us a Child Center.

Our greatest achievement was in Karpenisi, where we turned an old nightclub into a model Child Shelter. It was an ideal place, with spacious rooms and beautiful grounds, and it supported three hundred children. The girls of EPON organized and operated everything – providing supplies, food, hygiene, medical care, and shops for making clothes and repairing shoes.

During one of our meetings about hygiene, someone suggested we visit Kravara, "the villages of beggars," located high in the mountains. "We are fine here, you should see those children," he said.

I decided to go there immediately.

After a day's journey, I reached the first of the Kravara villages. I went straight to the school and introduced myself to the astonished teacher as a representative of the Association for the Protection of Children. I asked to see the children and wanted to know how they lived, what they needed.

"They're hungry," he replied and took me into the classroom. What I saw there took my breath away. Every child was deformed: arms and legs twisted into grotesque shapes, faces distorted, torsos stunted. I asked how these accidents had occured.

"They're not accidents," the teacher said calmly. "You will not see a child that's not deformed anywhere in this area. As soon as a child is born, the midwife will twist a part of its body or face to prepare it for the beggars' profession. That's how the people make their living here. We're poor. Our land is the most arid in Greece. No one has ever shown concern for us; no government has ever cared. We do what we can to survive. But we never touch the faces of the girls – they must be pretty, for they have to get married."

"Have you not heard of 'the man of forty sticks', " he asked me reprovingly. "Here a man with forty sticks hanging at his door is a great man. Each stick marks a journey. A man travels far, sometimes outside of Greece – to Rumania, to Yugoslavia, as far as Austria – for months at a time. His stick is always with him to knock on doors and chase away mad dogs and taunting children. When he returns with everything he's gathered – money, grain, and cheese, but, most important, stories about the world out there – he hangs his stick behind his door. Forty is a mark of great accomplishment – it means he's lived to a ripe old age, has traveled far, and has learned much. 'The man of forty sticks' is a wealthy and wise man."

"Don't be shocked, comrade. Help us, since you came, now that all Greeks have become beggars, and begging is a poor business." The teacher spoke softly now, attempting to assuage my horror.

Within a week the first center for the protection of children was established and fully operating at Kravara. In it children were given nourishment, medical care, and an opportunity to learn about new possibilities open to them, about other options.

I spent my last evening at Kravara talking with a ninety-year-old beggar, "a man of forty sticks." He was a great storyteller, with a wealth of knowledge and understanding about the history and folklore of our Balkan neighbors. I left Kravara with an understanding of people whose existence I had never even imagined.

On my way back I stopped at Dikastro to talk with Sofia Vlahou. A high school senior of great beauty and boundless energy, she was my first comrade in my efforts to feed the children. She helped organize Child Shelters in villages as well as shelters for our network of messengers. She kept the shelters supplied from contributions to the wonderful musical and dramatic events her groups staged every Sunday. Her most important achievement was the establishment of a hospital, the only one in that area equipped to care adequately for wounded guerrillas.

After the liberation, her husband and co-worker was shot for "anti-national activities." Persecuted by the government forces for her role in the resistance, she fled to the mountains in 1946, leaving her infant daughter with her mother. She died in a Rumanian hospital years later without having seen her child again.*

Aided by Greek traitors, the Germans tried to frustrate our efforts by destroying food supplies and by brutal retaliations. One of the cruelest attempts to intimidate us was the hanging of two EPON shelter workers, fifteen and seventeen years old, in the central square of Lamia.

My own struggle came to a halt on May 14, 1944, when I was arrested and imprisoned for "anti-national activities".

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* Sofia was one of the thousands of political refugees to the Eastern Bloc, to whom the Greek government denied repatriation for thirty years.

On March 10, 1944, in the village of Viniane in Evrytania, PEEA, the new government of Free Greece was formed, the Government of the Mountains, as it became known. In the rural areas, elections were conducted by secret ballot, and supervised by high school students. In the urban centers the ballots were sent to Viniane by messengers. It has been estimated that eighty percent of the population participated in the elections. There were five women among the PEEA deputies. For the first time in the history of Greece women were voters and candidates. In addition, the new legislation included articles on women's rights: 1. the right to choose a place of domicile, 2. the right to choose a profession, 3. equal child custody, 4. equal pay for equal work, and 5. the right to divorce for reasons of incompatibility.*

ELAS TRAINING:
told by *Georgia Pliyannopoulou-Kaline*

I joined ELAS in May 1944 at the central headquarters of the 12th Battalion in Karpenisi. There I met the two first women guerrillas, who had joined with other women in early 1942 – Thiella and Koula Damou. As members of the Death Battalion of the 36th Regiment, they took part in many battles and were distinguished for bravery.

The development of our division and our precepts for equality of the sexes necessitated training women in military leadership. Koula, Thiella, and I were chosen for the officer training school in Redina. Eleven other women, age eighteen to twenty, were training there to become officers. We trained with the men and in exactly the same manner, instructed by regular army officers. Our training was based on that of the regular army, and consisted in thorough instruction in all types of guns and warfare.

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* At the end of the civil war in 1949, when EAM-ELAS were defeated and the monarchy and the old polititians were once more established in power, women retained only the right to vote, which was relegislated by the post-civil war government, in 1952.

Soon after we came to the training center, we organized poetic, musical, and dramatic evenings, which everyone received with great enthusiasm.

As soon as we completed our training we were assigned the rank of captain as commanding officers of women's companies in various guerrilla divisions. The many battles after we had assumed our duties completed our training and fully tested our courage.

In October 1944, when the Germans began to evacuate Greece, they engaged in "liquidation operations" to facilitate their retreat. That is, they attempted to annihilate ELAS so that their army could exit without casualties. In order to cut off ELAS supplies and reinforcements, a campaign of extermination was waged against the countryside. By the time evacuation was completed, the Germans had burned down hundreds of villages and killed their inhabitants. People were shut inside village churches and burned alive. The number of executed in 1943 alone reached seventy thousand.

The liquidation operations did not secure the Germans a safe retreat however; their losses, both in men and equipment, were greater than ever before. Nor did the German brutalities manage to crush the spirit of the people. Victory, freedom, and a new democratic Greece were within reach.

ELECTRA APOSTOLOU*

Athens, July 23, 1944, ten a.m. A tall, strongly built woman about thirty years old walks in the Gyze neighborhood. Her expression is determined, her step quick. She is Electra – political organizer for the Athens underground movement.

It is another occupation day. Far away, in the vicinity of Kaisariani and Kalithea, echo the guns of ELAS. "How they sing, like swallows," thinks Electra. It is a warm summer day, but the sun doesn't scorch the earth yet – there was a light shower at dawn. The air is cool, fragrant with the scent of thyme and pine trees from the surrounding hills.

"How beautiful is our city," Electra whispers, turning around to make sure she is not being followed. She shouldn't have come out in the middle of the day like this. She knows that death could reach out to her from any corner. But she couldn't help it. She had been hiding for weeks. She has to see her daughter again. When was the last time she had held her? Her eyes hurt for the sight of her.

"I must be careful, for our struggle," she tells herself her own words – words she had told her comrades so many times before – and pulls her scarf to conceal her mane of reddish brown hair. Everyone knows Electra's hair – it is a sure mark of recognition. Why has she put off cutting and dyeing it? "Tomorrow," she orders herself. Too late: A shrill whistle cuts through the cool fragrant morning. In an instant she is surrounded by the Gestapo.

Electra was born in 1912, to a well-to-do family. At an early age she began to notice the unequal distribution of wealth, and ask her elders about it. She received no answers until she enrolled at the German Academy in Athens. There she met Herr Hans, the only liberal teacher among the staunchly traditional staff. From him Electra learned the first rudiments of dialectical materialism, of Marks and Engels, of socialism and revolution.

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* See: Melpo Axioti *Χρονικά,* Volume 3. (Kedros, Athens, 1980) p. 248-257), and Vasilis Barzotas *’Ηλέκτρα ’Αποστόλου* (Thucydides, Athens 1981).

In 1925, when the military took over the government, the thirteen-year-old Electra joined OKNE (Greek Communist Youth Organization), and helped organize communication networks that provided information to political cxiles on the island of Anafi. To escape the pressure applied by her family, she married one of her comrades in 1930. From then on she gave herself totally to the socialist struggle. She joined the Movement of Women Factory Workers and organized the first strikes in the textile and tobacco factories, demanding shorter hours and equal wages for equal work. The working women of Athens and Piraeus got to know her well not only as a political idealogue, but also as a friend with whom they could share their private joys and sorrows.

In 1932 she led the Central Information Office of OKNE, and became a member of the Political Information Education Committee. In that capacity she represented Greek women in the Paris Antifascist Conference, in 1934. When she returned to Greece, she travelled throughout the provinces organizing women to resist the advancing fascism.

She was among the first to be arrested when Metaxas came to power. During the two years she spent in the Averof prison, Electra organized political groups and communication networks. She was released due to serious illness, but was rearrested though she was, at the time, nine months pregnant. As soon as her baby was born, they were both sent to Anafi as political exiles. A severe case of a recurring bleeding ulcer caused her transfer to a military hospital in Athens. From there Electra escaped disguised as a cleaning woman.

World War II found her an expert union and political activist. She began to organize the resistance in Athens as soon as the Germans occupied Greece.

For nineteen years Electra struggled for social justice and equality. She believed in her struggle and never betrayed it.

"Every time they arrest me," Electra used to say, "I don't worry what they might force me to say. When I pass through those doors, I lose my memory, my hearing, my speech, my sense of pain. I forget my entire past."

"I am Greek. I live in Greece. I serve the Greek people." Her torturers were unable to get anything else from her. Except her life.

In spite of superior arms, manpower, and popularity, EAM-ELAS made no attempt to take over the government when the Germans left Greece. Instead, it remained true to its original promise of free democratic elections. But British interests decreed otherwise. Another war, designed to crush the social movement in Greece, was being prepared behind the scenes. The prophecy of Yiannoula's mother in the village of Karagouni, "The British won't let you, my daughters," was about to be proven true.

CIVIL WAR, 1944-49

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Many accounts have been written of revolutions and civil wars which have taken place throughout the world in recent times; the general public is aware, however vaguely, of the major issues involved in these conflicts. But the five year bloodbath that followed the liberation in Greece has been either ignored or misrepresented by official historians. The few writings published before 1974, are dominated by the government's point of view, which has been that of a cold war mentality; inaccuracies both in describing and analyzing the facts had remained unchallenged for almost thirty years. Until 1974, the resistance against the Germans and the civil war were either omitted from history textbooks for Greek public schools, or they were presented as anathema – members of the resistance were called "bandits" and their struggle "bandit war." Even such recent accounts as *Eleni* (a half fictional, half factual account of the civil war), by Nicholas Gage published in the United States in 1984, portray a simplistic battle of good against evil, light against darkness, democracy against communism.

Since the political change in Greece in 1974 many suppressed documents have surfaced – records of the Democratic Army (as the insurgents' armed forces became known), and personal accounts by leftists. They have provided another perspective on the history of that period, showing the Greek civil war to have been an international conflict as well.

It now appears that both the Greek fascists and the British used the civil war to crush socialism in Greece in order to achieve their post-war aims – safety for the collaborators, territorial control for the British. Besides the traditional British interests in Greece, the growing fear of Soviet expansion made her even more important to Britain than ever before. Greece was needed both as a buffer zone against communist encroachment in the Middle East, and to contain Soviet power in Eastern Europe. Both groups, collaborators and British alike, urgently needed a government in Greece sympathetic to their aims – preferably the monarchy and the old right wing politicians. L. S. Stavrianos describes the Greek civil war as the result of a "Hidden War" between left- and right-wing resistance groups, put in motion by Churchill while the war against the Germans was still being waged by all parties.

In 1943, when KKE consolidated the various resistance groups, EDES (National Republican Greek League) did not unite with ELAS. Further, it remained as it had began, a group of about five thousand, beholden to its original leader and entirely dependent on the British. The Foreign Office Agent in 1943 reported to London that "EDES is completely loyal and would do exactly what we tell them. They remain our creation and instrument."*

Because ELAS provided an effective buffer against the Axis, the British had supported it throughout the war years. But in 1944, when German defeat was imminent, Britain changed her policy towards ELAS. Supplies of weapons, clothing, and money stopped, and aid to EDES increased. These tactics of favoritism had two objectives: to deplete ELAS, and to create an atmosphere of suspicion between the two groups. The British efforts to divide the resistance bore fruit – mistrust, accusations, and before long, armed conflict. Often ELAS and EDES would call a truce to fight the Germans and then resume fighting each other as soon as the common enemy was defeated. Brigadier General Eddie Mayers, in charge of the British mission to the Greek mountains (Greek Resistance) in a report written in 1943, said that according to instructions from the British High Command he had advised their Greek and British agents in Greece to sabotage all efforts of EAM-ELAS that might help them gain any political influence whatsoever in post-war Greece. In conclusion, he suggests that their agents encourage the collaborationist government and the Command of the Security Battalions in denouncing members and Leaders of EAM-ELAS to the Germans, emphasizing that in so doing they exercise their right and duty.*

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* John Hondros, In *Greece in the 1940s,* p. 41.

Churchill's next step was to win the king's approval. To this end, he sent assurances to Cairo of his commitment to the king's efforts to regain the throne. He fortified his plans further by securing from Moscow a laissez-faire policy in Greece, when he met with Stalin on October 9, 1944, and between them they divided the Balkans. As a result of that meeting ninety percent of control in Greece was given over to Britain.**

Naturally Churchill preferred to take control of Greece peacefully. He attempted to convince ELAS to make no demands and to remain in the background. Stalin advised ELAS leaders to consent to British demands. Ignorant of the agreement between Stalin and Churchill, ELAS obeyed and agreed to an increase of British troops in Greece, placing its own forces under the command of the British General Scobie.

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* British secret document made public in 1967. See Mathiopoulos, H Ελληνική Αντίσταση και οι Σύμμαχοι (Greek Resistance and the Allies) Athens, 1970), p. 164.

** Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, Vol. VI, *Triumph and Tragedy* (Boston, 1953), p. 234.

When the Germans evacuated Athens, on October 12, 1944, there were no guerrillas in the victory parade, only British soldiers and troops from the Greek Middle Eastern Division. The celebrating crowds, singing resistance songs and waving banners that welcomed EAM-ELAS as the liberators, in vain searched for the familiar guerrilla uniform.

Scobie, in order to avoid an anticipated show of overwhelming support for the resistance fighters, had ordered ELAS to remain in Larissa. Wishing to demonstrate their willingness to cooperate, the ELAS leaders obeyed, despite much disagreement in the ranks. Snatching the triumph of victory away from ELAS was tantamount to snatching victory itself away from them. For the next three decades "ELAS" became synonymous with "terrorism." EAM-ELAS was outlawed and its struggle branded "anti-national." For thirty years the Greek government justified its policy of persecution of the left on the grounds that EAM-ELAS' aim was seizure of political power.

If EAM-ELAS intended to take over the government, it could easily have done so immediately upon liberation, when it was at its peak in both popular support and military capacity. However, it not only made no such attempt at that time, but its concessions to the British quite obviously weakened its position. The willingness of the left to cooperate with the Allies had been demonstrated on several occasions: in 1944, when it agreed to a build-up of British troops in Greece, when ELAS forces were placed under the command of General Scobie, and by agreeing to ELAS forces remaining in Larissa when the Germans evacuated Athens. In addition, EAM-ELAS issued a statement urging Greeks to support them and the Allies in their efforts to form a government of national unity.

The new Greek government was led by George Papandreou. He had led the Government-in-Exile, and was known for having accomodated the British throughout that time. Though the cabinet had the appearance of national unity and included several members of EAM, it soon became apparent that it had no intention of fulfilling the promises it had made: to punish the collaborators, to disband the Security Battalions, to try their leaders, and to incorporate ELAS into the National Army. Instead it incorporated the Security Battalions into the police and armed forces. Consequently, negotiations between Papandreou and the EAM ministers about the nature of the National Army broke down. The situation was aggravated by an ultimatum from Scobie ordering ELAS to demobilize by December 10, or to be declared outlawed. As a result, the EAM ministers resigned and called for a public demonstration on December 4.

Again succumbing to British pressure, Papandreou revoked a permit for assembly that had already been issued. Nevertheless, on the appointed day tens of thousands of people poured into the streets in support of EAM-ELAS. They marched to Syntagma Square, where in front of the monument to the Unknown Soldier they sang the national anthem, "It's a Long Way to Tipperary", and songs of the resistance. Suddenly shots were heard, and many fell dead or wounded. ELAS entered Athens, and the decisive battle of the civil war was fought that night in Omonia Square. Churchill wired Scobie to consider Athens an "occupied city" and act accordingly. Scobie declared martial law and ordered ELAS to evacuate Athens within two days. Civil war in Greece had begun.

THE STORY OF THIELLA:*
told by *Nausika Flenga-Papadaki*

Thiella died on December 4, 1944, in Athens fighting the British – the new invaders of our country – at the bloody battle of Omonia Square, hit by a barrage of bullets from a British machine gun. She was a true soldier, and had managed to make one out of me. I will never forget the day she forced a gun into my hand.

It was on October 6, 1944. I was going to Makrokome to start a new soup kitchen and first-aid station. At about 8 a.m. I heard the first gunshots. Sensing the danger, my horse reared and began to neigh. The shooting grew louder and more frequent, resounding in the surrounding mountains. Afraid, I dismounted and tried to soothe my horse. A group of guerillas carrying wounded men to Ai Yoryi told me that things ahead were very bad and urged me to return. But when I heard that it was Thiella's battalion I decided to go on. I knew that I would be safe near her.

Thiella was furious when she saw me. "What do you want here?" she shouted. "Can't you see there is a war going on? You should be feeding the children."

"Okay, okay take your horse and hide in that ditch," she snapped when I said that I felt safer near her. "We are not going to let them take Makrokome," she said and loaded her gun, smiling.

I crouched inside the ditch for hours. It was afternoon when I finally dared to lift my head. I saw Thiella with a wounded man on her shoulders, trying to cover herself with a handgun. Ashamed of my cowardice, I got out and ran through the gunfire to her.

"Ah, there goes another one," she shouted. "Here, take the machine gun and cover me. I'll go fetch him, he might still be alive. She thrust the huge piece of iron into my hands.

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* Thiella means storm.

"I can't," I cried. "I don't know what to do." She turned, her eyes flashing, and slapped me hard. "Cover me," she ordered, her voice as hard and cold as the iron I held. "Just let the bullets fly. Hold it hard, or else it will bash your face in."

I held onto the machine gun, and the bullets began to fly, just as she said. I had no idea what was happening. Drenched in cold sweat, I felt a strange excitement running through my veins. I was totally heedless of danger, not thinking that at any moment a piece of lead could end my life. I had heard about the intoxication of battle, but I had never understood its meaning until now.

Thiella carried 24 wounded guerrillas to safety that day. Her name had been Melpomene Papaheliou. Her husband was a police officer in the service of the collaborators. When she left him to join ELAS, people suspected her, said she was in the service of the enemy, a spy. She proved her independence and her loyalties again and again in her acts and finally in her death.

Her indomitable will and legendary courage have not been swept away by the hoses that washed her blood off the Athens street. Her proud, laughing gaze is etched in the minds and hearts of those of us who fought, each in her own way, for a better world, a world where people could be free, a world where women could be people.

During the first week of fighting, ELAS surrounded the British troops within a small area in the center of Athens, then asked to negotiate a political settlement. Hostilities could have stopped there. But Churchill wanted ELAS crushed and would not negotiate while it held a position of advantage, and urged Papandreou to accept nothing less than unconditional surrender. At the same time, he sent reinforcements to Greece raising the number of British troops to forty thousand. Two weeks later, ELAS was forced to sign an armistice calling for total disarmament and demobilization. Under the pressure of public opinion, the government agreed to ELAS' one condition – amnesty.

On February 12, a formal peace agreement was signed in Varkiza. It was virtually designed by the British, and it could have served as an instrument of reconciliation. Some of the important conditions were:

Complete demobilization of EAM-ELAS
Release of hostages held by ELAS (British and government soldiers)
Formation of a national army
Amnesty for the insurgents
Individual civil liberties
Freedom of the press
Purging the civil service of fascist elements
Plebiscite on the question of the monarchy in 1945
Parliamentary elections in 1946
Drafting of a new constitution.

Only the two first articles dealing with the obligations of ELAS were promptly fulfilled. The government did nothing to enforce the most important element in the agreement – amnesty, especially to provide protection to the thousands who became targets of right-wing bands in the countryside. These bands were created by the Metaxas and collaborationist elements. They formed a powerful parastate organization which was feared and tolerated by the official State. Their targets were members of EAM-ELAS as well as non-leftists who were against the restitution of the monarchy. The prevailing violence served as an opportune time for Britain to press her case for the reestablishment of the monarchy, arguing that only the king could stabilize Greece.

Britain, and to a lesser degree the United States which by then had become interested in Greek affairs, ousted prime ministers and toppled governments that tried to reconcile the opposing forces. Between October 1944 and November 1945, there were six major changes in government without elections, prime ministers being appointed by the U.S. and British embassies. Throughout this time, the British chose either to interfere, or to be totally indifferent to Greek affairs depending on how detrimental this policy would be to the left. (For example, forbidding the demonstration of December 4, but allowing the government to scrap the Varkiza Agreement.)

It was obvious to everyone that the situation was not right for general elections. Liberals and leftists asked that elections be postponed until conditions returned to normal. But, in violation of the Varkiza Agreement, Britain and the U.S. insisted that elections take place immediately, knowing that the return of the monarchy was more likely to be ensured now than under normal conditions.

EAM boycotted the elections hoping to bring about their postponment. This move was another tactical error of the left which weakened it further. The boycott kept away from the polls not only party members but thousands of sympathizers, and gave the right an overwhelming victory.

Ironically, no sooner had Britain achieved her objectives in Greece, that economic problems at home made it impossible for her to play the role of a world empire. But Greece was not to be left without “protectors.” On February 21, 1947, Britain formally notified the American government that as of April 1, it would no longer be responsible for Greek affairs, and that all British troops would be leaving Greece before that date. On March 12, President Truman announced to the world his new policy for the reconstruction of war-ravaged Europe through his so-called Truman Doctrine.

Based on this policy, all Greek political and economic matters would henceforth be the responsibility of the United States. In the words of the ambassador to Greece D. Griswold this meant: "the American Embassy had the right to interfere in all Greek affairs and to demand changes in Greek domestic and foreign policies. The American Embassy also had the right to cut off all aid funds if the Greek government did not comply. That's the gist of foreign aid," Griswold concluded, "and there's no reason to pretend it's something else."*

Thus, Greece was handed over to the U.S. which was eager to advance desperately needed money and weapons. Control of Greece and the establishment of naval bases were all that was required in exchange. Along with guns and dollars, America also brought to Greece its cold war policy. As a result, anti-communist sentiments turned to panic, the Varkiza agreement was scrapped and brutal persecution of leftists became sanctified by Church and State.

2

Under the guise of democracy systematic oppression of the left was practiced until 1974. In order to justify this oppression the government enacted "emergency laws," which in many cases replaced articles in the constitution and became known as the paraconstitution. Emergency law 509 legalized all persecution of the left — past, present, and future, and branded as antinational anyone suspected of anti-monarchical sentiments. By advocating the theory of "collective responsibility" this law justified the surveillance and arrest of relatives of leftists on the grounds that they might have committed antinational acts, or that they might do so in the future. Within two months after the Varkiza Agreement was signed one thousand persons were killed, six thousand wounded, thirty thousand tortured, and over eighty thousand were arrested.* Under the same emergency laws the civil service was purged of everyone suspected of leftist leanings, and collaborators were pardoned on the grounds of having collaborated in order to fight communism. Using the same argument of anti-communism, members of the Metaxas regime were allowed to keep their posts in the secret service and in the police force, and the National Army was packed with royalists officers and officers from the Security Battalions. These individuals, aided by the emergency laws, formed a powerful parastate responsible to no one. For almost three decades they directed domestic policy, and no politician dared to challenge them for fear of being branded pro-communist.

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* Tasos Vournas *Ιστορία της Σύγχρονης Ελλάδας* (History of Modern Greece), (Tolides, Athens, 1980) p. 112.

Emergency law 509 also legalized the establishment of concentration camps for political prisoners. Among the many camps established at that time was the infamous Makronisos where the final solution for communism in Greece was to take place. There the deportees were to be cleansed and converted into nationally thinking citizens. The wording of the emergency laws was such as to create a Kafkaesque world in which everything depended on the personal interpretation given by the various officials. Military courts throughout Greece handed out sentences for committed "anti-national" acts and for "intended" ones. These sentences ranged from deportation, seizure of property, deprivation of citizenship to death. Seventy-five thousand people were executed. (In many cases, several individuals were sentenced for the same crime*.) The only way to save oneself was reneging. That is, signing a prepared statement of repentance whereby one renounced one's political beliefs, one's struggle and comrades, and promised to be a law-abiding citizen, loyal to the king, the government, and to the Orthodox Church. Those who would not repent, the "incurables" as they were called, would be sent to Makronisos where they would be "convinced" to sign.*

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* Nicos Alivizatos. "Emergency Regime", in *Greece in 1940s*, p. 224.

3

Though faced with the violence unleashed against the left, the KKE did not initially advocate armed resistance. John Iatrides in his essay *Civil War, 1944-1949,* writes that in February 1946 the KKE Central Committee not only refused to endorse guerrilla activity, but, obeying orders from Moscow to limit its activities on political action, urged its supporters to obey the military induction.** This resulted in tens of thousands of draftees who were suspected of leftist leanings being confined to detention centers, and transported to Makronisos.

It was not until the spring of 1947 that the KKE, faced with unprecedented brutality, decided that armed resistance against the terrorist bands and government forces who supported them, was unavoidable. Even then, however, the KKE stressed traditional values: independence, territorial integrity, democracy, and protection of labor and property.**

Armed resistance on an individual level had begun long before the KKE had declared it necessary. To begin with, many ELAS veterans, realizing that the Varkiza Agreement would not really protect them, had refused to disarm and stayed in the mountainous regions of northern Greece. They were joined by white terror refugees, and by political ideologues who could not tolerate foreign interference in the affairs of the country. There they formed the first groups of what later came to be known as the Democratic Army, numbering tens of thousands. Greece, especially the countryside, found itself in the midst of war once more. Recruits for the Democratic Army came from all walks of life — artisans, farmers, workers, students, and professionals. They were united by a populist-leftist ideology, and especially by their opposition to the regime in Athens and its foreign protectors.

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* The emergency laws served the right so well that in the 1960s the Karamanlis government attempted to integrate them into the country's constitution. Fortunately, the democratic forces under the leadership of George Papandreou had finally acquired both the courage and the power to frustrate this attempt. Of course, in 1967 the Colonels' constitution incorporated all emergency laws. They were abolished in 1974 when the military dictatorship collapsed. For the first time since the Metaxas' regime in 1935, there is no political persecution, and a genuine attempt is being made to establish and maintain democracy in Greece.

** John Iatrides, "Civil War, 1945-1949." In *Greece in the 1940s.* p. 202.

*** Ibid., p. 207.

Though rich in manpower, the Democratic Army was at a disadvantage from the first because of lack of ammunition and spare parts for damaged weapons. The pact between Churchill and Stalin had cut off all possible sources for reinforcements from the East. Moscow, true to its promise to Britain, gave neither material nor moral support to the insurgents. Rather, it advised the KKE to negotiate an armistice and in the future to engage only in political activism.

Despite this, almost until the end of the civil war, the Democratic Army was successful against the two hundred thousand government forces. Guerrilla tactics and popular support (manifested in donations of food and clothing, and a network of information) contributed to this success. Another important factor was unrest and low morale among the national forces. Soldiers deserted and junior officers sabotaged aggressive actions against the guerrillas.

In January 1949, the U.S. Command threatened to cut off foreign aid if the Greek government did not appoint General Papagos commander-in-chief. Papagos was a hero of the Italian campaign, but also a fierce royalist and disciplinarian. The government consented, and Papagos declared martial law. From this point until the end of the civil war Greece was in effect governed by the military. The army restored discipline by immediately shooting anyone who refused to carry out orders, and by sending to Makronisos all soldiers and officers suspected of leftist leanings. Also, in order to intimidate the populace and undermine the morale of the politically active, trials of political prisoners were accelerated, and death sentences were carried out immediately. Between May and June 1949, almost three thousand former ELAS members and political organizers were sent before firing squads.* The decision to evacuate the rural areas, and thus cut off reinforcements and supplies, was another measure undertaken by Papagos in order to weaken the Democratic Army. In addition the United States supplied the government forces with an assortment of weapons: rocket launchers, bombs, napalm, and "Hell-Diver" aircraft. American officers served as advisers to both military and civilian sectors; all plans for major operations and political decisions had to be studied and approved by them.** The Democratic Army made two attempts to negotiate peace. But again U.S. threats to cut off foreign aid, and the promise to support the war until the insurgents were crushed, led the government to refuse to negotiate anything less than unconditional surrender. However, the failure of the Varkiza Agreement had served the Democratic Army well, if only in making it clear what "unconditional surrender" meant. It rejected the government's terms and prepared to fight to the end.

Two other important events took place at that point which accelerated the end of the civil war. First, the leadership of the KKE decided, inexplicably, to abandon its highly effective guerrilla warfare in favor of regular army tactics – obviously an unwise decision considering the lack of supplies and manpower. Second, Yugoslavia, the only Balkan country which had given some support to the Democratic army, pressured by both America and Russia, closed its borders. One fourth of the Democratic Army, at that time inside Yugoslavia, was cut off and not allowed to join the fighting. A last attempt to negotiate a peace was again answered by the unacceptable "unconditional surrender."

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* Iatrides, in *Greece in the 1940s*, p. 138.

** Ibid., p. 215.

During July and August 1949, the remaining forces of the Democratic Army fought their last battles in the Grammos and Vitsi mountains of the north. After they were overwhelmed by vastly superior forces and massive airstrikes, about three thousand survivors managed to escape into Albania. The rest were killed or captured.

WOMEN WARIORS

NUYEN TI SOY

She's walking all alone in the jungle
a machete in one hand
to cut down branches
and startle away poisonous snakes–
in the other, her gun. Between her breasts
grenades.
She's come to set traps far away from her comrades.
She's become a beast in the jungle
She's weaving traps with slender fingers
that also know how to embroider lotus flowers
and birds-of-paradise.
Her slenderness, her frail strength, know the fear
of formidable men armed to the teeth with the arts of war
She knows the whole jungle, step-by-step–
her brothers had planned to make a farm there
She's stepping along the rice paddies, she's hiding
she's stalking, she's crawling in the mud of the rice paddies–
her hands hold her gun up, dry
her white teeth hold her braid, clean
and deep in her heart
she holds her death*

– Victoria Theodorou, form *Picnic*

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* *Greek Women Poets*, p. 14.

THE JOURNALS

And so, for me to meet this fate, no grief.
But if I left that corpse, my mother's son,
dead and unburied I'd have cause to grieve
as now I grieve not.
And if you think my acts are foolishness
the foolishness may be in the fool's eye.

—Sophocles, *Antigone*

PROLOGUE

Twenty-five years ago a handful of women – prisoners on the island of Trikeri – met and decided to write an account of their wanderings through the various islands and reformatory camps of their exile. They decided that what they had experienced, what they were still to experience, must not be forgotten; it was their responsibility to be the keepers of history as they themselves had lived it. In secret, in constant fear of being discovered, each one of them wrote an account of her own particular hell, hiding the manuscript inside the hollow of a tree or in a hole in the ground.

After they had left Trikeri, their desire to reconstruct their lives pushed their sense of duty to history into the background. The notebooks remained buried in the fields of Trikeri. Two copies had been smuggled out of Greece, but no one knew their whereabouts.

In 1972 friends, and colleagues, and fellow exiles organized a picnic-pilgrimage to Trikeri. I went with them, hoping to find traces of our life there, to remember and to write; hoping to find our notebooks buried in the olive grove near St. George's chapel by the well. But not a trace remained. The little island had been made into a haven for picnickers.

A year later Rosa Imvrioti, one of the leaders during our years of exile, brought me the nine lost notebooks. She had kept them in safety during the difficult times of oppression and persecution that followed our release from the camps.

For her sake, for the sake of all the women – comrades in exile – for the sake of remembering, I devoted the next three years to organizing, copying, and publishing these journals. I changed nothing, corrected nothing – we were not writing literature in those days. The journals speak in the language of the women who dared to say no. Their defiance, their refusal to be broken and humiliated, to submit to the will of political and army thugs, was not sustained only by ideology and political idealism; it was based on a belief in their own integrity and independence as human beings.

Victoria Theodorou
Athens 1976

From *Picnic*:

Women disdainful, uncaring
bridegrooms waiting
urging and threatening
biting on the ring of their fate
the winds scatter their desire
the women are drunk on the wild honey of solitude

. . . .

Slender, unrepenting women
harvesting shells by the sea
Irma, Aliki, Athena, Louisa
the unsubdued, the dreamers

. . . .

Renoula, Popi, Titika, Melpo
their names – singing birds
morning glories and night flowers
a cruel god turned them into into dark, grim masks
dressed them in coarse cloth
tents of khaki, olive trees of khaki
sea of khaki and sky of khaki
not a single flower left
a blood-red ribbon for their wild hair*

—Victoria Theodorou, from *Picnic*

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* *Greek Women Poets,* pp. 8, 9, 11.

WHITE TERROR

Evanghelia Fotaki

> *How am I to sing*
> *the voice you loved now knifed*
> *my hair in this sublunar wake*
> *branches of despair my arms*
> *square slices the darkness beyond the iron bars*
> —Marina, *State of Siege*

After our leaders signed the Varkiza Agreement and we were disarmed, chaos reigned. The prisons were full. The government enacted new laws every day to make it easier to send thousands to their death. There was no conscience, no sense of moral limits. Courts-martial worked overtime, and the dry echo of gunshots from the firing squads filled us with fear and anger at dawn. We were numb with terror; we never knew what the next moment would bring. When we left our homes in the morning we didn't expect to return in the evening. When we went to bed at night, we didn't know whether morning would find us still there. Every day there were new arrests, new murders, and new reasons for them.

One could be arrested for anything at all — for looking a policemen in the face or for not looking at him, for putting the left foot forward when one stepped out the door. Men and women were rounded up everywhere;

doors were broken down in the middle of the night or early at dawn; people thrown half asleep out of their beds into dungeons; children, looking on, were suddenly orphaned, unable to grasp the reason for this terror; old people, settled at their hearths to wait peacefully for death, were thrown like bundles inside barbed-wire cages; firing squads killed in the name of justice, police officers tortured in the name of patriotism, gangs spread panic in the name of law and order, secret agents roamed the countryside discovering "antinationally-minded" citizens, war criminals, collaborators, and thugs, like blood-hounds, tracked people down everywhere – their testimony was enough to put anyone behind prison walls forever: Bodies swinging from the branches of trees became a common sight in village squares throughout Greece. In Soufli prison guards used the severed heads of partisans to play soccer. When their game was over, they lined up the heads on the prison windowsills and called the mothers of the murdered men and women to come and identify their children.

Prisons were full of people from all walks of life: mothers with babies in their arms, factory workers, teachers, doctors, students, boys and girls who had not yet tasted life. All were guilty of the same crime – belief in freedom of thought – all were tortured, humiliated, broken, made to sign the Declaration of Repentance. Murders, beatings, attacks of all kinds were the rule. Today one village, tomorrow another. Women were tortured, raped, murdered.

To save themselves, many left their children with their mothers, shut up their homes, took a gun if they could get one, and went to the mountains. Those who stayed behind suffered years of imprisonment and exile, their lot was beatings, disease, and death.

The first battle between the newly formed Democratic Army and the government forces was fought outside Soufli in June 1946. The government retaliated as the Germans used to do, by burning down the village and shooting 36 citizens at random – old men, pregnant women, children.

Midnight, August 21, 1946: In Doliana, Arkadia, Katchareas' gang surrounded the house of the priest, broke down the door, and asked for his daughter Kassiani "for interrogation."

"Tell your chief to come interrogate me tomorrow – I won't go away," she told them. Her arrogance drove the gang wild. They dragged her out of the house and took her into a ravine. Her mother and her sister, who tried to follow, were tied together to an olive tree. In the ravine the gang cut Kassiani's hair, tore off her clothes, and with the butts of their guns beat her on the head, breasts, and belly.

Her sister found her, on her hands and knees, trying to drag herself up a hillside.

"Stop crying and help me to our house before they return. I was only beaten, not dishonored," were Kassiani's last words.

Cleo Delivoria was gunned down in the streets of Tripoli. "They shot me with guns you gave them," was the only thing she said to the British commander who questioned her in the hospital before she died.

Night, August 27, 1946: They took Evgenia Papadatou and her mother. The two women were taken to a bridge outside the village and were forced to watch the torture of other women. Then they started on Evgenia. A shepherd found them in the morning – the old woman laughing madly next to the disfigured corpse of her daughter.

The same month they took Tasia Skoufi. She was beaten, disfigured, and scalped with a hatchet used for pruning the vineyards.

Sixty-eight were court-martialed in Naousa. All were found guilty of "antinational acts." After being sentenced, they were put into a cistern waist-deep in water, and hoses were turned on them. From barrels placed overhead, water dripped slowly on their heads until they lost consciousness.

Sotiria Hatzilazaridou was beaten and tortured with *falanga** and water. Elli Tadopoulou and Dora Sidirou were tortured with falanga for a week. Dora's head was pressed with a crownlike iron vise. As a result she was pronounced insane by the prison doctor.

Maria Triandafilou was taken from her home in Komotini. At the police station her feet and hands were tied together behind her back and she was thrown into a cistern filled with water and ice. Each hour she was taken out of the icy water and beaten until blood oozed from every pore in her body. Three days later she was sentenced by military court to life imprisonment.

"What my eyes have seen, my lips cannot speak. The thin voice of thirteen-year-old Mercene Lianopoulou echoed down the prison corridor. She had been pronounced insane after prolonged beatings and solitary confinement.

Outside Heraklion, Crete, in the labyrinthine cellar of a large house surrounded by acres of orange groves and barbed-wire fences, were located the infamous stables of

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* Beating the soles of the feet with iron rods.

Boutava. No one ever came out of there alive without the humiliation of signing the Declaration of Repentance.

In Boutava the folklorist Maria Liadaki and her friend Maria Dranaki were tortured in the fall of 1947. They had both just been released from a concentration camp on a special furlough and were returning to Crete. They disappeared as soon as they disembarked at Heraklion. All efforts to locate them by relatives were fruitless.

Two years later the skeletons of two women were found inside a cave. Every bone in their bodies had been broken, and their severed heads were placed in the crooks of their arms.

The infamous "guest room" of the Athens police station on Bouboulina Street, behind the National Museum, was a windowless hole. Between fifty and sixty persons were always awaiting judgment there, spending weeks, even months, amid garbage and excrement.

Katina, a beautiful, strong-looking woman, was interrogated for 36 hours. For a week she had sat in silence, awaiting her turn. She seemed to have made her decision. When they threw her back into the "guest room," blood ran in a torrent from her womb. She died in our arms three days later.

Evanghelia Armenaki and Evanghelia Fotiadou, both EPON members and organizers of Child Centers, were arrested in February 1948. There were no charges against them, but they were tried and sentenced to death, to intimidate us. Their two-month-long interrogation was conducted by "Butcher Karakis." Both women cried out with relief when they heard their sentence. Their last words, shouted to a group of fieldworkers from the truck on their way to execution, were: "We are going to death, but you hold fast to life. Take back our blood some day."

On June 12, 1948, Magdalene Saize and Efthimia Diakou were taken from their homes for interrogation. They were beaten until they lost consciousness. Efthimia was thrown into a dry well, and Magdalene was left half-naked in a corner of the police station cafeteria, to suffer the insults of any one who happened to pass by.

Popula Petalioti was arrested in July 1948. She was squeezed inside a closet one foot square, out of which she was dragged twenty four hours later and taken into a room filled with an array of instruments of torture: iron vises, huge pincers, whips of various types, and other tools, whose use defied the imagination. For hours on end she was bombarded with questions and intimidated with detailed descriptions of the torture each instrument was capable of inflicting.

Her interrogators, furious with her stubborness, handed her over to masked policemen, who stripped her and put her through the terrible torture of "penicillin." This "treatment" was considered effective for even the most difficult cases of "anti-national thinking." Her arms and legs were covered with bracelets of fine wire linked by long iron rods. Her feet and hands were then tied together behind her back and the bracelets tightened until both wire and iron rods dug into her flesh. A doctor revived Popoula each time she lost consciousness, and the torture continued until her whole body was an open wound.

A few weeks later she was court-martialed and sentenced to life imprisonment.

In August 1949 the following women were taken from the Trikeri camp: Maria Falia, Kate Petridou, Maria Voulgaroktonou, Nina Nicolaidou, Stasa Sapouna, and Athena Rizou. They were brought to the dreaded Volos detention center, where they were tortured with falanga until the doctor present said that they would die if the rod were to touch one more time their torn and swollen feet.

Physical brutality and tormenting uncertainty about what would happen tomorrow caused many women to sign the Declaration of Repentance. A number of those who held out were quickly court-martialed and sentenced to imprisonment or death on the basis of whatever evidence could be found, no matter how flimsy. The rest were thrown into uninhabitable islands, where they lived for years under inhuman conditions, deprived of everything necessary for survival above the animal level in order to break their wills and to degrade them.

THE TRIKERI JOURNAL

Victoria Theodorou

> *Far, very far, I hear life*
> *high, very high hang the lights*
> *the lights they stole from us*
> *lights from the city they stole from us*
> *and the memory of the last sunset when the hills*
> *were still our hills*
> *far, very far you exist, you must exist*
>
> —"Marina" *State of Siege*

Trikeri is a tiny, virtually deserted island at the foot of Mount Pelion, immediately to the north of Pagasitikon Bay in the north of Greece. Cut off from the rest of the country by the surrounding mountain ranges of Rumeli to the west, the Evia mountains to the south, and Pelion to the east, it was considered an excellent site for the establishment of a concentration camp for political prisoners.

One can walk around Trikeri in a matter of three hours — a pleasant stroll in the summer, along paths shaded by evergreens and olive trees. But in the winter the little island is constantly beaten by icy winds, rain, and snow.

A monastery was built in 1841 on the highest point of the island. The church, dedicated to the Assumption of the Holy Virgin, stands in the middle of the courtyard. Its lovely reredos was restored by an exiled artist, who was later executed nearby. The ground floor and upper cells, built around the courtyard, are connected by a roofed, wooden porch, which in summer was used as a living space by the women exiled there. The ground floor cells, always dark and moldy, with half-rotten floorboards and no doors or windowpanes, were used for storage, bathhouses, and stables.

The sea surrounds Trikeri like a moat, and the mountains form a naturally impassable wall. Because of this isolation and inaccessibility, it was used during the Balkan wars as a camp for prisoners of war, without additional fortification. When in 1947 it was chosen as an ideal site for a camp for women political prisoners, it was deemed necessary to fortify it further, with even harsher security than that offered by nature. Guards, armed with machine guns, barbed-wire fences were installed in double and triple rows around all the areas used by the women, and naval vessels were positioned along the entire shoreline. Not a soul could approach Trikeri except policemen, the sailors who brought in supplies, and public speakers, whose job was to instruct the prisoners on how to "repent" and return to the "bosom of Greece." In spite of all the security measures, the women were forbidden to go outside the barbed-wire cages even to look for mushrooms and wild vegetables in the fields and olive groves nearby, or to go to the shore to swim and bathe their sore bodies. The eyes of the guards were constantly on them. Lights and fires were strictly forbidden for fear the women might flash signals to guerrillas in the mainland.

Early in the summer of 1945, almost immediately after the end of the war, the persecution of the left-wing resistance movement started. The government began to arrest men and women who had played an active part in the resistance against the Germans. If they had escaped to the mountains or to the Balkan countries, their families were arrested and confined on the island of Trikeri. In 1949, when the men were relocated at the Makronisos camp, Trikeri became exclusively a women's camp.

The first women exiled there were relatives — mothers, grandmothers, wives and children — of members of EAM-ELAS, and the Democratic Army. Most of these women came from villages in the north of Greece. Many of them had small children and had brought nothing more than the clothes on their backs. The government called these arrests "a preventative measure". Their numbers were always fluctuating because almost daily many would sign the Declaration of Repentance and leave, and new ones would arrive. From 1947 to 1949, these were the only women on Trikeri, and they were confined within the area of the monastery. But by September 1949, new arrivals (guerrillas and political activists) from the concentration camps of Chios, Macedonia, Rumeli, and Thessaly increased their number to 4,700.

Outside the monastery, only a few yards from the main gate, there was a small cemetery for those who died at Trikeri — a small, square plot, always with some freshly dug graves, which with the first rains would become green with clover and bright with wild flowers. The first men exiled there planted an oleander and marked the place with a large cross carved from olive wood.

The tents were a few steps away from the cemetery. On sunny days the children would play hide and seek there, hiding in the thick foliage of the blooming oleander behind the cross. The knowledge that yellow fever or T.B. or even a simple cold could put any of them under the salty earth had given them such familiarity with death that this cemetery, a place that under ordinary circumstances they would have shunned, held no special fear for them. It was simply a spot where they were allowed to run and shout away from the guards and the sad faces of their mothers.

On April 4, 1949, three cargo ships carrying 1,200 women and children left the concentration camp of Chios for Trikeri. The ships were painted black on the outside, and their interior was black with soot.

At nightfall a ferocious storm developed. The captain wanted to return to port, but the officers pressed him to continue the journey. The ship battled huge waves across the Aegean and almost lost the struggle. We lived through the first night of terror packed inside suffocatingly narrow sooty cabins, fearing that after having survived two wars we would perish at sea. All night long we were tossed about, knocking against each other like drunks. Many had lost consciousness and lay on the floor in puddles of blood, vomit, and excrement from the overflowing toilets. Others lamented and pulled their hair, hugging their frightened children to their breasts. Only Kate Memeli and Tila were on their feet, trying to take care of us and comfort the children.

By the next evening, as we approached the shores of Pelion, the storm calmed down somewhat, and we were able to discern Trikeri on the horizon, green with olive groves and pine forests. Among the olive groves stretching to the shore were scattered small grey houses. Half a dozen fishing boats were moored at the small pier.

Our official destination was the campsite on the north shore of the island, but the officers in charge ordered the captain to dock two miles away, giving us the additonal burden of carrying our bundles, the children, and the stretchers with the sick up a steep and thorny path, which that day we named Golgotha.

The camp, originally occupied by men, was located on the top of the hill beyond the olive groves and was enclosed by rows of barbed wire. We stopped for a short break under the shade of the olive trees and ate our few ounces of "dry nourishment" — half a piece of salty whitefish — and drank a mouthful of brackish, lukewarm water. Our future home, a barbed-wire enclosure, was entirely exposed to the elements, without a single tree in sight.

The tents we found within this cage were tilted over, many had neither poles nor ropes. They were low and narrow, with room enough for only one person to squat or lie down. Inside some of them there were makeshift fireplaces and small stoves made from tin cans.

We gazed in terror at the desolation on the top of the bare hill, stark witness to man's struggle with the sea and sky. We began to realize how much more difficult survival would be in this desert, without even the comforting thought of being near the sympathetic and compassionate people of Chios. Our one hope was that they would keep us here only through the fall, that they would not let women, who lacked men's strength and expertise, face the winter isolated in a place as terrible as this.

For weeks we slept on the ground without fires or blankets, exposed to the night damp and surrounded by pounding waves and the cries of owls. Finally we were divided into three groups and placed within separate barbed-wire cages. In spite of everything, spring had filled our bodies with strength and our hearts with joy, and we began to repair and set up the small tents, thankful to be out of the dark, stinking cells of our prisons. To avoid having to crawl in and out of the tents, some of us (using only our hands and fingernails for tools) built a five-foot wall, and over it we tied the canvas. We wondered why the men who had lived there before us had not thought of doing that. The first summer storms gave us the answer by bringing our hard work down in heaps of bricks and mud. But we were young, the sun was warm and bright, and we would not give up trying. We built over and over, countless times, until we found the way. In the end our huts stood impregnable against the fury of the storm.

The officers who escorted us from Chios were brutally hostile. They had always hated our resistance, our indifference to their authority, our refusal to comply with their demands and sign the Declaration of Repentance. At Trikeri they found new ways of tormenting us. To the isolation, hunger, and thirst indigenous to the place, they added the difficult task of loading and unloading the caiques and carrying the supplies up the rock-and thorn-filled path to warehouses located high above the camp.

To humiliate us further, they told the guards that we were convicted whores and murderesses. The guards took for granted that we would be easy prey to their lusts. When they encountered our scornful response and realized that we were political prisoners, they turned against us with redoubled fury, punishing us for scorning their sexual advances as well as for resisting their pressure to succumb politically. They never lost an opportunity to beat us and lock us for days on end in the darkest hole of the monastery cellar without food or water, or to restrict our movements around the camp in every possible way.

The more they tried to fence us in, the more we struggled to break through. We crawled under the barbed wire to visit and care for the sick. When the fields inside the fence were littered with garbage and excrement and the water in the camp became polluted, we pushed the barbed wire aside. We dug latrines far from the tents and bathed in clean water; finally we uprooted the fence blocking the path to the wells so we no longer had to pass by the guardhouse and listen to the guards' mocking insults. The more they oppressed us, the more they restricted us, the greater grew our anger and defiance. Risking the few individual privileges they allowed us for good behavior, we pushed unrelentingly to make living conditions for the group more tolerable. We always paid dearly as individuals for every success we had as a group: with solitary confinement, beatings, and additional personal restrictions. Even the children could not move about freely in the fields or on the beaches. Fearing that they might be used as messengers, the guards put them under the same restrictions as the adults. Once, when five-year-old Roula crawled under the fence to play with her friends in the next cage, she was put in solitary confinement for insubordination.

From the meager cash allowance the government granted us, the Camp Command deducted one quarter as fees for loading and unloading the caiques and for carrying our supplies from the pier to the warehouse – a job we ourselves were forced to do for nothing.

The food was always inadequate and bad: beans, potatoes, pasta, and, every Sunday, spoiled meat. We never had fish and very seldom vegetables and fruit, even though the fields of nearby Pelion brought in an abundant harvest and the sea surrounding Trikeri was full of fish. The bread was black, coarse and half-baked. Our breakfast consisted of a cup of weak, lukewarm tea with no sugar, olives, and heavily salted sardines.

Women and children sick with dysentery – especially common in the summer – were not allowed special food. Unable to swallow the disgusting beans floating in lard, they barely survived on the tea we made from herbs we picked on the mountainsides.

When in the spring of 1949 we came to Trikeri, we found three wells equipped with pumps, opened in 1947 by the first men exiled here, who had bought the pipes and pumps with their own funds. We had no access to the well near the kitchen; it was used exclusively for the cooking needs of the officers. A few days after we arrived, and for no reason at all, the well in the village was also put off limits for us, leaving only one well to supply us with drinking water. Two other wells had neither pumps nor covers, and their murky water, full of rotting leaves, was good only for washing. But at least we had some water, and using it with care, we managed to meet our needs. But by May, when 2,500 more women arrived, the wells would be empty by noon. In August 1949, when our numbers reached 5,000, the wells dried up completely, and the pumps broke down beyond repair.

We would get up before dawn and glide like ghosts to the walls, hoping to be first in line. But no matter how early it was, we always found a long line of pale, half-mad women waiting day and night for the world's most precious treasure – water. Sleepless and hungry, we would forgo even the few moments of peace allowed us, even the rare opportunities to be alone, for a pitcher of water.

Once during an especially hot, dry summer, a cargo ship came to Trikeri bringing new officers. The sailors saw us standing for hours in the scorching heat near the dry wells, and brought out a barrel of lukewarm water smelling of chlorine and rust. The news traveled like lightning through the camp, and within minutes the shore was swarming with women carrying empty water jugs. Those who were first to drink the sailors' gift recoiled with disgust from its brackish, tepid taste. But it was water, after all, and forgetting our squeamishness, we drank our fill and blessed the sailors.

They used every means to isolate us from the world. They forbade us to listen to the radio or read any political news whatsoever. They spread rumors that treason and defeatism were rampant in the ranks of the Democratic Army. Once in a while a newspaper would circulate in this total isolation. Passing from hand to hand, it would either lift our spirits and give us courage or, if the news was bad, crush us and plunge us into utter dispair.

Our correspondence – the only means of communication never entirely taken from us – was less than minimal. Outgoing mail consisted of ten heavily censored lines per week, written on a postcard. We were allowed only to ask news of our family's health, to inform them that our own health was nothing less than perfect, and to say that all our needs were well provided for. We were not allowed to ask our relatives to send medicine, food, candles, clothes, books, or paper – all of which we sorely needed.

Even as meager as our correspondence was, it was still too much for the one censor provided by the Command. He solved the problem by burning all excess mail: The fires burned brightest during the Christmas and Easter holidays. It was worse with incoming mail, which was delivered after long delay unless it contained news of death. Then it was promptly and gleefully delivered by one of the officers, who would read aloud to us the names of our people killed in action or of our executed relatives and friends.

The caique brought packages from our relatives once a week. With what joy and painful expectation we'd run to the harbor, longing to touch those packages as if they were the hands of our loved ones. The packages had been inspected in every police station along the way. But the guards would again open them, scatter everything on the ground, and tear the boxes, especially the newspapers wrapped around the various items, making certain that not a single headline was left intact. They kept all reading materials, particularly educational and literary. Only innocuous magazines and second-rate novels would be given to us, and even those weeks later.

These packages and the few censored lines were for months at a time our only communication with the outside world: the world whose lights we could see glinting on the horizon, a few miles beyond Trikeri; whose heartbeat would reach us from the coast of the mainland across the bay when the night was very still. And we would watch and listen as if to signals from another planet light years away.

An important means of communication, which really kept us in touch with the outside world, was the new prisoners who occassionally arrived at Trikeri. From them we'd hear the bleak news of 1949 – news of persecution, terror, and death, as well as tales of unbelievable heroism.

The sound of the caique's engine could be heard long before it entered the harbor. It always came at noon, when the sun scorched even the rocks, when we were most in need of a little rest. In that shimmering, white heat we would run downhill, our scarves and straw hats over our heads for protection from the sun's brutal rays, stopping for only a moment's rest under the shade of olive trees or to cool our foreheads with sea water in a desperate attempt to collect and preserve our strength before the enormous labor of unloading and carrying the supplies.

The strongest would jump inside the ship and drag out sacks, barrels, baskets, hardware – hundreds of pounds of food and building supplies, which they would roll down a narrow plank to the pier, holding their breath for fear of dropping them into the sea. Other women, waiting on the pier, would grab the supplies and drag them to the beach, and then others would load them onto their backs and carry them uphill to the warehouses. We would carry sacks weighing 200 pounds – food for four to five hundred souls.

The barrels, too heavy to carry on our backs, we would roll up the path, concentrating every ounce of strength and attention on preventing them from rolling back to the sea and crushing us on their downhill plunge.

As soon as we'd finish unloading the barrels, we would start on the hundreds of loaves of bread. To make this task easier, we formed a line and passed the loaves hand to hand from the beach all the way to the warehouse. But even then, the task usually took at least two hours.

When, late in the afternoon, we would finally finish, the guards did not allow us to wash the dust and perspiration from our exhausted bodies in the cool sea. We had to go back to our cages as we were, filthy and tired.

Once a week a cargo ship brought firewood from the forests of Evia and Pelion. The job of unloading it was even more difficult than that of unloading the food supplies. Tons of firewood had to be lifted out of the ship's hold and loaded into rowboats, which in turn had to be unloaded onto the beach. There we would split the huge logs and, under the relentless supervision of the guards, carry them to the kitchens and stack them in neat piles. Wishing to end the terrible task as soon as possible, we worked with unbelievable speed. Not allowed to help, the men from the ship stared at us with perplexity and pity wondering at our stubbornness.

Often the wood was black from forest fires. The soot would blacken our sweaty faces, arms, and legs; only the whites of our eyes would stand out, bloodshot and fierce.

Sometimes they wouldn't let us carry the sacks of cement, bricks, and other building materials up the hill, saying that they would be carried up by mules the next day. But soon we learned to dread this sort of kindness. Around midnight we'd be awakened by nightmarish shouting and whistling, and the guards would order us to go to the beach at once and carry whatever was left there on our backs. On moonless nights this task was almost impossible. Groping our way in the darkness, bent double under our heavy burdens, we would stumble over sharp rocks, gouge our legs on barbed wire, and fall into ditches.

We were a strange breed of convicts, with our long hair in braids, our torn skirts and bare feet, our palms blistered, our hunched and stiff bodies in torn and dirty rags, and our faces grooved with deep wrinkles. But in our hearts we always struggled in spite of the terror, the heavy loads, the steep mountain paths — always struggled not to give up, not to compromise, to keep going. We'd march to their whistles, run to their shouts, stand in line, load, unload, fetch and carry. But we'd always resist, working to the point of exhaustion only on tasks that had to do with our own lives: building, cleaning up, chopping and splitting wood, working in the kitchens. No matter how severe the punishment, we would never do anything for the guards. At first they were furious and put us in solitary confinement, threatening us with court-martial for insubordination, but eventually they gave up and carried their own supplies.

By the summer of 1949 there were five thousand women on the island, and the Camp Command had not yet built a single toilet. We decided that if we didn't want to sink to the level of animals, we'd have to take as much responsibility as possible for our daily life.

With picks and shovels we stole from headquarters, and with sharp stones, we dug holes and made several latrines in the surrounding fields and on the beach. Every Saturday we had a general clean-up of the camp and grounds. We'd fill the latrines with sand and lime and dig new ones. But no matter what we did for sanitation, we could not beat the flies. They'd come like clouds from the excrement and settle in our tents, on our food, on our utensils. All our efforts for hygiene came to very little as well. Without enough water, we couldn't even wash ourselves from the sweat and dust after a hard day's labor. We had to bathe and wash our clothes and dishes in the polluted water within the barbed-wire fence, and we were thankful when the tide came and cleaned up the accumulated scum. Finally, desperation drove us to tear down the fence barring us from the clean beaches. Every day it was clear that we had no alternative but to push and resist, to do anything we could to change the squalor in which they had condemned us to live and to die.

The wells for kitchen use would dry up in the summer. This made the preparation of meals as difficult a task as any. To preserve the little water there was, we cooked pasta and potatoes in sea water. Of course, a few hours after we ate, our thirst would reach unimaginable proportions, and our need for drinking water would be greater than ever before.

The kitchen had been built by the men long ago, and it was by now a ramshackle stall with broken-down fireplaces and holes in the roof. The wind scattered the smoke and blinded the cooks. When it rained everything was flooded: the fires went out, and the soup in the cauldrons was covered with soot; the wood was soaked, and it would take hours for the fires to start. There was nothing to eat until after midnight – a terrible thing for the children, who never stopped crying from hunger pains, begging us for something to eat. In their struggle with smoke and rain, the cooks were blistered and scorched by hot steam. Their arms, legs, and faces were always bandaged, and their eyes always red and watery from smoke. Later we managed to repair the kitchens with pieces of wood, bricks, and cardboard.

In May 1949, Trikeri was green and full of flowers. It was almost the end of the rainy season. We were getting used to our tents and had even begun to love them. But the desolation and isolation were growing more intense. The few letters we occasionally received were our only source of news. And the news they brought was bleak – heavy casualties, executions, arrests, defeats. Every time the mail was delivered, dirges and weeping resounded throughout the camp. Each of us lived in terror of what the next boat might bring.

News of death was a daily event for the Third Company, which consisted mostly of families of partisans. Some of the women would shout and wail, beat their breasts, tear their hair, and refuse food and drink until they'd collapse in a corner, almost dead themselves. Others held back their grief as something very precious, a secret source of courage. They'd sit outside their tents and gaze towards the mountains of Pelion, listening to the echoes of the last gunshots of the Democratic Army, whispering dirges and wiping their tears, taking care not to spread their grief.

In our company, the first response to the executions was anger. Some of us would hold onto this anger, feed it, let it grow boundless, get stronger through it. Others would collapse under the terrible burden of their grief, become depressed and withdrawn and would think of suicide. Dark and silent, they'd sit under the olive trees and beneath the cliffs, thinking only of the dead, the orphans, the razed homes, the abandoned fields.

By the summer of 1949 the population of the two camps included 235 children – from infants to twelve-year-olds – whose presence was never officially acknowledged. This meant that they were never counted as individual prisoners and consequently were never given any rations of food, soap, or clothing. For many of the children the camp was the only world they had ever known. They'd roam in the fields and along the cliffs – pale, and hungry, and frightened, in search of something new, something other than the misery that surrounded them. Many times they'd stumble and fall into ditches or down the cliffs, and we'd find them covered with blood and dirt, crying in a quiet, hopeless way, always with that terrible look of hunger in their eyes.

The Greek Red Cross refused to provide anything for the children of left-wing parents. When the first rains came, there were no warm clothes or decent shoes for them. Only once the Red Cross sent a few boxes with sugar, cereals, and powdered milk. The children ate pudding for about twenty days. Soon we realized that they had also other needs as important as food and clothing, needs that only we could provide. They needed to be prevented from roaming the wilderness; they needed to be taught how to read and write, how to play and live like children.

The children needed a Child Center; we decided to build one. On a plateau, some distance from the camp, we cleared a large area under the shade of olive trees and spread sand and pebbles over it. Then we collected everything that could be considered a toy and made other things ourselves. Whatever else was lacking was provided by the children's imagination. Before long, the Child Center was ready, and the children spent many happy hours in the shade of the olive grove, far from the heat and the noise of the camp.

From 8 a.m. till noon the children learned to read and write; they sang songs, played games, danced, and did gymnastics. One Sunday we went to the plateau to watch their performance of Little Red Riding Hood. We laughed and cried with happiness to see that the terror had left their eyes and that they had again become children. The Child Center was in operation till fall, when heavy rains and cold forced us to dismantle it.

Most of the older women in the camp were *Andartomanes** who had sons, daughters, or even grandchildren in the Democratic Army. They had been imprisoned because they refused to renounce them and their struggle. Many lived with their daughters-in-law and small grandchildren in the Second and Third Companies at the monastery. They endured cold and hunger with courage and patience and were a source of strength and inspiration for us. Among them were famous weavers, great storytellers, and singers. Many nights we'd sit outside the tents, tell stories, and sing or lament together..

Dysentery, caused by the flies, the spoiled meat, and the polluted water, was a serious health hazard in the camp. The Camp Command consistently ignored our pleas that the infected areas be sprayed, and our own efforts to check the disease were futile. For months the children would suffer without medicine. The disease reached its peak during the summer, then disappeared in late fall of its own accord, leaving small children and very old women chronically ill. The Camp Command would not move the sick to a real hospital on the mainland unless they were near death. A woman suffering from typhus died on the caique – too late – on her way to the city of Volos.

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* Mothers of partisans.

Staphylococcus and scabies tormented many, especially young women and children. Their bodies and faces were covered with scabs, and red blotches appeared on their hands because of malnutrition. Many suffered from sore eyes and, unable to endure the light, would crouch in dark corners for days. Clouds of flies would go from sore to sore, then land on our food and cooking utensils.

Because the symptoms of these diseases were visible, we could at least do something for their victims. But there was also the terrible menace of T.B., which, hidden deep inside our lungs, afflicted many among us. When women began to spit blood, they knew that they could never be cured under the conditions in the camp. The scorching summer heat and the piercing fall and winter dampness would aggravate their condition. Food was so bad that even minimal nourishment was out of the question; and nothing was done to isolate the sick from the healthy.

We had our first medical checkup after we had been relocated to the Makronisos concentration camp in 1950. Only then were loss of weight, lack of appetite, and chronic fever finally diagnosed as symptoms of T.B. But without treatment, the examination and chest X-rays did no good.

Other prevalent health problems systematically ignored by the camp doctors were stomach ulcers, liver disease, rheumatism, yellow fever, depression, and phobia. Some suffered painful menstruation many times each month, whereas for others it stopped altogether. But pain relieved none but the dying from hard labor.

We tried to combat disease by organizing our own medical center. We repaired one of the huts, patched the holes in the roof and walls, scrubbed the floor, whitewashed it inside and out, built large examination tables, and staffed it with doctors and nurses from our own ranks. Side by side with the nurses, Doctors Magdalene Alexiou and Katerina Kouskou struggled day and night in a desperate attempt to alleviate pain and loneliness. They lacked even the most essential medical supplies – sterilized bandages, tetanus serum, or ointment to soothe the terrible itching from staphylococcus and scabies. Our doctors had to beg the army doctor for medicine and for authorization to move the seriously ill to mainland hospitals. He kept all medicines under lock and key, and we were forced to pay dearly out of our meager stipends to get even an aspirin – we were the enemy, undeserving of special care. It was up to us to survive.

During our whole time at Trikeri, only a dozen women were sent to outside hospitals. They were advanced cases of T.B., acute rheumatism, spinal disease, bleeding ulcer, meningitis, and chronic heart trouble.

In addition to the medical center, we organized a dental center, also staffed by our own dentists. The Camp Command was more cooperative with the dentists because they gave dental care to officers, guards, and enlisted men as well.

Sergeant Patzaras, whom we had nicknamed *Haropouli,** came almost daily that summer with news of executions, betrayal, and defeat, and with lists of names of women to be taken to the mainland for trial. We knew well that these "trials" meant death or life imprisonment – no one was ever brought to trial unless conviction was certain. We would stay up all night long before the departure of the condemned, singing and talking together; we'd bring them gifts: a scarf, a hair ribbon, preserves, money; wash and comb their hair; make plans for the future. When the caique came we'd march together to the harbor, keeping our spirits up by singing all the way down the path and until the caique had disappeared.

But many times there would be no warning. The guards would burst into our tents in the middle of the night and push and kick the women whose names were on the list, not giving them time to gather their things, comb their hair, or say goodbye to their friends. The following were sentenced to death that summer and fall: Amalia Daperogla, Nina Nikolaidou, Maria Falia, Kate Petridou, Lambrini Kaplani, Eleni Mini, and Liza Kottou. (Many others were given life sentences.)

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* Bird of Death.

One of our major concerns was to organize the work so as to allow us some of the leisure we needed to keep our morale up. Our first priority was to free the old, the sick, and the children from labor. This we achieved after a very long and difficult struggle with the Camp Command. Then we formed groups, and to each group we assigned rotating tasks. This type of organization made it possible for us to have three days every week to devote to personal activities: washing and bathing, cleaning tents and grounds, fighting mice and flies, or just sitting alone for a while. Lacking proper fishing gear, we rarely succeeded in catching any fish, and our joy had no bounds when we would succeed, and were able to offer fresh fish to a child or to a sick woman.

We stuffed mattresses and pillows with dry asphodels, and with their long leaves we wove hats, mats, and baskets. We carved spoons and dishes out of olive wood and made wall hangings from driftwood and shells. We decorated our tents with them or gave them to each other as presents on name-days, at Christmas, at Easter, or on any other occasion we could think of as an excuse to celebrate. No matter how we tried, we were never allowed to send those items to the stores in Volos, where they could easily have been sold to provide us with urgently needed funds.

Once the practical aspects of our life were more or less under control, we began to organize a system to make education available to everyone. Middle-aged women who had never held a pencil began to learn to read and write. There were 230 women in the camp who could write only their names and 380 who were entirely illiterate. It was truly wonderful to see with what enthusiasm and patience these women began to learn the alphabet, tracing the letters in the sand because at first we had neither pencils nor paper.

Eighty high school girls, exiled because of their political involvement in EPON, met some of their former teachers at Trikeri and picked up their studies where they had been interrupted. Besides the usual academic subjects, dress design, foreign languages, accounting, shorthand, and sewing were also taught. All subjects were available to everyone. Teachers and students always worked in secret, with books and materials of our own invention. For example, women who were expert in a subject would design small texts, which in turn were carefully copied by others on paper we stole from the Camp Command office.

Liza Kottou and Rosa Imvrioti organized lectures and discussions on art, history, poetry, and folklore. There were many risks in preparing and presenting these talks, and, because of the constant surveillance, attendance could be very dangerous. But we had tasted every form of torture and punishment in their arsenal and we had become immune to fear. We never curbed our efforts to learn and to teach. We gathered in the fields, along the cliffs, inside the tents — wherever we could find a secluded place to take our contraband books and papers, concealing them beneath our mending, knitting, or embroidering.

Dancing and singing were other ways of lightening the burden of exile. The musician Elli Nikolaidou, with the help of other women expert in songs and dances from various parts of Greece and Europe, organized the many talents among us and created the miraculous "Musical Evenings". On those evenings we'd hear folk and love songs from Greece and other European countries — melodic German lieder and exquisite Russian songs and lullabies. We loved the lullabies best and with them soothed the children to sleep.

We gave concerts in the old theater, built by the first men exiled here, and on the plateau where we had built our Child Center. On holy days our dancing would gird the camp in a colorful triple chain. "Blue Danube", a song we all loved, was choreographed and danced by a group of girls dressed in blue and white.

We organized festivals, theatrical performances, musicals, poetry readings, and programs with dances from different countries around the world to celebrate national and religious occasions.

We held basketball and volleyball games on an athletic field we built. One Sunday afternoon we presented a mime about our trip from Chios to Trikeri – how we were packed in the ship's hold, arriving at Trikeri, taking over and repairing the men's camp, struggling with the wind and rain, and the collapsing tents.

The most unforgettable performances were by the Children's Theater. The little creatures, frightened and wild a few weeks before, made us laugh and cry as we watched them act in front of thousands without inhibition.

The Camp Command could not altogether stop us, but it never lost an opportunity to frustrate our plans. The slightest provocation, real or imagined, would be enough for them to call off all preparations for an event. An example of this was our attempt to present "Prometheus Bound", which we had been rehearsing since Chios. The professional actors among us had done the casting and were directing the play. When we came to Trikeri, we continued our efforts until we had finally mastered our parts, made the costumes, and built the scenery. Everything was ready for the performance, the censor had seen the rehearsals and had approved. But on the eve of the big day the play was cancelled. It had been judged subversive. We were never again allowed to perform any of the ancient Greek tragedies or comedies.

At the end of July 1949, there was a change of command at the camp. Under the pretext of taking inventory, officers and policemen for days invaded our areas, dismantled our tents, and broke up our workshops. It took us a week to rebuild the huts, mend and set up the tents again.

The summer of 1949 was particularly hot and dry; even the sea was not cool enough to soothe our scorched faces. The women in the monastery from the mountain villages in the north, where summers are cool, wore heavy woolen clothing and suffered more than any of us from the heat. But they were slowly being released – their husbands, children, and grandchildren were being captured, killed in action, or executed, leaving no reason to detain them longer.

The Minister of Public Order came to speak to us in the fall of 1949. We assembled in the square, thousands of black-scarved women with sweat streaking our grim faces. We stood motionless and impassive while he told us of the total destruction of the Democratic Army and of the futility of resistance; then talked of repentence and forgiveness. The heat and our indifference to his "wise and generous" words so irritated him that he hastened to conclude with a warning of even worse calamities about to befall us if we did not comply with the demands of the nation. But those were still days of hope and belief, and we were impervious to talk of defeat and treason. With an almost religious passion, we believed that the Democratic Army would finally win.

A few days later we heard that three captured partisans had come to Trikeri from the camp at Larissa to speak to us about the defeat of the Democratic Army. The Camp Command thought we would be more likely to believe our own kind: a woman dressed in blue – pretty, fresh-looking, with gold-rimmed eyeglasses – and two young men dressed in brand new suits. It couldn't have been long since they had been wearing the uniform of the Democratic Army.

The woman came over to our tents with an air of casual friendliness, looking for familiar faces. Her name was Eirene. She spotted someone she knew, a fellow student from her university days, and began to tell her of the wisdom of giving up, of returning to her studies, to life. Her classmate listened unmoved by her tone of concern, her tears, her friendly manner.

The officers, realizing that she wasn't going to convince us on a person-to-person basis, ordered her to prepare a speech and summoned us to the monastery courtyard.

Eirene stood on a platform constructed for such occasions and looked at us thoughtfully, shyly. "You live a life of true luxury in your exile," she began, "compared to the unbearable suffering of the partisans who are still fighting." She attempted to justify herself. She had fought hard, she said, and had given all she had to the cause, but when she realized the futility of continuing on the wrong path, she had given up her gun and begged her country's forgiveness. She said that because of her education she had held a post of high responsibility in the Democratic Army, and she knew well what was really happening in the ranks; the selfishness of the leaders, the miserable conditions of the fighting men, their helplessness, their unwillingness to continue. All provisions, she said, came from Balkan countries.

"My boots were from Bulgaria, my gun from Russia, the tins of food I ate from Serbia" – all given as proof that the Democratic Army was an agent of those countries and that its objective was to surrender Greece to them. But throughout her speech Eirene's eyes, behind her gold-rimmed glasses, her timid expression, and her cracked voice pleaded with us not to believe any of it.

The next morning we were again ordered to assemble in the monastery courtyard. The speaker, one of the men who had come with Eirene, was a long-time partisan and left-wing political activist. He had been arrested and confined many times and as many times escaped from various camps and prisons. Captured again a few months ago during a fierce battle, he had been taken to Makronisos and tortured until he finally broke. His face was hairless and wrinkled, his body shrivelled, his expression impassive. But his voice was calm and eloquent. As an old party member he knew names and facts well. He spoke in the manner of a comrade, a brother in arms. But we were not deceived; his words were only jargon to us now. Every time he defiled the name of the Democratic Army, we'd shout, heckle, hiss, and chant "Shame, shame, comrade."

"You, too, will see the light and sign as I signed," he said with a cold laugh.

"No, we are not going to sign; we don't want to fall as low as you have," one of the women shouted back. For a few minutes there was silence, then he laughted again – a cold, black laugh. We realized then that inside that weak, ugly, and miserable body of his lay hidden immense reserves of strength and hate, which were now aimed at us. We did not yet know that this pale, hairless, mocking face would soon be in total control of our fate, invisible but omnipresent.

The sun singed the island. We ran toward our tents, relieved to escape the harangue, singing an improvised mockery of his ugly, hairless face and his weak body. Our skirts formed a river of color, and our scarves billowed in the bright summer afternoon. We were many, almost three thousand. The breeze took our song and flung it against the monastery walls; breaking through the barred window, it grated on Christos' nerves. That day he swore that we would pay dearly for insulting him. We did.

After a few days the three partisans left. Their efforts had brought no results. We were left alone for a while, and we busied ourselves with rehearsals for our Sunday show, a festival devoted to dances and songs from Epiros and skits inspired by the pastoral life there.

At the beginning of September a ship brought us the son of an old politician. He came in a jeep, the first car on the island. A silky, aristocratic type – well-fed, blond, as light-complexioned as though the sun had never touched him. He stood by the monastery gate as we passed, looking us over with a curiosity and rudeness that angered us. With him was a former member of EAM, a young man with a deeply pained expression. He seemed worn out by the lies he was forced to spout and was one of the least convincing speakers we ever had. No matter how hard he tried, he could not hide his shame and despair; we understood him, and we felt sorrow and pain for him. We saw that he had been tortured long and hard. Later he showed some of the women the deep falanga welts on the soles of his feet.

Early fall rains flooded our tents, washed away the basketball field, and filled the Child Center with mud. We started to make preparations for winter. Inside each tent we made a small hearth, and we began to collect branches and pine cones for kindling. The days were getting grey and short, and the nights long and terrible. Our time was filled with speech-making by reformed partisans and with chores, leaving us no time for personal activities or for studying and teaching. We had no fuel for our lamps, and we spent our evenings in the dark, talking and singing quietly. Everything seemed to predict a hard winter.

We lost many women. With the first rains and cold came a wave of signing. Of the 5,500 women at Trikeri in August 1949, only half remained. Many of the tents occupied by partisan families around the monastery were empty. A huge blue boat, decorated with flags, came to carry the "purified Greek maidens" back to the bosom of Greece. The few women who remained around the monastery moved closer to our camp-site. Together we prepared to face the storms and floods of the months ahead.

Almost all the men confined in various island camps and mainland prisons were moved to Makronisos. The rare letters we received from them were strange and troubling, the envelopes marked with unfamiliar acronyms. We tried to understand what was really happening there. Men we had known for a long time, whom we admired for their strength and integrity, had submitted and signed at Makronisos. We were slowly realizing that something horrible was taking place there – what?

By mid-November the air was heavy with fear and uncertainty. Guards and policemen were packing their gear, apparently preparing to leave Trikeri. There were many rumors: relocation, trials, changes in the Camp Command, in government. Uncertainty gripped us. What was going to happen? Where would they take us next?

From November 1949 on our life changed radically. The Camp Command passed from the police to the army, which, having finally won the long, cruel conflict with the left, had decided to wipe out all traces of opposition. The rehabilitation of the unrepentant women of Trikeri was taken over by the Makronisos Rehabilitation Organization. We were now under the jurisdiction of that camp, even though we had not yet been moved there. The army commander lost no time in outlining the rules and regulations of the new regime. There were restrictions everywhere: letters, money orders, and packages were forbidden; we were forbidden to go into the olive groves, to swim in the clean waters, forbidden . . . forbidden . . . forbidden. The new commander was illiterate and vain. He cut a silly figure, prancing about, brandishing a small whip with the air of a “magnanimous but stern victor”, as he called himself. We immediately gave him the nicknames “Slicker” and “I forbid”.

At first, his rules were enforced to the letter. But soon we saw through his veneer of toughness. Realizing that he was not capable of sustaining his new line, we began to ignore his rules. To begin with, we stopped dragging the sick to roll-call. Then we demanded that our mail privileges be reinstated. We resumed our walks in the olive groves, looking for mushrooms and wild vegetables, and we reclaimed the clean beaches for bathing and laundry. The only rule we couldn't overthrow was the curfew. At exactly 8:30 Slicker would send the guards to make sure all lights were out. Soldiers, and occasionally Slicker himself, would come and search our tents during our absence. Once they found a notebook with personal journal entries and poems. This resulted in the burning of all our books, writing materials, and manuscripts.

Commander Slicker did not last long. He was replaced, much to our regret, by Commander Margiotis, a tall, thin, red-haired man, who wore gold-rimmed glasses and had an expression of indifference and boredom that made him look like an Englishman. We nicknamed him Scobie.* We realized that he would be a tyrant when we heard how many comrades he had put to death as one of the judges of the Larissa military court. He was a true fanatic, enforcing the rules of the "New order" to the letter. The guards, terrified of him, saw to it that we followed the prescribed schedule without the slightest deviation.

A new face, wrinkled, pale, and hairless, appeared in the camp's headquarters – our old friend and comrade Christos. The General Headquarters at Larissa trusted him implicitly by now. He had proven his worth, and they had given him a free hand in dealing with us. The commander, the officers, and the soldiers were merely instruments of his singleminded will to break us, to drag us down to his own level, to totally humiliate and degrade us.

The winter 1949 was so harsh that the caiques could no longer land in the small bay. They went around to the west side, which was somewhat sheltered but much more rugged, its sheer and slippery cliffs nearly impassable. Unloading and carrying the supplies was more difficult and dangerous than ever. Icy winds from Thessaly whipped up the sea, threw down our large tents, and flooded the kitchens.

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* The name of the English general appointed to command ELAS after the liberation. See p. 56.

A vise was closing on our lives. For the first time we felt that we were no longer only political prisoners but true convicts or war hostages. Headquarters intensified its efforts to convince us of the total defeat of the Democratic Army. Partisans, often women, were brought in every day to tell us about demoralization and disorganization among the rank and file. They told how Democratic Army leaders would kill or abandon the wounded to facilitate their own escape across the border. They'd attempt to prove that the leadership of the Democratic Army was conspiring to hand Greece over to the Bulgarians. We responded to this slander as we always had, with reproof and indignation. But their poisoned words at times chilled our hearts, and we'd listen in silence until we were on the verge of collapsing from cold, hunger, and fear.

On December 14 we were ordered to cut mastic and pine branches to build an arch for the arrival of a general and the Bishop of Larissa. We refused. Early the next morning we were marched to the monastery and had to wait there in the snow until noon without even a cup of tea. The women who had already signed were also in the courtyard, with officers and enlisted men instructing and threatening them. They wanted the women to understand that they would always be under observation, no matter where they were; the government would always know what they were doing, what they were saying, what they were thinking. They wanted them to remember that if they were ever to utter an "anti-national" sentiment, they would be brought back to the camp and dealt with more harshly than before. Then the soldiers ordered them to applaud the arriving dignitaries. The poor, panicstricken creatures applauded and shouted wildly: "long live the Army, long live the King." They were already beginning to pay the high price of their passage out of this hell.

The Bishop spoke first in his usual manner of pretentious meekness:

> My beloved sisters. We have come here as the nation's representatives. We see how much you have suffered, uprooted from your homes, roaming the islands of exile. This, my sisters, does not become you. Our country needs you and you must return to her. The ideals in which you believed have proved to be false – a Utopia. The only realities here are the Greek Nation and the National Army, which, with Christ's help, have triumphed over the barbarians.
>
> We know only too well the situation in Russia. The misery of the people there is beyond imagining. Their religion and family lost, they roam the streets starving and in rags. Why? Because they wanted equality. There is no such thing, my sisters. Look around you in the natural world, look among yourselves: no two are alike. Forget all these misleading ideas about equality and come back to Christ.

Christos spoke next, his voice piercing our ears:

> The agitators and indoctrinators among you are the ones who extend your exile. But their time is short. Soon they will be exterminated from the face of the earth. We know very well with whom we are dealing. They are the professional students, the unemployed pseudo-artists, the intellectuals. Understand this: The time has passed when they could corrupt the world. You will pay with blood for your treason.

The snow had covered our hair and shoulders. We prayed for the speeches to be over, so that we could move our frostbitten feet and restore the circulation of our frozen blood. But as soon as Christos stopped, the general began to speak. His voice was repulsive, hyena-like. Not so much what he said, but the way his mouth opened made us forget the cold and shiver with terror instead. He had the snout of an old wolf. His flabby lips hung over sharp, yellow teeth, the froth spattering from his mouth scorched our faces. Before he started to speak, we knew what he would say: accusations, slanders, and threats for hours on end.

We stood at attention, facing this carnivorous beast, not daring even to blink. Our eyes were like marbles, devoid of all emotion. Deadly cold and silence reigned. Not a sign of pity or hope anywhere. The soldiers were restless, their eyes perplexed and frightened, wondering whether they would be ordered to shoot us on the spot. They relaxed when the mayor of Tripoli mounted the podium, a kindly expression on his face. We also breathed easier at the sight of him and his wife, a pleasant, plump woman with brown hair and a short veil over her forehead. Our eyelids moved and our blood thawed at the sound of his light, casual voice. "Listen girls," he began, "I come as a representative of our nation, to urge you to return to your hearths. If you don't comply, we will take drastic steps, of course." He gazed at us somewhat abstractly, as if he had just remembered something, and continued, "Listen girls, you will die."

Finally, after hours of speech-making, after each of the speakers had concluded that we must die, the Bishop came forward again, and with a great show of humility and pity in his now trembling voice added: "I grieve, my sisters, that we are forced to speak with a cruel tongue. Alas, this seems to be the only way. Repent, my sisters. Come to the bosom of our beloved country, and there you will find truth."

It was almost dusk by the time the speech-making was over. The kitchens were dark; the children, cold and hungry, were waiting. We ran to get water for the soup and started the fires. As we sat down to supper, a group of soldiers rushed into our tents. They read the names of forty women from a list—all our doctors, teachers, and organizers. Without any explanation they took them away and shut them in the monastery cellar.

On December 16, they ordered everyone without exception (including the sick, the old, and the children) to report for roll-call the next day before dawn. The cooks were still half-asleep when we went to the kitchens to get whatever nourishment we could find in order to endure the long, cold morning we knew awaited us. Before six we began to walk toward the monastery. Not knowing what would happen, we walked through the icy fog close to each other, holding hands. We put the stretchers with the shivering, sick women in the middle of the courtyard, and we stood around them, using our bodies to shelter them from the icy wind.

Standing near the gate were the women who a few days before had been taken and shut in the cellar. They looked cold and hungry. We began to throw them everything we carried – bread, canteens of water, jackets. The guards pretended not to notice. We ran over to them to find out what was happening. The commander appeared and with a bloodcurdling shout sent us back to our formantions. He climbed into the small platform and began to hurl at us words we had heard many times before:

> As of today your life will change radically. You will pay dearly for what you have done to our country. The Army has declared war against you. You've had a good life here. You've grown fat. You strut around jeering at our laws. From now on you will jeer hungry and thirsty. We will kill you with exhaustion, we will drive you insane, we will destroy you totally. Tomorrow morning you will turn in your cots, mattresses, pots and dishes, lanterns, braziers, cooking stoves. No special cooking for the sick and children. Letters, packages, money – all are forbidden. As of today your families had better forget about you. You will be here every dawn for roll-call. You will stand at attention in rain or snow, while the Greek flag is being raised, the flag you have disgraced.

We swayed like a mute chorus in an ancient tragedy, filled with pain, anger, and fear. We gulped the icy air in short, deep breaths. "Let them take away the cots," we thought, "we don't care. We will sleep on pine and mastic branches. We will eat only bean soup, we will have less bread, but we will survive. We will survive even without the letters from our families and friends. We will survive without anything at all, without even love. This too will pass, we must not forget it, we will overcome". We walked down the hill, pressing close to each other. The path was slippery, and the ditches were filled with ice. But we had no time to lose. In a matter of minutes we were on the mountainside, cutting down shrubs, collecting tar paper, cardboard, anything that could serve as bedding. We were determined to survive.

In the morning we carried the cots to the monastery, but we kept the mattresses. We decided we were not going to die from the cold. The soldiers locked the cots in a cell in the cellar.

A group of women partisans were in the courtyard. Their uniforms were filthy and torn, their bare feet blue and swollen. They had been brought by Christos from the Larissa prison to tell us about the great "mistakes" and "crimes" committed by the Democratic Army. With pathetic, flat voices, they began by singing hymns to the National Army and to the flag, out of tune. Then about a dozen of them took turns reading prepared speeches. They could hardly articulate and seemed unconscious of their own words. Their bodies trembled, straining with a superhuman effort, as if to take flight. Many of these women had been condemned to death.

The forty women taken from us were still locked in the cellar, sleepless, starving and tormented by daily beatings. On December 17, five of them – all teachers – were brought to the harbor. We ran to the pier, hoping to find out what would happen. We saw them being pushed into a caique. The only thing we could do was to throw to them bundles of clothes, food, and medicine. Rosa Imvrioti lifted her handcuffed hands in a gesture of courage and farewell. We smiled and waved at them, but our hearts were filled with forebodings. It was clear that the dismantling of the Trikeri camp had begun.

At roll-call, we were separated into three groups according to education: elementary, secondary, university. We thought we might be sent to Larissa, where the best educated, considered the most dangerous, were usually confined.

December 24, 1949, started like any other day – hatred and misery everywhere. The snow-covered olives made strange Christmas trees. We saw the caique fighting the waves near the cape, unable to dock. After a long struggle with wind and water, it managed to turn right and land in the harbor near the Third Company. We ran to unload, hoping that the guards' hearts would soften today, that they would let us have the mail and packages sent to us. First we unloaded our Christmas dinner – dry cod, onions, figs, and dark bread, all soaked with sea water. A shrill whistle stopped the boat's captain as he was about to throw the Christmas mail and packages into our outstretched, trembling hands. Christmas Eve was illuminated by fires made of thousands of undelivered letters, books, and magazines. Even so, on Christmas Day we cleaned our tents and spread our embroideries over crates where we placed the photographs of our dear ones. We made wreaths from pine and mastic branches and hung them on the tents, washed our hair, put on clean clothes, and ventured outside the barbed-wire fence singing Christmas carols.

A few days after Christmas three large tents were set up on the north side of the camp. A hundred women considered dangerous intellectuals were confined there. The tall, barbed-wire fence around the tents left only fifteen feet of free space, where the women could walk for half an hour each day. Guards watched every move they made. There were no toilets inside this cage, and the women had to beg for the guards' permission each time they went out. The guards escorted them to roll-call and back. They were not even allowed to go to the wells or take part in the unloading of the caiques. When crude toilets and kitchen facilities were finally built within the cage, their isolation became total.

We had less food than ever. Since the guards had taken away our personal stoves and cooking utensils, we had to prepare our bean soup in the kitchen of the abandoned camp, a considerable distance away. Many times we would slip on the ice and lose most of our meager rations. By the time we could begin to eat, the remainder was ice cold and covered with a thick crust of lard. We had no money for oil, salt, matches, or kerosene. Tubercular women wasted away without proper food, medicine, or bedding; ulcer patients ate bean broth, dry bread, and occasionally boiled potatoes and pasta cooked in repulsive lard. The children, pale and always hungry and cold, crouched in corners, lacking all desire to play in the snow they used to love before they came here. We sat at night without lights, like black shadows in the cold tents. Our boots let in rain and snow, each step was a trial of endurance. We lived in limbo, unable either to receive or to send news, dead to the world, to our families, even to ourselves.

But New Year's Day, some of us dared to celebrate. We dressed Katina Sifinaki in red and white, filled a sack with old mail, and went around the camp delivering it and singing New Year's songs. Enlisted men and guards looked the other way, smiling – the commander was celebrating at Volos. Later, the lovely Santa Claus and her friends slipped inside the cage of the isolated women, and the whole island echoed with songs and laughter.

When the families of the partisans left, the guards lost the servants who did their bidding. They attempted to replace them with us and ordered the women in the first row of tents to start doing chores for them. They refused, tied the doors of their tents from the inside and did not come out. The guards tore the tents open and took the women to an open-air detention area. It was snowing, the wind was like a whip with a thousand tails. From our tents we heard the women jumping up and down to keep their circulation going. We crept over to them, and, while the guards were drinking raki in the tent nearby, we threw blankets and bread over the fence. We were spotted by the guards as we crept back to our tents, they surrounded us and put us, too, inside the cage. But we screamed and screamed, demanding to be taken to the commander. Finally the guards, unable to silence us, took us to the office. With every ounce of courage we had, we faced the terrible Margiotis. "We are ill and exhausted," we said. "We will not carry water or anything else for the guards." We were threatened and harassed, but we persisted. We never served our captors.

Early in January 1950, there were rumors that we would soon be moved to Makronisos. We did not believe it. The very name of that island made us shiver with terror. But the rumors were confirmed by Christos. He came to the arched porch of the monastery carrying a bundle of newspapers, his movements unhurried, his expression distracted. He intended to keep us standing in the snow a long time. Finally he looked at us with "pity", sighed, and began to speak — at first timidly, then insolently, as was his style:

> When you get to Makronisos you will realize, too late, that your life here has been idyllic. So I want to tell you about certain conditions you will have to cope with there. I hope this last effort of mine will convince you to clear your names, even now, at the eleventh hour. You will remember my advice in Makronisos, but it will be too late. There they will demand much more from you. You will be forced to make many compromises, and labor will be endless and utterly back-breaking.
>
> I repeat, for the last time, your struggle, the struggle which was mine also, which was the purpose of my life for years and years, is over now. I know very well what you will face in Makronisos. There you will be made to sign. And you will do it gladly. Unless, of course, you decide to go the limit — to death. Well, then you will become heroines, worthy even of my admiration. But I know that you will break.

We never saw him again. His job was over. He had prepared us for the great test of Makronisos.

On January 20, 1950, the committee of the MRO (Makronisos Rehabilitation Organization), headed by Colonel Anagnostopoulos, arrived at Trikeri. After Christos' last speech there had been a constant stream of women going to the office and signing. They were the remaining partisan families, and they left feeling miserable and humiliated, knowing well what their desertion meant to us, who were now left alone in the ruthless hands of the army. But we were glad they were out of this and wished them well. Their husbands, sons, and daughters had been killed, their homes burned. They were going back to their villages to start again, most of them with nothing but the small children who had shared their exile.

The new commander, in a final attempt to collect as many signatures as he could before our relocation, spent hours giving us detailed descriptions of the humiliation awaiting us in Makronisos. But we were determined to go to the limit – to death. We no longer listened. At a final meeting, realizing that he had failed, he stopped in the middle of a sentence and stared at us with cold hate. We stared back and waited. "You will now dance," he shouted and ordered us to take off our coats, jackets, shoes, and stockings. "Around the church, and keep the rhythm of the music," he screamed, cutting the cold air with his whip. We ran around and around and around the church of the Virgin until we could no longer stand. Our feet frozen, our heads buzzing, we went on and on, clenching our teeth. After a long time he got tired of shouting insults and threats. Our stoicism enraged him, his mouth was foaming. He barked new orders at us: "Take down the tents, lug the cauldrons to the beach, roll up the barbed wire, and carry everything to the harbor." Of course we nicknamed him the "Dancing Master".

On the west beach some women were struggling to move a huge kiln. It had been brought to the island the previous summer to sterilize our clothing, but it had never been installed.

It had been left outside through the winter, and by now its rusty bottom was rooted in the sand. Anyone could see that all efforts to budge it would be futile. But the Dancing Master's orders could not be ignored... Some enlisted men came to give us a hand, and together we pushed until the iron monster moved. Uprooted, it tipped over and, like a mammoth, moved forward. We were to bring it to the monastery. We all joined in pushing it uphill, not daring to rest, afraid that it would roll back and crush us. That night we remembered again that we belonged to a special class – the class of the condemned – and that for us there was no mercy.

Next morning, after roll-call and after we had again been forced to dance, the commander announced that in two days we would be leaving for Makronisos and assigned us the task of moving everything to the harbor and loading it onto the boats. In the midst of this moving, we were ordered to line up; one of the soldiers handed us a flag and told us to wait near the cliffs. We thought our end had come. One of the women whispered that they were going to push us off the cliffs.

After waiting two agonizing hours in the snow, holding the flag and at perfect attention, we realized that they had sent us there to watch the departure of the women who had signed. We saw them running half-crazed downhill, terrified that the commander would change his mind and not let them go. Without turning to look at us, they ran to the waiting ship that was to take them, after a three-year nightmare, back to their homes.

It is difficult to describe the day of our departure, January 25. The sea seemed angrier than ever, and ice covered everything. The enormous task of moving, which should have taken days, was accomplished during one short day by a group of weak and exhausted women. Everything had to be moved, down to the last nail. The beach filled with piles of tents, poles, ropes, lumber, tools, cooking implements, and supplies. Many of them marked with English letters – part of the American government's aid to Greece.

By 5 p.m. we had moved all the camp equipment. The only things left were our own, and by now they seemed heavier than the huge iron kiln. But we would not abandon anything, not even the shells and stones we had gathered on the beaches; we would take them with us, bitter reminders of a hard but defiant life. In the confusion of the last-minute activities one of the women found a chance to dig a hole in the nearby olive grove and bury there a tin box containing our papers – poems, and journals. Their discovery would mean harsh sentences, even death.

Acheloös, the cargo ship destined to take us to Makronisos, docked in a small bay far from the camp, where the steep mountainside reached all the way down to the beach. A narrow goat path led from the camp to where the cargo ship waited. We held our breath as we carried the stretchers with the sick down that icy path, fearing with each step that we would lose our balance.

We put the sick women inside the stifling, dark cabins, where a small fan provided the only source of air. The stench from the toilet, already blocked up, had spread throughout the ship. The whole place echoed with military marches, dance music, and nautical jargon. We looked like creatures from another world, and the sailors stared at us with sad and astonished eyes.

Twelve hundred women and children were shut inside the ship's hold. Before long almost all of us lay on the floor vomiting and moaning. Barrels, bundles, and suitcases fell off the racks onto our heads. Their contents spilled out in the vomit and excrement. The children turned purple, and the sick were near death. The ship's doctor, drinking with the sailors, shouted insults at us each time we begged him to help. Suffocating, unable to endure a moment longer, we began to scream: "Air, air, air." The sailors, terrified, flung open the portholes. Icy waves poured in, drenching us.

This seemingly endless journey concluded at the port of Lavrion. The Dancing Master ordered us to load everything into another, smaller ship. Half-conscious, we carried the barbed wire, the tents, the iron poles, the cauldrons, and the kilns. The soldiers who had come to meet us gazed at us, wondering why we had chosen to come to this hell. They gazed at the old women, the young girls, and the children, and wondered why we had not signed. Why hadn't we spared ourselves Makronisos? They pointed to the island looming in the distance – a long, bare rock, stretching like a petrified dragon surrounded by waves, across from the lovely temple of Poseidon on Cape Sounion. White lines marked off the rock's surface, and floodlights illuminated it in the grey dawn. Rows of tents were within the squares and octagons carefully outlined with whitewash. The precision and orderliness reminded us of the German camps. There wasn't a single tree or a patch of green anywhere.

A rope ladder was thrown from our ship to a smaller ship waiting below. Looking at it was enough to give us vertigo. The Dancing Master stood nearby, pushing us as we struggled to keep our feet on the ropes. It was impossible to get the stretchers with the sick down that terrible ladder. The Dancing Master was shouting, threatening to hurl the sick overboard, stretchers and all. We lined up around the sick women, and, making a barricade with our bodies, we refused to move. Tension was high; sparks flew from the Dancing Master's eyes. The doctor finally intervened. With leather straps he tied the sick onto the stretchers, and carefully we slid them down the side of the ship. Throughout all this the sick women were silent and indifferent, as if outside it all.

Their faces, white with huge, dark circles under their eyes, resembled grim masks.

It was dark when we finally stepped onto that wind-beaten land. We prayed for a miracle to keep us from being crushed, to save us from disgracing ourselves, to have the strength to endure this, too.

Victoria Theodorou
Trikeri, December 1950

THE MAKRONISOS JOURNAL

> *My body will dissolve,*
> *my cells one by one will detach themselves*
> *from this procrustean bed*
> *my body* —a burst of sunray— will project writing
> my name in every firmament
> my cells one by one will inject men's bodies
>
> —Marina, *State of Siege*

January 27, 1950

A narrow strip of sea divided the cargo ship from Makronisos. A long, narrow, and dark land stretched ahead of us. Lavrion and the shores of Attica receded behind. The watery distance separating us from the rock of Makronisos was growing smaller. We could now see clearly the three "domains" (battalions), with acres of arid land between them. Huge letters traced with whitewash and illuminated by the pale sun read LONG LIVE KING PAUL. In the center of the island was painted an enormous royal crown.

On the hillside, rows of tents formed acronyms AETO, ESAI, ESAG,* and so on. We had seen those acronyms

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AETO *Πρῶτο Εἰδικό Τάγμα Ὁπλιτῶν* (First Special Army Regiment).
ESAI *Εἰδική Σχολή Ἀναμορφώσεως Ἰδιωτῶν* (Special Reformatory School for Civilians).
ESAG *Εἰδική Σχολή Ἀναμορφώσεως Γυναικῶν* (Special Reformatory School for Women).

before, on letters of friends and relatives sent from this island. How many times had we scrutinized those incomprehensible combinations of capital letters, combinations filled with mystery and pain? The only thing we understood from them was that the prisoners were kept in three separate locations – three dark places of torture identified by those acronyms.

And here we were, only a few feet of sea away from AETO. We shivered as we approached the island of terror. We had heard of the brutal way male prisoners had been received, and we wondered whether it was going to be the same with us. Would they fall on us – a sadistic gang of torturers – would they mock us, spit in our faces, beat us with leather straps?

The ladders had barely touched the pier and the deck was swarming with shouting officers and *alphamites*.* The officer in charge looked us over with venom-filled eyes and shouted, "Line up by fives."

Reeling with seasickness, we fell into formation and disembarked dragging our bundles and suitcases. As soon as we set foot on land our eyes were filled with khaki: countless soldiers and officers, throngs waiting for the "reception." We gazed at them in terror, expecting them to attack us. Instead, the soldiers began to sing a song about the prodigal sons and daughters of Greece gathered from the four corners of the country to the great national reformatory of Makronisos.

The island loomed around us – a grey rock pitilessly pounded by waves and whipped by harsh winds. There was not a single tree in sight, not a plant, not a bird in the sky. The entire island was a bare mountain with steep, deep ravines. We remembered the words of a soldier from Makronisos who a few days ago had come to our camp at Trikeri: "and there are the 'death ravines' where they take you and torture you until you sign."

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* The special Makronisos police force, some of whom were former prisoners who had signed the Declaration of Repentance.

It was a cold day. The winter sun, a "sun with teeth," as the mountain women called it, had not enough warmth to thaw the frost in the air or to warm our frozen feet. Our teeth chattered, we didn't know whether from fear or from cold. The soldiers continued their song.

A few minutes after we disembarked, a strange event occured: the soldiers suddenly interrupted their song and began to run uphill, shouting. In a matter of seconds a vociferous, gesticulating, whistling, applauding, shouting mob filled the square on the plateau. We looked at each other in amazement and fear as the throng of soldiers began to move downhill, as if going to a rally, A wildly barking German shepherd headed the procession, a whip-brandishing officer surrounded by bodyguards followed. "Long live Vasilopoulos, the great reformer, our beloved commander," the mob began to shout as soon as they caught sight of him. And so we met Colonel Vasilopoulos, the camp commander. He stopped and aimed a murderous glance at us. Smiling with derision, he gave the officers his orders. A pig of a sergeant ordered us to line up. We picked up the crying babies, helped the grandmothers to their feet, and formed ranks. Vasilopoulos seemed to be examing us attentively rank by rank as we passed in front of him.

"What do you think, Commander?" asked one of the officers. Certain that he had already gauged our endurance, he did not hesitate: "A matter of ten days, at most. They will not give us any trouble."

We marched among silent masses of "reformed" camp inmates. For the first time they saw women on the bloodstained streets of Makronisos. During the last four years, since the concentration camps had been established, only men had been sent here. The sight of marching women must have been a tragic diversion in the already unbearable life of the captives. They knew what was in store for us.

Still confused by our first impressions, we met yet another unexpected menace – loudspeakers placed at short intervals lined the street on both sides. A nerve-shattering metallic voice drowned out everything: "Women, the chains of communism are not suited for your wrists. Return to your homes. Your leaders have been exterminated. Ask your country's forgiveness." The whole island echoed with this threatening drone.

After we passed the soldiers' encampment, we found ourselves in front of a field fenced with barbed wire, which caged the men who had succumbed and signed the Declaration of Repentance. Thousands of eyes were on us and we saw in them an unbearable expression of sorrow and pain. Even though most of the men were young, they seemed to have given up all resistance to the inhuman regime that surrounded them. Unshaven, unwashed, their clothes dirty and torn, they seemed to have lost all memory of what they once were.

From among the tormented crowd watching us like shadows from the underworld, we suddenly heard shouts: "Mother," "Maria," "Annoula." Some of the men had recognized their own people among our group. But before their sisters, mothers, or friends could reply, the alphamites, guns in hand, fell on them, beating them and flinging in their faces the terrible insult of their weakness: *Δηλωσιες!** Like shadows the men moved back, to hide inside their tents in shame.

Our own cage was in an area fenced in with many rows of barbed wire. As soon as we began to arrange our things inside the tents, a new order was shouted at us: "You are not to occupy all the tents, only the first four rows. You are not to use the cots . . ." We protested, but the officer in charge said grimly, "Words are of no use here. Obey the order." The alloted space was very small, and we were many. We had to leave most of our things outside. Two hours later, when with much ingenuity we had managed to find barely enough room in the tents for our bedding, the orders were changed again: "Everything must go inside the tents. This is not a gypsy camp, but a civilized reformatory." "It can't be done," we protested once more, exhausted with fatigue and terror. "Do as I say. Military orders are not to be debated. Obey!" shouted the officer. Mechanically, we began to pick up our bedding, fold our blankets, tie our boxes. As soon as the last box was out of the tents, the officer ordered: "Those of you in the last row of tents move to the front row, and vice versa." We gazed at him, unable to fathom the meaning of this useless activity. (Later, we realized, that we would never find explanations for anything in this place.). We started to walk – uphill, downhill – with suitcases and bundles, changing direction each time a new order was shouted. It was pitch dark. The children, having lost their mothers in the confusion, were screaming. The lights from the harbor could not penetrate the darkness of our cage. We didn't have a drop of oil for our lamps. We moved like the shadows of the damned in the night.

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* Delosies – turncoats, cowards, betrayers.

If we managed finally to pile our stuff in the tents and set our bedding down, for the sixth and last time that night, it was only because of the inexplicable strength one finds in moments of dire necessity. Our bodies ached unbearably – the loading and unloading of the cargo ship, the nightmarish journey, the dancing we were whipped into performing during our last days at Trikeri, and the anxiety and terror of Makronisos had reduced us to mere shadows of ourselves.

Our arrival, besides providing our jailers with an opportunity to exercise their ingenuity in breaking us, gave them yet another means of tormenting the male prisoners, who, knowing well what awaited us, had to stand by helpless and watch us being tortured.

Morning, January 28, 1950

The trucks passing by our cage slowed down, and the soldiers, leaning out of the windows and furtively looking around to make sure no officers or alphamites were in sight, threw loaves of white bread, tins of milk, oranges, and other supplies over the fence. It was their way of showing us their feelings of solidarity. These were the same soldiers who, yesterday, had applauded Vasilopoulos.

That same morning special messengers from the Camp Command paid us a "friendly" visit, as they called it, to warn us, out of "brotherly" interest, that we must clear our names as soon as possible. They told us again that resistance was futile, that there would be no mercy for those who would not obey, that our own comrades were signing by the thousands every day, that the best thing for us was not to waste time.

"What will you do to us – kill us? Well, go ahead and kill us – we'd rather die," one of the women answered.

"She'd rather die," the officer repeated with a thoughtful yet mocking tone. "As if it were up to you to choose your fate. If that were the case heroes, would be coming out of Makronisos."

We could not comprehend his meaning. Everyone said the same thing: don't waste time, don't fool yourselves that you'll make it. No one makes it here, so-and-so has already signed, there is nobody who hasn't given in. Give up all resistance, it is futile, sign, sign, sign!

At 2 p.m. that day, we were ordered to gather for the first general meeting at the amphitheater. Captain Papagianopoulos opened verbal fire:

> Our honored Command of Makronisos has assigned me commander of your unit. In that capacity I have called you here today to make myself clear to you. The idyllic life you've known in your previous places of exile is gone, never to return. Now you belong to AETO, and your school is ESAG. Your life here will

> be very difficult. Its duration is up to you. If you are willing to admit your error, if you are willing to help us, if you are willing to return to the bosom of the nation you have betrayed, you will soon go back to your homes, if not, the nation's entire might, and the law's entire power will fall on you, and it will be ruthless. I call on you to come to your senses. We have extremely effective means of convincing you. I call on the provocateurs, on the leaders among you, to stop their evil doings – for their own good and for yours. Beware!
>
> Our honored Command has decided to give you three days. After this deadline, there will be no mercy, no humanity, no clemency. We are not going to treat you less brutally than the men. Only one law governs Makronisos: repent or die. This law applies to all, regardless of sex or age.

At this point, the captain caught a glimpse of Vasilopoulos approaching the theater. He stopped in mid-sentence, flustered and confused. Then, his voice rising to a high pitch, he began to shout: "Everyone stand. Our beloved Commandant is coming. The Great Reformer and Healer of Souls – Anthony Vasilopoulos. Greet him with me – Long Live Vasilopoulos!" His voice, hoarse now, thundered in the winter afternoon. Not a single woman among us applauded the chief executioner. We remained motionless and silent. Vasilopoulos had to pass in front of our silent ranks to reach the stage. Not a single gaze followed him.

January 29, 1950

The day of the promised general visit. Those who had "regained their senses" came to have a look at us. It was clear why Vasilopoulos had allowed this, why he had brought us in contact with these "reformed" slaves. He had calculated that when we saw their faces, cruelly marked by suffering, and when we heard their accounts of torture, we'd be intimidated. His calculations were correct. An expert reformer like him could not be too wrong. These broken men with their tales of horror eroded our morale.

"Then they poured gasoline over me and set me on fire," said one.

"They made me dig a ditch and buried me, leaving out only my head and right arm," said another. "They left pen and paper nearby. I don't know how long I stayed there. I went mad, everyone was screaming, I couldn't stand it any more."

"They tied me by my feet and hung me, head first, from a cliff over the sea. The waves beat on me, drowning me. They pulled me up many times. I begged them to kill me. 'Kill you and make a hero out of you?' they laughted. 'Makronisos doesn't breed heroes, only worms.' They kept it up for three days."

"My whole body was an open wound, scorched by their cigarettes. I managed to lift my arm to my mouth; I tore at my veins with my teeth. I was in the hospital when I regained consciousness."

And so it went, on and on, until we saw clearly the terror of this place: the graves for the living, the falanga, the penicillin, the *pressa* men pút in sacks together with cats and thrown into the sea, the whole gamut of tortures invented by these satanic executioners to reform the "wayward sons and daughters of Greece." And finally the most unbearable torture of all: the terrible shame, the endless humiliation of the "reformed." Everything rising in front of our eyes – a nightmarish, macabre message. The tortured past of our brothers, our own terrible future. The loudspeakers droned ceaselessly: "Soldiers and civilians, show your women the path of virtue, the path of repentance. Help them reform. Bring them to the office to clear themselves. Women, help your men; don't hesitate. If they fail to convince you to sign, it will mean they are not really reformed. Help them, and yourselves – go back to your homes together."

Walking back to our tents, we heard the entire island echoing with horror – the madhouse, the maimed, the murdered, the ravines. The captain's "other means" had been amply clarified by his victims – our brothers, husbands, children.

Our thoughts, our bodies, our entire beings were focused on one question: Would we make it?

January 30, 1950

The attack started before the time limit was up. We were awaken by hoarse shouts and the stomping of boots. Officers and alphamites rushed inside our tents like drunken cannibals.

"Get ready, whores. Line up. Today we'll drink your blood." We began to dress, putting on everything heavy we could find in the dark. The guards began to kick us, and the loudspeakers started their drone: "Attention, attention. Women go immediately to the amphitheater."

Unwashed, uncombed, we started downhill. "Faster, faster, whores," the guards roared behind us. The small plateau was filled with officers and alphamites. Among them we saw Vasilopoulos' sadistic face. He was wearing a leather jacket; a pistol hung conspicuously at his waist, a whip was in his hand. The officers were dressed in combat gear. Everything foretold disaster.

We were ordered to sit on the ground. They surrounded us, and slowly began to move towards us, pointing their guns at us. Deadly silence blackened the area. Then Vasilopoulos began to speak:

> Poisonous vipers, the day I promised you is near. Take a last look at the sea, the sun, the light. If you don't sign today your eyes will close forever. There is no mercy for you, no humanity, no pity. How can you still dare to raise your scrawny little bodies — you, a mere thousand females — against the will of our nation? Today it's all over, all over for you. You will be made to sign, whether you like it or not. You will sign from the stretchers before you die.

Turning to the alphamites, he said: "Faithful sons of Greece, I give them to you. Do with them as you will. Use your imagination. Waste them. They are the scum of Greece. They are whores. They have betrayed our nation. Avenge on them the blood of our brothers who died fighting the evil of their doctrine. We have thousands of victims, thousands. These women are to blame. Be ready to execute your orders without pity. Without pity."

The alphamites were being fired up. Every word of the colonel further heated their blood. They were ready to attack.

"Attention!" Vasilopoulos roared again. "Attention. I'm now going to spend on you my last ounce of mercy. I give you one more quarter of an hour. Decide. Choose: life or death." Not a single woman moved.

"Attention!" he said again. Among you there are some who have the right to call themselves Greek. What I just said does not affect them. When I call their names they may step from the ranks. They are free to go. He took from his pocket a list and read the names of 120 women. They were partisans who had surrendered to the army and had been brought here for their discharge papers.

"These women", he shouted, "are made Greek again. They have the courage to admit their mistakes. In twenty days they will be home; our love and care awaits them. You, too, could follow them out of here."

The 120 women stepped out of the condemned mass and walked away. Vasilopoulos expected that this would create a wave of desertion in our ranks. But nothing happened. No one moved. His eyes focused on the children, who, terrified, clung to their mothers. "Take the children away from their mothers and bring them to the departing women," he roared. The alphamites began to grab the children, one to three years old. Crying, the children hid their bluish, cold faces behind small, frostbitten hands, hoping not to be seen. The guards tore them from the arms of their shrieking mothers and herded them before Vasilopoulos.

"Give them to the departing women. The children belong to Greece!" he roared again. "Whoever wants her child must become Greek first." The partisans took the children in their arms and left the theater. The mothers stood transfixed, watching their crying babies disappear from sight. Vasilopoulos took out his watch and shouted again: "You have ten more minutes. You can still go find your children, your husbands, your homes."

Death hovered over the helpless, dazed mass of women. Yet we did not fear death. If they had announced that we would be shot in ten minutes, we would have felt relief. A consoling thought occured to us then. Weak as we were from the hardships of our exile, we were not going to last long, we would die with the first beating. We looked around us. We were a solid mass of stubbornness and determination. Pressed close together, holding hands, we forgot about our individual selves; we merged with the maimed of the ravine; we became one with all the oppressed people of the world. We waited, holding our breath. All our strength, all our thoughts, focused on only one desire – to continue to resist.

"Five more minutes!" Vasilopoulos roared.

This tempting opening to life, which in five minutes would be closing forever, created a terrible moral struggle.

"I can't stand it any more," a woman suddenly screamed, and ran from the ranks. Here and there women moved uncertainly.

"Hurry!" Vasilopoulos roared, spreading panic.

There were some empty places in our ranks. The alphamites insulted and threatened us; pulling us by the hair and kicking us, they attempted to carry us bodily away.

The dark, menacing uncertainty held us in maddening suspense. We struggled to convince ourselves that we were going to make it. Had we known exactly what would happen, our struggle would have been easier. But this uncertainty, this mystery, made us helpless.

"Do you see the ravine? Do you know how many thousands of men broke in there? Do you know how many bodies we cut up into small pieces in there?" one of the alphamites shouted. He pulled Anna Dagli out of the tent, and dragged her toward the sea, beating her. Another guard kicked a woman to the ground and began to stomp on her face and breasts with his hobnailed boots. Guards were swinging their clubs and whips among us like mad dogs. More women left. We pressed close to each other in an effort to fill the empty spaces. Vasilopoulos came to the microphone again. We fixed our gaze on him. He called the names of three women, our most important leaders – Karayiorgi, Paize, Siantou – and, after insulting them, he ordered the alphamites to take them away.

"Time is up," announced Vasilopoulos. The alphamites awaited their orders, motionless.

"Attention!" he roared. "Troops, stay in readiness, take your places, close all exits, position the machine guns. There will be no mercy, no exception." The alphamites surrounded us with war cries. They ordered us to line up by fives, then divided us into groups of forty, with a gang of executioners assigned to each group. We began to march.

The first phase of our struggle ended there. The psychological pressure had reached its highest peak. Their attack with the terrible specter of the awaited tortures had taken from us two hundred women. The rest of us marched toward our cage, surrounded by a pack of wolves.

They put us in the tents, forty women in each. We sat down close together on the frozen earth. The tension was high, our nerves at breaking point. But we kept strict watch on our emotions. We knew that, no matter what, we had to keep control of our minds. The alphamites were howling outside. Within minutes they rushed into the tents, holding whips and thick clubs.

"Who is the leader in here? You, over there, stand up. Are you going to sign? No, do you still say no? Take your coat off, and your sweater."

The whip hissed as it tore through the air. Ten times, twenty, thirty, fifty.

"Are you going to sign now?" "No," the woman whispered. The guard's mouth frothed. He renewed his attack, beating her with the butt of his gun, with the whip and the club; stomping on her with his boots until she was a mass of flesh, writhing on the ground. He looked around for a new victim. "You, with the brown coat. Are you going to sign? When I get through with you, you will have no nose, no ears, no face." He twisted her arm and sqeezed her throat with his huge hands.

"Take off your shoes and follow me to the ravine," he howled, dragging the woman outside. Shouts and bloodcurdling screams were everywhere. We recognized Elli Lambraki's voice. Sonia Kosta lay unconscious in the corner. Blood poured out of Niki Sefleki's mouth. Maria Tsatsani moaned with pain, her thigh broken with blows from a club. Women soaked in blood were taken on stretchers to a makeshift first aid stall. Insults, cries of pain, plaintive appeals for mercy – all the sounds of hell echoed in the grey dawn, a crescendo of satanic orchestration.

We each waited our turn, drenched in cold sweat, trying not to hear the crying and the threats. We pressed close and gathered our strength for the supreme struggle – to stay sane. "Courage," we whispered to each other. "This too will pass. Courage." But there was no end. They kicked and howled and picked new victims, dragging the youngest out of the tents.

Everything moaned with pain. We were not sure what was going on in the other tents, how the rest of the women were holding up.

"Fools," the alphamites said. "You are the last ones. The rest of the tents are empty, everyone has signed, only fifty are left."

We knew they were lying, but we didn't know how much. After six hours of terror, the alphamites left. But we knew they would soon come back. We hurried to take advandage of this short reprieve. We talked to each other, cared for the wounded, and prepared ourselves for the next assault.

When they came back they were not carrying their instruments of torture. They told us to go to the canteen. We were puzzled; we couldn't believe that after all this they were going to feed us. We had yet to fathom Makronisos, yet to learn that going from hopelessness to hope was another form of torture.

Without knowing how, we found ourselves outside the tents. The air revived us. We finally found out what had happened. Our spirits rose when we discovered that in spite of the torture very few had given in. When we fell into formation, tin plates in hand, and saw the length of our line, we sighed with relief. At roll-call almost all of us answered, "Present." Only the seriously wounded had stayed in the tents. Marching to the canteen – a long line of stubborn, determined women, each of us a tiny fragment of resistance, each of us a necessary and indestructible part of the whole – we were triumphant.

The cooks were waiting for us, stirring the cauldrons. They filled our plates with hot bean soup. They were especially daring, especially friendly. Were it not for the constant presence of the alphamites, they would have talked to us, expressing their sympathy and admiration.

We sat near the sea and ate our lunch greedily, believing that these spoonfuls of hot bean soup would give us the strength we needed to face what was to follow. This small interval of freedom, the food, and the friendliness of the cooks bridged the chasm separating us from life. We saw the outlines of Lavrion in the distance, and beyond – only an hour away – we imagined Athens, our neighborhoods, our homes, with our families and friends having lunch at this very moment, ignorant of where we were, what was happening to us.

We rinsed our plates, washed our faces, and wetted our hair with sea water. We breathed the briny air and felt lighthearted. Irrationally, hope stirred inside us. Something might have happened to make them change their plans: a political crisis, a change in tactics, perhaps... Hope blazed up, and a mad, incomprehensible joy took hold of us. Piercing whistles and hoarse shouting soon brought us back to reality.

The attack came with renewed fury. Again cries of pain and terror issued from every tent, to mingle with the roaring of the waves and the mad howling of the wind.

Around 3 p.m. we heard the loudspeakers again.

"Attention! Attention! The honored Command of Makronisos had decided to give the women of ESAG a last chance to reconsider their decision. Their relatives and friends will once again meet them at the amphitheater to talk with them."

Obviously, mere physical violence had not reaped a good harvest of signatures. This visit was a well-timed pressure. They knew that, exhausted as we were from the beatings and the emotional terror, we could easily be influenced. Nothing could have been more unnerving than the faces of our loved ones now, when more than ever we had to focus every bit of our strength on remaining firm in our resolution. Now, when nothing else should matter, our executioners came once more with a new chance for life, a new temptation.

It would be unfair to our sad, "reformed" friends to say that they all tried to undermine our determination, that they were all consciously or unconsciously instruments of Headquarters. On the contrary, many of them tried to give us courage. They told us that the whole camp was with us, that the whole of Greece, the entire world was protesting the existence of the camps. They brought us whatever they had – admiration, pride, bandages, ointments, tins of milk, love.

We felt deep gratitude for this. Their words and their friendly faces managed to break the macabre circle surrounding us. Guards were everywhere throughout the visit, interrupting our conversations with threats and insults, dragging the men to the office for not being convincing enough. Loudspeakers howled, urging us to take this last chance, to go home, to save our families and ourselves while there was still time.

When the visit was over, our numbers were considerably diminished. Night descended heavier and more nightmarish than usual. The sharp cold penetrated to the marrow of our bones, our heads buzzed, our eyelids were like lead. We could not even press close together for warmth – our bruised flesh could not tolerate even the slightest touch.

We were not allowed to lie down. We remained sitting, terrified, in the dark. Throughout the night the alphamites would rush inside our tents, shining their flashlights in our faces, their beam more terrible than the darkness.

"You, why did you lie down?" they would shout, pointing at random.

"I did not," a woman would reply, trembling.

"Who did then, no one? Come out, we'll teach you not to lie."

Lashes, kicks, and blows fell like rain. Our faces and eyes burned as if with high fever.

What we dreaded more than anything was being dragged outside. As long as we were together, we felt safe. Screams came from the direction of the sea. The guards kept coming back, pointing their flashlights in the faces of new victims. The tents steadily emptied. We begged for dawn, but dawn was in no hurry.

It must have been 2 a.m. From far away we heard a woman's angry, incoherent shouting. As it came closer we were able to make out her words. "What do you want me to renounce, my brother's blood? I renounce nothing, I repent for nothing. My name is Skevofilaka. Yes. I am seventeen years old. What do you want from me, fascists? Go ahead, beat me, beat me, dogs, fascists, beat me".

The guards threw her inside our tent, her eyes wide open and glassy, her teeth clenched, her body drenched in blood.

In vain we tried to soothe and calm her. Her reason gone, she continued to shout her angry determination not to succumb.

At Headquarters we were put under tremendous pressure to sign: pinned against the wall, insulted, beaten with whips and brass knuckles until we'd collapse in pools of blood and vomit. The officers then would try to hold the pen between our paralyzed fingers, forcing our hands to trace our names on the prepared statement of repentance. Those of us who were still able would fling the pen at the officers' face; only those who had lost consciousness would let their hand be led. Each time a paralyzed hand would trace a signature, the officers, besides themselves with glee, would congratulate each other, proud of the great achievement of having helped one more misguided woman to see the light and attain salvation.

The prepared statement read: 'Entirely on my own, and without any influence of force, I renounce with all my soul and with disgust, the foreign instigated and directed rebellion and everything it represents, and I pledge to be henceforth a law-abiding citizen."

Many women whose signatures had been obtained that night suffered brain hemorrhage, concussion, broken legs or arms, or mental collapse.

Each of us who lived through that night had our own story to tell, either of how we withstood the pressure and emerged victorious or of how we succumbed and signed.

I will give here only one. The story of a village girl, Diamando Karabetou, as she told it the next day:

> They took me at night, around nine or ten, to the Headquarters. As soon as I went in they said, "Here's a good girl, she will sign." I didn't answer. The office was full of officers and alphmites; they were all having supper. They asked me where I was from, and I told them Konitsa. "Sign," they said, "and go home." I told them that I hadn't done anything and that I wasn't going to sign anything, and I asked them why they had been beating me all day for no reason. They started beating me again

> with whips, their fists, and boots – mostly about the head. I started to scream, crying out my mother's name. "Don't you have any mothers, sisters, wives?" I asked them. "Aren't you human?" The captain put his hand over my mouth to make me stop, but I bit him so hard he started to bleed. Then someone pulled me by the hair and held my head back, while they slapped me. Then they dragged me to the table and put a pen between my fingers. I broke the pen and threw the inkwell and the paper on the floor. "What a wild thing this one is," one of them said. "What do you expect fron a wild goat?" said another. Then they tried to dip my thumb in the spilled ink and press it on the statement. I kept pulling my hand away from the ink. "I know how to read and write," I said. "You have no right to do that." They started to laugh and beat me again. "Do you have a pistol?" the captain asked one of the guards. "Take her to the ravine and finish her off." I said nothing. Then the captain came up to me. "Do you know that he'll take you to the ravine?" He asked me. "I don't care, take me wherever you like," I answered. They were furious. But they only took me to an empty tent and left me there. All night I prayed for morning to see if my thumb was inked. It wasn't.

This is how the officers succeeded in getting three hundred signatures on the night of January 30.*

January 31, 1950.

Around noon, the loudspeakers announced that the "unrepentant" were to be put in a separate area and to remain there until further notice. The guards promised to stretch their imaginations to the limit to invent for us the worst treatment possible, reserved for "special cases." They surrounded the new area with many rows of barbed wire, making any contact with the rest of the women impossible.

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* Aphrodite Mavroede-Pandeleskou continues her account with a list of the names of 56 women who that night suffered hematoma, concussion, mental collapse, and hemorrhage of the brain or stomach. Most of these women never recovered.

No one dared come near. We were totally cut off from the world.

The tents inside our old cage were old, with whole sides torn off and with most of the poles missing or broken. The wind blew through them, and rain flooded them. Thirty women were piled in each tent, the healthy and sick together. A narrow, barbed-wire passage led to the seashore, where the latrines were. Along the shore beneath the cliffs, the passage became somewhat wider – about ten yards in each direction. This was our allotted space in the world.

February 1950

Those who have not been to Makronisos cannot imagine the satanic alliance of nature and man. The four winds pound that bare rock with relentless fury, blowing down the tents and creating storms of sand and gravel that whipped our faces and blinded us. On windy days we'd walk along the narrow passage to the outhouses by twos and threes, holding hands for fear the wind might fling us against the barbed wire. On such days it was as hellish inside the tents. Each moment we expected them to collapse entirely. Every night we took turns holding down the center pole, barely managing to keep it in place. Day and night our mouths were filled with mud, our nostrils stuffed with sand, our eyes red and swollen.

They had forbidden us to use the cots, so we had to sleep on the ground in a space smaller than a grave, unable to move or turn over. Sleep brought us no rest. Mice nested inside our mattresses and scuttled over our bodies, and once in a while we'd glimpse at a snake disappearing inside a hole in our pillows.

This unrelentingly harsh life, endlessly repeated day in and day out, broke down the health of many women, making us unable to cope with the hardships of daily existence.

If only we had some water to wash off the dirt and mud that clung to our bodies and faces, clogging every pore. If only we had even a cup of water to clean the mud caked on our eyelids, to wash the stinging salt from our skin. But we didn't even have enough to wet our parched throats. That arid island didn't have even a drop of fresh water. It was brought from the mainland by boat, stored in a cistern, and strictly rationed. The torment of thirst was inflicted on the inmates of this reformatory as a routine.

Each of us was daily allotted half a gallon of water for all our needs – for drinking and for washing our bodies, clothes, and dishes. But even that, little as it was, could be withheld at any time for "reasons of discipline." If we didn't die from thirst it was because the women who signed and therefore lived under less harsh conditions ignored the strict regulations about keeping far away from our cage and crawled under the barbed wire, leaving jugs and tins filled with water. This was only one of the examples of the collective responsibility seen on all levels throughout our imprisonment.

We used fresh water only for drinking and making tea. For all our other needs we used sea water, and even that was difficult to get. The only area where we were allowed to get sea water was within the barbed wire near the latrines. We begged the guards to let us go outside to a clean area, but in vain. We were forced to wash our dishes and clothes with that polluted, murky water. Thirst and the inability to keep clean were among the worst hardships.

Life in Makronisos could be summed up in a simple statement: your self, your time, your life were not your own. Everything, even the smallest, the most trivial details were predetermined by "regulations." To make sure these regulations were kept to the letter, officers and alphamites were present everywhere. From the very beginning the oppressive regulations forced us to comply with the demands of the camp.

The day would begin at 6 a.m. with the sound of bugles blaring through the loudspeakers and end at 8 p.m. when we had to be silent and put out all lights. The day was divided into propaganda sessions on morality and nationalism, chores (usually in the kitchens), and assembly. In order to follow the regulations we had to be alert constantly, ready to switch instantly from one chore to the next like robots, without thinking or questioning. Hesitation was very risky, even for eighty-year-old grandmothers who could hardly walk. When the bugles sounded we had two minutes to be outside the tents and line up by fives. Regulations allowed no time for personal activities like washing, mending, tending the sick, or reading. All of these things had to be done in the brief intervals between chores. A whistle would send us running, leaving whatever we were doing – our food half-eaten, our laundry lying in the mud, bandages half wrapped around the wounds of the sick. Lined up by fives, we waited for hours outside our tents, until another whistle dismissed us. This senseless harassment was the handiest method to exhaust us physically and mentally. One of their favorite ways of harassing us was to make us run to the rhythm of the whistles in and out of our tents, faster and faster, until, out of breath and dizzy from noise and movement, blinded with sweat and tears, we'd lose our direction, bump into each other, stumble, and fall.

Relocation was another method of harassment. It usually took place without advance warning during the brief intervals between chores. Demonic whistling would suddenly give the signal for general confusion. We had thirty minutes to move to different tents and arrange all our belongings there. Imagine six hundred women running up and down, lugging boxes, mattresses, and suitcases. Chaos and panic reigned as, wild and terrified, set in motion by loudspeakers, roaring guards, barking dogs, and sharp whistles, we hurried to finish before time ran out.

Relocation often took place amid strong winds, which flung our things every which way – into the sea, onto the streets, over the cliffs. If, during relocation, the loudspeakers announced a propaganda session on morality or nationalism, we'd have to drop everything once more, leaving our belongings at the mercy of wind and mud. Relocation might take place five or six times a day.

Keeping the camp clean was another exhausting task. Enormous iron garbage cans had to be emptied into the sea twice a day, the latrines cleaned three times. And there was always the endless labor of clearing the streets and squares of gravel, whitewashing the stone walls, and tracing fresh lines with whitewash around the tents — for that "Greek island" look. Many times we had to carry bricks and buckets full of mortar for the various buildings that were always under construction. We grew more and more exhausted as time passed. Nature and man were working together in a systematic attempt to break our bodies and spirits.

"If we don't manage to kill you, Makronisos will. There will be no letting up. You will either die from T.B. or go mad," the officers used to tell us, smiling cynically. Ioannidis,* second in command and most cynical of all, would add: "We are not humans; we are animals. We will destroy you no matter what. We will drill holes in your stomachs with rotten beans and wormy lentils."

Makronisos would not tolerate any type of self-government, that is, managing of our own food supplies and our monthly stipend, as was done in other island camps. Here everything was handled by the officers, who appointed reformed** inmates to carry the sacks with the supplies from the warehouse to the kitchen.

"You'd better forget about collective action here," the officers said, sending our "Marias"*** back with empty buckets.

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* He was also second in command during the eight-year military dictatorship that ended in 1974. For a few months before the dictatorship collapsed, he was in charge of the government.

** Frequently reformed inmates surpassed the guards in cruelty.

*** Women who prepared and served food.

Each and every one of us had to go, tin plate in hand, and stand in line for food. Going to mess was required. That meant we had to line up and wait, even if we dumped the disgusting stuff in the garbage cans as soon as it was served to us. There was usually a 45-minute-wait from the moment the whistles sounded for the line-up to the moment we were allowed to start our march to the kitchens, depending on the officer's mood. While waiting we were constantly harassed. The officer would single out one of us and amuse himself by physically and verbally abusing her. Anyone could be harassed at any time. His "reasons" were many— either he did not like our appearance or the way we stood, or he did not like the way we looked at him, or for not looking at him at all.

The kitchens, built next to the sea, under the cliffs, were constantly pounded by wind and waves. The cooks — old guerrillas who had been captured or had surrendered in battle, their faces blackened with soot, their eyes red from smoke — handed us the repulsive food in silence, watching with pity our futile attempts to pick out worms and stones from the watery mess. These tormented men worked like slaves from dawn to dark, frightened and silent, stirring the huge cauldrons and stoking the smoky fires with the horror of the alphamites looming over them.

Sometimes after we finished eating we'd start humming a tune — one of our beloved Trikeri songs. Singing made our hearts lighter and sweetened our life. The cooks listened with reverence, and, if there were no guards nearby, they'd ask us to sing American Negro spirituals. Tears streaked their sooty faces as they listened to lyrics telling of the suffering of black men and women across the Atlantic.

Evening mess was always interrupted by the lowering of the flag, one of the most solemn moments in Makronisos. Everything came to a halt. We'd turn into pillars of salt, with spoons suspended half-way to our mouths. If the wind blew our hair, our scarves, or the tips of our jackets into the soup, we had to let them stay there until the ceremony was over. The slightest movement might have cost us our lives. "Makronisos does not tolerate 'irreverent' behavior."

Because it damaged our stomachs, the food was another method of systematic destruction. The number of women with stomach ulcers, T.B., hepatitis, breast disease, gynaecological disorders, and severe depression increased each day. Among six hundred women, only a few had no signs of illness. Ninety percent suffered from at least three health problems. The two large tents that served as hospitals for the seriously ill were closed to those who refused to sign. When we finally managed to get through the endless maze of red tape and admit twenty-five of our dying women to the hospital, we immediately regretted it. The sick were better off in their own tents, where at least they had the care of their friends. In the hospital they were drugged or tied to their beds in order to avoid, the officers claimed, the responsibility of their suicides. If a woman was considered ill enough to be removed to an Athens hospital, the Camp Command first demanded that she sign.

The story of Sonia Kosta, Stella Paploka, and Eleni Lambraki, who had been beaten about the head and suffered hematoma, concussion, and migraine is an example of the brutal way the sick were treated. They languished for weeks in primitive medical care until their condition deteriorated to a degree deemed dangerous by the authorities. Not wanting to have three corpses on their hands, they shipped the three dying women to Lavrion. As soon as the people saw them they surrounded the stretchers, throwing flowers on their broken bodies. The officers, concerned about the camp's reputation, rushed them to a hospital in Athens. When they arrived at the hospital of Nea Ionia, a working-class neighborhood, people again gathered around the stretchers questioning the women about their condition and about the camp. The officer in charge, upset by rumors of brutality, which spread like wildfire, and not wanting all of Athens to know that women were being crippled and maimed at Makronisos, sent them back to "die away from the media and public demonstrations." When we protested this treatment, which meant certain death, 'Vasilopoulos' answer was: "We did not bring you to this island to thrive, we brought you here to die."

Murder was only one side of Makronisos. The other, by far the worst, was the scientifically designed and expertly executed atmosphere of uncertainty and disorientation. The falanga and the whip, the alphamites, the shrill metallic voice of the loudspeakers, the howling of drunken guards, the gentle-mannered propaganda, the nightly assaults by the archterrorists Ioannides and Kastritsis, even the island priest – all were engaged in a total, pitiless assault on everything that keeps a person human.

At Makronisos no one could ever say "the worst is over" or find a moment's peace. Day and night were haunted by the specter of torture, the dread of an unknown tomorrow, and those sinister "friendly" warnings. It was hard to breathe at Makronisos. Air and light crushed our chests. We never knew when the alphamites, crazed with drugs, would come to our tents; we knew only that they were always inventing new ways to attack our bodies and minds.

In its efforts to reform us, the Office of National Moral Education and Training frustrated any intellectual activity. Naturally, their first targets were books, newspapers, magazines, and writing materials. All intellectual fare was cooked up by reformed officers, soldiers, and hard-core fascists and was served to us over the loudspeakers. The whole island continually echoed with slanders against the Democratic Army, with tales of defeat and treachery within the ranks, with terrible threats of what was about to befall us: "Your leaders have abandoned you, they have betrayed you, they have all fled to Russia and Bulgaria. There is no one to protect you or to ask about your fate, you are totally forgotten by everyone. If you think you will get out of here holding your heads high, you are mistaken. You will turn into worms here, you will crawl on your bellies begging our forgiveness. We are the victors, we can and will destroy you."

We met daily in the amphitheater for National Training Hour. The session began with letters of repentance read by the "reformed" prisoners. Each man stood up in front of the assembled crowd and in a voice broken by sobs and shame read letters written to the priest of his village or to the mayor or his town; letters destined to be read to the congregation after Sunday mass or heard over the radio or published in the newspapers. They told of how in the great reformatory of Makronisos, among wise and benevolent teachers and healers of the soul, each man had been helped to see the light and rid himself of the terrible infection of wrong thinking, and that now they could once again take their places as nationally minded subjects on the side of the King and Queen.

The phrase "I saw the light" was particularly tragic when uttered by the men who had lost their sight as a result of torture.

We often heard letters with unbelievable contents. For example: "I, Demitrios D., from the village of K., have renounced with disgust and loathing the putrid blood of my brother, Petros, shed by the blessed bullets of our National Army while he was engaged in the dishonorable fight against Country, King, and Family." (Often the brother had died fighting the Germans.)

After a series of such readings, we were lectured on various 'educational' topics, such as economics (the Marshall Plan and the Greek economy, the hopelessly utopian theory of Marxism, the economic structure of Makronisos, etc.), religion (divorce and religion, Christianity and communism, the place of the Greek woman in the Orthodox Church), or philosophy (Plato and the incarnation of his *Republic* at Makronisos).

Whatever the topic, the content was always the same: Makronisos was the continuation of our glorious national tradition, a national bastion against foreign influence – the glorious fountains of Siloam.* In sum, Makronisos must continue as a bastion against communism, a place where everyone infected with antinational thinking could be brought and be made pure, a worthy child of Greece.

Throughout these sessions alphamites circulated among us watching for even the trace of a mocking smile when the speaker described the generosity of Makronisos and the joy to be found there. At the slightest sign of disrespect, an unfortunate would be dragged to the ravine, where a few broken ribs would teach her not to mock what was said in Makronisos. The session ended with a triumphant hymn of hate for Russians and Slavs.

Another function of the Office of Education was "recreation." The choral and theater groups from the First Company, comprised of "reformed" artists, would prepare and present gross propaganda in the form of skits.

From behind the barbed wire of our cages, we watched the preparations for the night's entertainment, knowing that as soon as the sun set, the tormented minions would begin to gather, that after a day of back-breaking labor they'd line up and wait for hours in a long, grim line to applaud Vasilopoulos in his dress uniform. There, along with the soldiers, the "reformed" greeted enthusiastically their torturers and their wives, who had come to the island for the weekend. And when the various skits, inspired by the epic of Makronisos, came to an end, we'd hear the familiar shout:

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* A spring outside Jerusalem that cleanses the body and spirit of those who bathed in its water.

"Are we going to bring the women also into the bosom of Greece?"

"Yes, yes we will, we will!" was the crowd's frenzied reply.

Their efforts to bring us to the festivities were always futile. "In this place of torture and shame we need no recreation," we'd answer. The guards administered a few lashes here and there, and left our cage, threatening that tomorrow we would regret our stubborness.

The Officers' Club often featured musical evenings. All night long the loud speakers brought to our tents the sound of familiar and beloved songs, which softened the misery of our hearts, and brought us closer to life. Music was a bridge from this rock of horror connecting us with home. But the horror returned magnified when the sound of violins mingled with the delirious howling of Skevofilaka, still defying her tormentors, still refusing to renounce her brother's blood.

On a small hill across from his white villa, Vasilopoulos decided to build a church. The money for this House of God came from the meager monthly stipends the government gave to the prisoners and soldiers, which they "voluntarily" contributed, along with their labor.

Under the lash of the alphamites, amid hailstorms of sand and gravel, under the scorching blinding sun, with a diet of wormy bean soup, soldiers and prisoners suffered for months on end to complete this place of worship.

Anthony Vasilopoulos, in true Christian humility, named the church after himself – Saint Anthony.

The priest of Makronisos adjusted his religious duties to the needs of the Office of Education. His voice could be heard over the loudspeakers pleading with the "prodigal sons" and the "foolish virgins" to return to God and to follow the path of virtue traced by the Camp Command, God's representatives on earth. His Sunday sermon gave a strange version of Christian repentance, redemption, judgment, and forgiveness as defined by the "commandments" of Makronisos.

Once, when we asked Father Kornarios what he thought of the murders perpetrated here, he answered, "My children, even Christ was forced to use the whip in order to cleanse the House of God of infidels."

Once a week Makronisos hosted high officials from throughout Greece. Their visits were considered an excellent opportunity to present the "reformed" crowds to their new "fathers and protectors," and the Camp Command would feverishly organize "spontaneous" and "enthusiastic" demonstrations of love and gratitude by the camp inmates.

Hours before the arrival of the dignitaries, the inmates gathered in the square and prepare for the reception, with the loudspeakers constantly reminding them that their enthusiasm must be unstinting, that the louder they shouted and applauded the sooner they'd be released.

"Louder! Louder!" the captain's voice boomed from the loudspeakers as hats flew high and applause, whistles, and shouts of greetings filled the air and echoed again and again in the terrible ravines.

A week after the tragic night of January 30, the Camp Command decided that we, too, should be present at a reception, judging that the experience would provide a variety of useful lessons: those who had signed and were still in the first phase of enlightenment would learn from old-timers what they still had to do in order to achieve total transformation; those who still refused to comply would learn that they were in the minority; both groups would gain a better understanding of the nature of Makronisos.

But not knowing quite what to expect from us and afraid to take a chance that might prove dangerous, they lined us up in the back. Behind the wildly shouting, applauding crowd, we closed ranks in cold silence. Not a single woman's hand rose to applaud, not a single mouth opened to shout.

The procession of dignitaries was led by General Bairaktaris, an infamous butcher. His medals shone in the cold sunlight. He had received them for executing dozens of defensless soldiers.* Like a benevolent leader he raised his hand to salute us. But it froze in mid-air when he found himself between two icy, silent columns of ESAG women. Without looking at us he quickened his step, barely able to control his anger. The Camp Command ordered us to leave the meeting; our presence was a note of discord.

We knew we would pay for our rebellion of silence, and that night we went to bed fully dressed. It was one of the worst, and the next day we were given no drinking water.

March 5, 1950

As election day approached we waited, holding our breath. Our "reformers" were hatching plans for March 6, the day after the elections – either an all-out attack or a change in tactics, depending on the outcome. On March 5, this horrible island would either explode and disappear or become stronger and more terrible than ever – inexorably our grave.

The democratic forces defeated the right. Throughout Greece the people had dared to cast a vote for democracy. The captives of Makronisos, who yesterday had applauded their torturers and had been praised by the Camp Command for "obedient patriotism," crossed out the names of the right-wing candidates on the ballots despite threats and surveillance at the polls. The alphamites, confused and bewildered by the outcome of the elections, changed their tune. Those who dared to leave the barracks tried to exonerate themselves: they were not to blame; none of this was their doing;

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* Soldiers in the National Army who during the civil war, had refused to fight agains the Democratic Army.

they had hated what they had been forced to do to us; their hearts bled each time they were made to torture us. "We know what it is to be weak women. We have mothers, sisters, wives," they said in cajoling voices.

Wild with joy, we kissed and hugged each other, celebrating the democratic victory. We breathed freely; the cliffs and air of Makronisos seemed to have lost their harshness. The loudspeakers were silent, and in the ravines and on the mountainsides only our happy songs echoed.

But a democratic victory was not to be tolerated. The victorious party, pressured by the American Embassy with the everpresent threat to discontinue American aid to Greece, agreed to form a coalition with an important leader from the ranks of the right.

Vasilopoulos reappeared, brandishing his whip. The machine of terror resumed with vicious reprisals against soldiers who had voted for the democratic party. The nightlong inquisitions, the beatings, the harassment, and the disappearances began all over again.

Even so, we saw clearly that something had changed in Makronisos. We no longer saw timid little men who lost their voices and trembled in the presence of officers. They no longer distrusted each other: The polls had revealed to them that they were brothers: they had discovered that even though Makronisos had broken them and turned them into slaves, it had not changed them irrevocably. They hated their tormentors not so much for the physical pain as for the endless humiliation and disgrace they had inflicted upon them. With a new spirit and a new trust in themselves and in their comrades they faced the penalties of their voting transgression.

A new wave was gaining momentum in Makronisos – recantation. Every day prisoners crowded Headquarters to sign a new type of declaration: I recant the Declaration of Repentance signed under conditions of unconsciousness due to mental and physical torture inflicted upon my person in

Makronisos. I remain faithful to the people, and to my democratic ideals, and I denounce with all my heart Makronisos and its creators. *Long Live Democracy.*

A few feet away from us a new barbed-wire cage was constructed for the hundreds of soldiers who had voted for democracy. Again the ravines echoed with their cries and the cries of the recanters. But this time their screams managed to reach beyond Makronisos. The truth about the "rehabilitation" taking place in this "great school" was slowly being uncovered by the press. The Greek people and people around the world were finally becoming aware of the terrible realities of our existence.

March 13, 1950

Visiting foreign correspondents caused the Camp Command a great deal of worry – not because there wasn't a plethora of interesting items on display. The window dressing was always there: electric lights illuminating the pier; the snow-white buildings of the Headquarters tastefully decorated and full of island charm; the loudspeakers scattering happy tunes; the soldiers, "carefree and happy," playing basketball or soccer in the new athletic fields. Who would think that Makronisos wasn't one of the happiest nooks on earth?

The problem was the background – the maimed, the insane, the paralyzed. The newspapers had already written too much about those sinister ravines. If conscientious, indiscreet reporters were to find their way behind the facade, then the edifice of "rehabilitation" would crumble. To avoid this, a day or two before the visitors arrived, there was great commotion in the cages – the mad and maimed were taken to the furthest end of the island and hidden inside secret caves, where they could not be found or their screams heard. So, even if the visitors asked to see the infamous ravine, they' d find it empty, without a trace of evidence of the "malicious slander" written about Makronisos by the enemies of Greece. The problem of the unrepentant women of ESAG was solved by removing every trace of our existence from the premises and shutting us inside the tents for the duration of the visit. Our cage seemed deserted. The officers would explain to the inquiring visitors that those once occupying it had been rehabilitated, forgiven, and released.

But on March 13 we decided to change the scenario. At the crack of dawn we began to pour into the barbed-wire passage, forming endless lines in front of the latrines. In vain the alphamites, howling and cursing, tried to confine us inside our tents. The grandmothers, who because of their age were relatively safe from brutal treatment, had the task of fending off the wrath of the guards. The'd look at the guards reproachfully and ask in scolding voices: "What? do you mean to stop us from taking a piss? You can't make a law against *that*, our sons."

Finally, the Camp Command realized that they had no alternative but to let us stay outside. They lined us up in back, behind those who had signed, hoping that we would cause no more trouble, figuring that, if we had to be seen at all, they'd rather have us outside the barbed wire— a bad impression was to be avoided at any cost.

The foreign correspondents were from French and British newspapers, among them Madame Dominique Auclair from *Le Figaro*. They were escorted by the entire leadership of the camp, who led them carefully through the "safe" formations of inmates. The reporters spoke for some time with women who had signed and then were taken to inspect their tents. Trembling with excitement, we waited in silence for the reporters to approach. We wanted to talk with them, to show them the marks on our bodies. We wanted to lift even a tiny corner of the curtain hiding this place of cannibals. But the reporters were kept at a safe distance. The officers told them that we had been rehabilitated, that we would soon be going home, and that there was nothing new to be gained by talking with us. So as soon as the chats and the "inspections" were completed, the reporters were ready to depart. Everything seemed to have gone according to plan.

Suddenly something unheard of, something unprecedented in the history of Makronisos, occured. As the reporters were about to get into the car, we broke our silent ranks, and, like an overflowing river thundering down the mountain, we ran toward the reporters shouting, "Wait, Don't go yet! Don't believe anything. We'll show you the truth."

This unexpected outbreak confused officers and alphamites alike. Guns in hand, they fell on us, shouting insults. But nothing could stop us now, nothing could silence us. A woman broke through the wall of guns and ran to the reporters' car. She grasped Dominique Auclair's hand and, speaking to her in French, explained the situation, urging her to visit the hospital. The officers surrounded her, assuring her that we were crazy, hysterical women. Auclair asked them for permission to inspect the hospital. They tried to convince her that there was no hospital, no infirmary, that there was never any need for such things here.

"Straight ahead, fourth tent to the right," one of the women shouted in French as we were herded back to our cage. Some of us managed to stay with Auclair. We took her to the tent where Skevofilaka was still shouting her refusal to sign. Pale and shrivelled, she gazed at the reporters with glassy eyes. Auclair wanted to know about Skevofilaka, and about the other women moaning in the infirmary. We told her about January 30, about the ravine and the madhouse. "Madame, this is an island of torture. People die here. Take our voice, carry it to the world and save us from the hands of our executioners."

We had done what we had to do – sent our voice beyond the barbed wire. We were ready for whatever the night was going to bring.

The thermometer of optimism went up and down. Hope had touched our hearts; we had began to believe that we would soon leave Makronisos. The public demanded a general amnesty for all political prisoners, and the politicians began making pronouncements about "forgive and forget." When Plastiras* became prime minister, we were certain that we were going to be released soon. Even the commander general of Makronisos came to tell us that we would soon be going home. The prime minister himself spoke over the radio about "progressive amnesty." But again, the well-meaning prime minister was not allowed a free hand. "Progressive amnesty" was not to affect us. Only those judged "releasable" by a screening committee were freed. Yet newspapers and radios were ringing with misleading claims of mass releases, and with government announcements that the "new nation of justice for all is crushing transgressions against political prisoners everywhere and is establishing civil equality for everyone." The regime of orgiastic terror continued on Makronisos. Laws and politicians could exercise no power here.

Once, a congressman came to inspect the camp. He was escorted by officers who behind his back mocked his promises of civil liberties and amnesty.

No attempt was made to hide anything from him. The Camp Command was through with window dressing; they no longer had anything to fear. The congressman saw everything – the maimed, the mad, the sick and dying without medical care, the lack of water, the ravine. When an old woman asked him to explain to her the meaning of "civil liberties," he started to speak in jargon. "Speak to me in simple Greek, my son. I'm an old village woman, I don't understand fancy talk," she rebuked him. "Are you going to let us out of here? Yes or no?" The congressman found the courage to say that we would all go home just as soon as we signed "a little piece of paper."

"You call that 'a little piece of paper,' renouncing my own children? And you an educated man. How would you like it if your mother renounced you? But I see, you, too, are one of *them.*" The old woman turned on him with such fury that he hurried to add, "It is not my department, but I will gladly talk to the appropriate authority on your behalf," and escaped in the company of the officers to complete his inspection.

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* Old general with strong democratic principals.

May 17, 1950

The Camp Command changed. Vasilopoulos left Makronisos. In his place came Commander Demetropoulos, supposedly carrying the new liberal political spirit. Demetropoulos, a Black Beret,* drove up to our cage to greet us personally. Ironically polite, he made promises freely. We told him of the brutalities; he said it would not happen again; we told him of the lack of water, he promised we would be given more; we told him that tubercular women were wasting away inside the hot tents; he promised to send them to hospitals in Athens; we told him that we were suffocating in the tents; he promised to take care of that also.

But before eight o'clock that night the alphamites descended on us, screaming. They rushed into the tents, tramping on our bedding and smashing our lamps.

Within a few days the new commander's polite smile disappeared; in its place remained the harsh expression of the Black Beret. On the rare occasions when he came near our cage, he remained in the jeep, talking to us disdainfully with one hand on the wheel, ready to take off at the first request for the improvements he had promised.

Despite this, we never ceased to struggle to improve our life. We managed to get back the cots, five additional tents, and permission to go to the warehouse for our own food supplies, and to place our women in the kitchen to work with the cooks. We no longer ate wormy soup, and the menu for the sick and the children improved.

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* Special tank division.

The hope that we would soon return to our home never left us. The mythical "leniency measures" were the main topics in the parliament. The public continued to demand a general amnesty and the closing of the camps. The prime minister never stinted his promises. Our friends' letters were filled with hope and optimism and were signed "Godspeed" which was always crossed out by the censors.

June 14, 1950

The sereening committee came to the island. They gathered us at the amphitheater and announced:

> Don't expect that the government will release you. Understand this once and for all: nothing can save you but your sincere repentance, written, and signed. Get it through your heads that neither this nor any other government has the power to get you out of here. We are the only ones in charge of your fate. We will take you to another camp, and you will stay there until you either sign or die.

In a few days we read in the newspapers the announcements of the Vice President, George Papandreou.* It read: "The unrepentant women will be sent to an island where, while still leading the life of exile, they will now have humane living conditions."

It was clear that behind the prime minister and his government was something far more powerful – the Army and, behind that, American Aid.

Since our "democratic government" was powerless to keep its promises, it had to do something, however small, to pacify the angered public. A token release of all women age seventy and over was declared. Seventy-and eighty-year-old grandmothers who for years had been instructed in morality and patriotism at the reformatory of Makronisos were allowed to return to their homes.

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* George Papndreou succeeded Plastiras on November 1950. Many times in the past he had demonstrated his willingness to accomodate the Allies.

Their release was an occasion for celebration in the cages. For years they had watched over us and tried to shield us with their bodies. We were glad their exile was over. But our joy was mixed with pity, for they were returning to burned and deserted homes and to the graves of their children. If any of them had been spared by the bullets, they were either in hiding or still fighting in the ranks of the Democratic Army. No one would be waiting for them.

The old women, as bewildered by the news of their freedom as birds whose cage had suddenly been opened, were almost immediately put in trucks and taken away. We ran along the barbed wire to say goodbye as the trucks disappeared around a bend in the road.

"May freedom reign, our daughters," were the last words we heard from them.

Another token release was that of the nine seriously ill women to their home-town hospitals.

With this, the new politics of "forgive and forget" came to an end for the unrepentant women of Makronisos. Our life continued with more harassment, more sickness and more brutality than ever, under the torment of the merciless summer sun.

Summer is terrible in Makronisos. The cliffs give out a scorching heat, the tents are ablaze, the earth burns like red-hot iron, there is no shade anywhere. Not the smallest tree, not a shrub, no water, nothing to relieve the cruel, white heat. Constant harassment had utterly worn us out. Three times a day we had to assemble and wait endlessly in line with the sun beating down on us. The whole day was an unbearable ordeal. The women with T.B. wasted away in the burning tents, their breathing difficult and heavy, the tin cans next to them full of blood. The doctor promised that the steps necessary to move them to sanatoriums were being taken, but there was always so much red tape – a new paper to be completed, a conflicting order to be untangled.

July 1950

On a Sunday afternoon in the middle of July, we noticed an unusal movement of cars outside our cage. We ran to the barbed-wire fence and saw that the men in the cage next to ours were being taken away. Their new place of exile was going to be the tiny island of Ai-Strati in the North Aegean. That same night we learned that we, too, would be leaving soon – our destination was rumored to be desolate Trikeri, where we would stil be cut off from the whole world, without housing, a hospital, or people; where our jailers would be free to do whatever they liked, where they would be accountable to no one.

We protested, sent petitions and telegrams to the government and wrote to the newspapers informing them that the lovely words about "humane living conditions" were nothing but a fraud, designed to fool the Greek people.

A few days later, the commander presented us with a choice – he asked us to name our preference in a signed statement, Trikeri or Makronisos. "It is all up to you," he said. Disgusted, we answered that we were not about to choose between two extermination camps. We demanded to leave this island of terror, saying that it was the duty of the government to put an end to this tragedy.

The government's answer came in the form of three cargo ships. We had an hour to pack and bring everything to the pier. Still hoping that the "promised land" would not be Trikeri, we tried to find out where they were going to take us. The commander's answer was a joke: "The envelope with the orders for your destination is sealed and will be opened only after departure." We asked what was to be done with the sick. Of the fifty tubercular women, only nineteen were going to the sanatorium. The rest were to follow us into our new exile – a certain death sentence for them. The sick women refused to go, demanding to be shot on the spot. Their refusal, calm but determined, drove the alphamites into paroxysms of rage. They ordered us to carry the sick to the pier on stretchers. We answered: "It was promised that they would be taken to hospitals in Athens. We are not going to carry them to their deaths." The almphamites attacked us with wooden clubs, overturned the cots, and threw the sick women on the ground. Still, no one moved. They sent for a group of soldiers. But they too refused. Finally the commander was sent for. That was exactly what we wanted. Until then he had systematically avoided facing the sick and their blood-filled tin cans.

He realized, he said, that "the situation is sad but unavoidable." The sick women still refused to go. Finally he said he would take "personal responsibility" only for the five who at this moment were vomiting blood. The rest, "unfortunately," had to go. He was "extremely sorry," but there was nothing he could do.

The moving took all day. The police, our new masters, waited on the cargo ships to take us into custody. At sunset, on July 31, we left Makronisos.

Aphrodite Mavroede-Pandeleskou
Trikeri 1951

Perhaps someday when all is known, when the icecore of memory thaws again
when colors are back again
maybe some day the doors will open – doors of houses, of prisons, of laws
Perhaps the only ones to understand will be the children
rich from our inheritance
unforgiving in their memories
children may read for once in time
the clumsy messages of the shipwreck
correcting the errors
deleting the lies
naming accurately
children marked by lightning
the knowledge of their loneliness, their strength
that came to us too late
perhaps the children will catch up with life
for one moment before dark
then there shall be nothing left of me
neither remorse, nor my touch upon your hand
I'll flow in all the rivers
spelling your name with all the snows heaped on precipices
I will have crossed the dark I feared
and my body dead but intact once more
shall rest surrounded by your remembrance
and this sun – and this sunlit life
and this sunlit –
this sunlit life.

—"Marina", from *The State of Siege*

BACK AT TRIKERI

In August 1950 the 480 women who had refused to sign the Declaration of Repentance at Makronisos returned to their familiar haunts of Trikeri. They were the few "lucky" ones who had outlasted that hell, the ones who had made it. Their punishment for their endurance was to continue "disciplined existence" cut off from the rest of the world for an "indeterminite number of years."

In early dawn the cargo ship spat us out near the wells into the waiting hands of police units. The new commander ordered us to set up camp at our old campsite, the bare and desolate west cape. But, tried and tested by hardship, we ignored both his orders and his threats. Indifferent to everything but our own instinct for survival and the need for solidarity, we refused to go and firmly demanded that the monastery be opened to us.

After a month-long stay in the open air, we put the sick on the stretchers, picked up our bundles, and quietly walked up the little hill and took over the monastery cells and grounds. We arranged our things and settled the sick women on the cots. Then we cleaned up the kitchens, and settled into the tents, which we put up in the courtyard.

There we stayed, and no one dared to say anything about it. We could have roamed the island at will, but we did not have even the strength to walk down to the cove for a swim.

We felt secure only in and around the monastery. We didn't even venture into the fields for wild vegetables, mushrooms, and snails. We stood still, conserving our energy. Our only preoccupation was writing letters everywhere, asking, pleading, demanding our freedom. We were almost all sick. Even the youngest and strongest among us had been overcome by fear and depression.

Soon we realized that we were going to be there for a long, long time, that the camps would go on forever. We rose from our inertia then, fully determined once more to create a new life for ourselves, no matter where or how. We regrouped our resources, gathered our strength and knowledge, and began to build again.

Trikeri became again a beehive of activity, a unique monastery for women. The ground cells, bright with whitewash, became shops and workrooms. Here Kallirhoe and her apprentices worked all day long, making new sandals and mending old boots, song and laughter always on their lips. Further down, the women from Pondos made mattresses and quilts. Next door was the carpentry shop, where Foto and her helpers made tubs, stools, beds for the children, benches, and tables. From tin cans we made braziers, pots, lamps, and oil stoves. Boubou, Evanghelia, and other dressmakers fitted us with old clothes sent by our relatives, turning them into smart, fashionable dresses, which we wore with pride and joy. There was a studio for painters and a music room where the choral groups practiced new songs and discussion groups met, where the keepers of our records and the writers of the journals you have just read retired to work.

Argiro Koutifari, a gym teacher, gathered us early in the morning on the plateau for an hour of flexing and stretching. There we organized games of volleyball, basketball, and soccer; there we danced and sang and acted in skits of our own making. Titika Papanikolaou, Mary Alexiadou, Kate

Vandourou, Lilian Kondopoulou, Rosa Imvrioti, expert and wise teachers, taught us French, English, German, mathematics, philosophy, and literature.

That's how I left them in the winter of 1952, when my name was called from a list of those released on furlough.* They were unshaken, though entirely despairing, possessed by their vision, living outside ordinary time, uncompromising, romantic.

In April 1953 only nineteen women and ten guards were left on the island, and in September they were relocated at Ai-Strati, where they lived for many more years with the remaining men in exile.

Today Trikeri is green and peaceful. Vacationers walk along its beaches and under the cool shade of its pine forests. The sadness of the monastery has disappeared; the cypresses remain. At the east gate, where every morning we used to gather to be counted, the rising sun illuminates the promise we made: Never Again!

Victoria Theodorou

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* Because of public pressure, the camps were phased out in the 1950s. Most 'unrepentant' prisoners were released with furloughs. That is, with temporary passes issued only through the intervention of persons in a position of influence. The passes had to be renewed montly, at the discretion of the police. The political prisoners who had no one to speak on their behalf were sent to Ai-Strati. Many of those released on furlough were exiled once more by the Colonels in 1967. All political prisoners were released in 1974, when the Colonels' government collapsed.

WOMEN OF TRIKERI AND MAKRONISOS

When the whale spat me out on this beach
I was too dazed to understand their warning
carved on the cliffs. Too sick to be afraid.
“Hope for nothing” it read.
Later, when I took in its meaning
I scorned it
Hope! what use is it to me, I thought.
The sea will stand by me
and the olive tree
I am not the first to taste exile
But I will be the last.
I will abolish it with my life.
I swear.*

– Victoria Theodorou, from *Picnic*

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* *Greek Women Poets*, p. 6.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Evangelia Fotaki, a woman of letters and a journalist from Heraklion, Crete. "She thought deeply about the world and her place in it," reminisces Victoria Theodorou. "I remenber her light-filled face, her laughter, her noble stature".

Evangelia's role in the resistance was writing for the Free Press. When the Germans left, she was exiled to Trikeri and Makronisos. After her release, she married and had two children. However, the hardships of exile undermined her already delicate health, causing her death in 1972.

Victoria Theodorou joined the Resisistance at the age of fifteen in 1941, when Crete refused to sign the armistice and continued to fight the Germans. During the occupation, Victoria served as a messenger, helping to keep supplies and information flowing between Hania and the mountains.

After the war, she went to Athens where she hoped to find anonymity and to finish her studies. A few months later however, she was arrested and exiled to Trikeri.

"There are many reasons we did not sign the Declaration of Repentance," says Victoria. "For one thing, we believed in our struggle and we were faithful to it. We had done nothing to be ashamed of – quite the opposite. It was also a matter of personal pride "stubbornness" as they called it. Finally, some of us decided to become symbols of Resistance. Those were times of violence and betrayal. We could not allow the idea and the act of Resistance to be totally obliterated, we had to keep it alive, no matter what."

Today, Victoria Theodorou lives in Filothei with her two daughters and her husband. She has written many volumes of poetry and prose.

Aphrodite Mavroede-Pandeleskou, "Aphro" was born in Kalamata. She was seventeen years old when, as a member of EPON, she began writing pamphlets designed to keep up the morale of the people. When her activities became known, she moved "underground" and wrote for the Free Press throughout the German occupation. When the war ended, she was exiled to Trikeri and later to Makronisos.

"Resistance was a tradition in my family," Aphro says. "That we had to resist was a given, the question was *how?*"

Today, Mrs. Pandeleskou lives with her husband in Athens, and is a column writer for the newspaper *Avgi.*

Katerina Hariati-Sismani was born on the island of Zakynthos. World War II found her in charge of a large family of younger brothers and sisters. She became a political organizer during the German occupation. Subsequently, she was charged for anti-national activities, and exiled to Trikeri and to Makronisos.

"Once at Makronisos Headquarters," she reminisces, "during a session of 'convincing' us to sign the Declaration of Repentance, a guard told me that my turn would come in five minutes, and gleefully asked me what I thought *'now?'* I answered him that the only thing I was thinking was how to draw what was haphening."

Throughout the years of her exile, Katerina, with charcoal from their fire or pencil when she could find one, drew the faces of her comrades – their strength, their defiance, and their determination.

Mrs. Hariati is today an accomplished and prolific painter, and lives with her son in Kipseli, Athens.

Spiros Meletzis was born on the island of Imvros eighty years ago. At a very young age he went to Athens where he worked single-mindedly on becoming a photographer. Besides the unique visual history of the Resistance, he has also given us several books of phographs of rural Greece.

In his book, *With the Partisans in the Mountains,* he writes: "I had to go to them as soon as I heard about them. I was like a child listening to stories of magicians and giants, imagining them taller than mountains, stronger than steel. I imagined the partisans as strange, superhuman beings, flying over Olympus like eagles, leaping over ravines like mountain lions – fearless, unvanquished.

Meletzis went to the mountains in 1942, expressly to photograph the partisans. Later, he became their official photographer, and, without a gun, he walked with them photographing their triumphs and defeats.

He leaves Athens and his wife Ioulia every summer to climb to his old haunts on Mount Olympus.

In a State of Siege was written in February 1968, in a prison hospital in Athens by Rena Hatzidaki, under the pseudonym *"Marina."* By chance, the poem came to the attention of Mikis Theodorakis who immediately put it to music. As a song, it became a great success, and it was played illegally throughout Greece during the seven-year Junta.