Buried Silences of the Greek Civil War[1]

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The Greek Paradox

Several societies in the Balkans and Southern Europe have invested in the symbolic capital inherent in mass graves. The public exhumations and reburials of World War II victims of atrocities carried out by the Croat military units of Ustasha were powerful symbols of Serbian nationalism in the former Yugoslavia (Denich 1994:382). More recently, the effort to exhume, identify, and bury the remains of the approximately 30,000 persons that went missing during the war in Bosnia (1992−95) has become a way to deal with the violent past, as the process provides some form of closure (Wagner 2010). The Cypriot case is more puzzling. During the two major stages of violence in the island (1963−67 and 1974), approximately 2,000 persons went missing from both communities (Sant Cassia 2005; Kovras and Loizides 2011). The unresolved problem of the missing became the symbol of the impossibility of peaceful coexistence between the two communities (Sant Cassia 2006). Since the early 2000s, however, despite the absence of a political settlement and the *de facto* partition of the island for almost four decades, the bi-communal Committee on Missing Persons (CMP) has been successful in exhuming, identifying and returning the remains to the relatives. The CMP has become so successful, in fact, that it has paved the way for the emergence of other pro-reconciliation grassroots actors that transcend the divide (Kovras 2012). Finally, the exhumations of the *desaparecidos* (disappeared) of the Spanish Civil War (1936−39) led to crumbling of the "pact of silence" that dominated Spanish politics since the consolidation of democracy in late 1970s (Ferrándiz 2006).[2]

Since the early 1990s a consensus been reached by policymakers and academics that dealing with the traumatic past constitutes not only a moral imperative but is the best way to move forward and consolidate peace and democracy.[3] Stock phrases like "revealing is healing" or "dealing with the past" now dominate public debates. The considerably revised international normative context ─ that reserves privileged position for the discourse of human rights ─ partly explains the growing demand for truth, and for justice as a form of catharsis. Similarly, the recovery of "forensic" truth from mass graves gradually has become synonymous with the effort of societies to face their violent past.[4] This trend is also found in the relentless demand by international media for powerful images of suffering, such as bereaved relatives in the exhumation sites (Ferrándiz and Baer 2008).

Irrespective of the reasons why societies decide to "unearth" violent chapters of their past, exhumations of common graves and the identification of victims of violence have become central policies in the agenda of peace-building. There is a tendency in the literature to focus on "success stories", where exhumations have been implemented, including but not limited to notable cases in Latin America and Former Yugoslavia. Little attention has been paid to why certain countries resist this trend.

Greece is especially interesting as it seems to conflate two trends: although a policy of exhumations of the victims of the Civil War has never been implemented, over the past three decades, several unofficial exhumations have been carried out in the island of Lesvos. The violent legacy of the Greek Civil War left thousands dead, many more were refugees, and an unknown number had been executed and buried in common graves.[5] With the exception of Lesvos, the overall Greek experience contravenes both the relevant experience of neighboring countries discussed above and the hypotheses of the literature. For one thing, Greece's transition

to democracy was a textbook case that satisfied all the requirements of Transitional Justice, including the trials of the coupists and the establishment of policies of lustration (Sotiropoulos 2010). In addition, in almost any part of Greece, the living memory of clandestine executions/disappearances foregrounds the demand for truth. Finally, one of the biggest mass graves in Europe, located in the region of Florina in northern Greece, contains an estimated 700 persons.[6] Given this, one might have expected Greek society to be the first to "unearth" the divisive past; yet Spain whose amnesty law forbade any reference to past atrocities (Aguilar 2002) led the way by exhuming the *desaparecidos*, albeit tardily.[7]

Why do certain societies defer the recovery of the bodies of those executed in a traumatic period? Why do the relatives of some victims remain reluctant (or ineffective) in their demand for truth? To address these questions, we examine the interesting experience of the Greek island of Lesvos. It contravenes the national experience of silence because exhumations were carried from the 1980s to the 2000s. In what follows, we discuss the role of bones in the Greek-Orthodox tradition specifically, as well as the symbolic value of remains in post-traumatic societies more generally. We consider why policies of exhumations were never implemented in Greece, before focusing on the instructive case of Lesvos and its choice of a different path. In the concluding section, we offer a number of insights that can be drawn from the Greek experience.

The Symbolic and Analytical value of Bones

It seems that in contemporary nation-states, the dead take on a vibrant political life because "the dead body is a mark of good political symbol: it has legitimating effects not because everyone agrees on its meaning but because it compels interest despite divergent views of what it means" (Verdery 1999:31). Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities* captures

the symbolic capital of the dead body in the culture of nationalism, by referring to the "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier" (Anderson 1991:9).

It is precisely because dead bodies are such powerful political symbols that the study of exhumations (and non-exhumations) can be a useful analytical tool to understand how different post-traumatic societies deal with their violent past. As the human community is composed of both living and dead (Verdery 1999:108), the decision to unearth, identify and bury properly the dead body which was previously buried in a common grave signifies a major political decision that changes the way we look at our past. As McEvoy and Conway aptly remark, "The question who 'owns' the dead is not simply a question of the exclusive exercise of authority over the remains, but is inextricably linked to the notion of who 'owns' the past" (2004:593).

These moral tensions between the past and the present are even more acute in post-conflict societies where the moral duty to honor the dead may be at odds with the needs to look forward and consolidate peace and democracy (Lederach 1998:177). Hence, studying the "politics of (non)exhumations", can tell us a great deal about how societies deal with their traumatic past. Victoria Sanford notes: "Mass graves of massacre victims […] were hidden in that they were silenced, but survivors, witnesses and most community members know the locations of these graves" (2003:17). The study of clandestine graves is analytically important because it provides insights into the social construction of silence as well as the local dynamics of "resistance" to this hegemonic silence.

Although in most cultures the recovery of human remains is critical in the mourning process of the relatives, there are exceptions. For example in his fascinating study of the families of missing in Timor, Simon Robins, shows that access to the remains is not essential to confirm the fate of the disappeared as contact with spirits can remove ambiguity by using a substitute

body to perform the ritual (Robins 2013). Yet, the Greek-Orthodox tradition reserves a sacred position for human remains. Exhumation of remains is seen as a "rite of passage", a necessary stage for the deceased to enter paradise (Danforth 1982: 50-62). The condition and color of the bones serve as indications that the soul of the dead has entered the paradise and had a "good soul" (*kalopsychos*) (Danforth 1982: 50-62). In fact, the whole burial ritual is based on the premise that (impure) flesh should decompose naturally in order to leave bones untouched; the central role of bones partly explains why cremations are prohibited in the Greek-Orthodox tradition.[8] Apart from the deceased though, the process of exhumations signifies a "rite of passage" for the family as well. The exhumation of the body indicates the end of a period of mourning – especially for female relatives – and their re-incorporation to the human community (Danforth 1982: 50-62).

Human remains are also central in the Greek national identity which is founded on a linear view of history, from Ancient to contemporary Greece. The bones link *time* and *space*, two important ingredients of Greek nationalism. For example, the bodies of the Greek-Cypriot persons that went missing in 1974 in the northern part of the island, currently under the control of the Turkish Cypriot community, demark the (imaginary) borders of the Greek (Cypriot) community. As Paul Sant Cassia shows, the role of the dead body and human remains are also central in Greek literature and poetry (Sant Cassia 2005:102). Ilias Venezis, in his famous book *Aioliki Gi* (Aeolian Earth), describes the experience of a group of recently displaced Asia Minor Greeks and their decision to carry the remains of their ancestors to the new land. Perhaps the starkest illustration of the sanctity of the bones in the Greek tradition is the national anthem. Based on the poem "Hymn to Liberty", written by Dionysios Solomos, the anthem glorifies the bravery of the ancestors in securing liberty. The most renowned verses go: "From the sacred

bones, of the Hellenes arisen, and strengthened by your antique bravery, hail, o hail, Liberty!". This makes the topic of exhumation an extremely interesting one in the Greek case.

The Greek Civil War and the Case of Lesvos

The Greek Civil War was fought between the Greek Democratic Army (DSE) officially formed in December 1946 under the auspices of the Communist Party and the National (governmental) Army.[9] The war was the outcome of a highly polarized, socially and politically unstable period, closely connected to the brutal German, Italian and Bulgarian Occupation (1941−1944). The Communist defeat, following the last act of the Civil War drama played out at the end of August 1949 on the mountains of northwestern Greece lead the country into a long period of turmoil and instability. The end of the Civil War resulted in widespread persecution, repression, abuse, banishment and incarceration for the leftist citizens; the Greek Communist Party (KKE) remained outlawed until 1974 and its members and sympathizers were treated as social and political pariahs.

The Greek Civil War, considered one of the first episodes of the Cold War, had disastrous socio-economic and political effects that were to formulate the everyday lives of the population. The Civil War (and the preceding Axis occupation) left a painful legacy, including famine, destruction and evacuation of villages, political refugees and the deportation of thousands of Greeks, tens of thousands of dead on both sides, and the victimization of women, children and elderly.[10] The socio-political consequences and traumatic ─ both personal and collective ─ memories of the Civil War defined the Greek political culture and local political identities until the fall of the military dictatorship (1967−74) and the transition to multi-party democracy.

Concurrently, the country remained divided between two opposing poles, the communists or leftists and their supporters and the nationally minded citizens.[11] These socio-political divisions were not as evident or as rigid in Lesvos as in other areas, for instance, in northern Greece or the Peloponnese. This can be attributed to two factors: the democratic tradition of the island and the fact that it had not witnessed mass executions of and atrocities against the local population by either side during the Civil War.

Even so, Lesvos was a communist stronghold, and the climate of fear, polarization and persecution, primarily against the democratic and leftist citizens was intense, forcing partisans to flee to the mountains. Besides the gendarmerie, the perpetrators of violence were paramilitaries and rightist bands that targeted well-known members of the Communist Party and leftists, as well as their families, relatives and members of the local communities.[12] By the end of summer 1946, a significant number of guerrillas had fled to the mountains of the island and three main armed groups were created, one situated in the northwest, another in the area of Agiasos, a village built on the inland slopes of Mount Olympus at an altitude of 967 meters, and the third in Gera in the south of the island.[13] Six main battles took place in Lesvos between the governmental and gendarmerie forces and the Democratic Army of Lesvos (DSL), a branch of the Greek Democratic Army (DSE), including one deadly ambush; 68 guerrilla fighters of the DSL were killed or executed during the battles, more than 60% of its total manpower; 14 leftists or communist sympathizers (including three women) were executed or murdered by paramilitaries; 22, primarily political detainees, were executed or died away from the island during exile due to hardships and lack of medical treatment.[14]

Despite this opposition, the violent activity of DSL in Lesvos was actually quite restrained. In other regions, especially in Macedonia and the Peloponnese, it committed a

number of atrocities against local communities. But the survival of DSL depended exclusively on voluntary contributions, including food, medicine and tolerance/cover, from the locals rather than the central mechanism of DSE, which was based in the inaccessible region of Macedonia. This partly explains why DSL did not direct its violent action against the larger population in Lesvos; simply stated, to survive, it needed to gain the support of locals. Some crimes were committed against individual locals, but these were guided by personal motivations and interests (for example, crimes of honor and revenge) causing distress to the relatives of the victims, of course, but not decimating whole populations as elsewhere.[15] One can reasonably expect the aftermath of the Civil War to be quite different in Lesvos, given this relative restraint.

Reconciliation through Silence

Over the past few decades, exhumations have become a key policy tool to bring about reconciliation in deeply divided societies that has been deployed by major international organizations such as the UN. Yet, Greece remains resistant to this norm. The Greek policies of national reconciliation in the period following the consolidation of democracy (1974) did not include exhumations.

The coming to power of the socialist party (PASOK) in 1981 signified a turn in the national discourse about the past by taking measures of symbolic and economic repair to the "defeated".[16] Yet because these moves were guided by electoral considerations, they were shortsighted and failed to establish a comprehensive policy of reconciliation. The formation of a coalition government composed of the main parties of the left and the right in 1989 finally shaped a national policy of reconciliation in Greece.[17] The coalition government passed the law on the "official rehabilitation of the defeated of the Civil War" and also provided financial

benefits/pensions to the disabled participants of the defeated (Close 2004:265). Paradoxically, the most essential aspect of the policy of reconciliation was the unprecedented decision of the government to burn millions of personal files of leftists from the past decades (Close 2004:265). Interestingly, the parties representing the defeated perceived the "burning of the past"— and subsequently silence — as a prerequisite of reconciliation.

It seems, then, that at the political level, a subtle agreement was reached to silence certain inconvenient aspects of the violent past, precluding the possibility of truth recovery processes such as exhuming mass graves.[18] The strategy of silence is frequently used by political elites in an effort to eschew the past and address more effectively critical political objectives like democratic consolidation and reconciliation. Yet it remains puzzling why the relatives/descendants of those buried in common graves did not initiate a bottom-up pressure group to demand the rectification of the injustice done to their relatives. As democratic consolidation and accession to the EC/EU offered new institutional tools, one might have expected the emergence of a grassroots truth-seeking actor demanding the recovery of the inappropriately buried of the Civil War. A grassroots actor similar to the Spanish NGOs that promotes policies of exhumations has yet to emerge in Greece.[19]

To understand why unearthing individual victims of the Civil War was never included in the agenda of the political parties or civil society, consider the case of Florina. As noted above, one of the biggest mass graves in Europe, containing approximately 700 members of DSE, is found in this region of northern Greece. The mass grave, often called the *lakka* (the pit) by the locals, is in a plot just a kilometer outside Florina; it often goes unnoticed, as the only visible object is a stone-plate. **(FIGURE 7.1 HERE)** The most significant factor that constrains both local politicians (representing the defeated) and civil society from exhuming the grave is the

prospect of facing inconvenient truths. More specifically, although the personal details of those buried in the grave remain unknown, there are rumors that a sizeable number of the fallen were Slav-Macedonians youths violently recruited from the neighboring region of Naousa.[20] The prospect of verifying in a scientific way that violence was a strategy DSE used to recruit fighters has the potential to delegitimize the master narrative of the defeated, namely that they fought for a noble cause and their members were idealists. Meanwhile, civil society remains reluctant to open the grave because identification of Slav-Macedonians remains among the victims could potentially lead to a new confrontational chapter in the "Macedonian conflict".[21] Hence, the politicization of the mass grave in Florina and its relationship to one of the most sensitive issues of the Greek foreign policy, the Macedonian problem, prevents the possibility of opening it. Exhumations are like a "Pandora's box"; once you start "digging" up the past you can never be sure what you will find.

Civil War Exhumations: The "Paradox"of Lesvos

Whereas Florina is typical, Lesvos is an outlier case; it is the only known place where victims of the Civil War have been exhumed over the past decades. Lesvos is situated in a privileged location, bridging the Aegean with the Black Sea; it has been a cultural crossroad for East and West and an important commercial centre for sea trade and the industrial production of local goods.[22] Self-sufficient economically, with a rich cultural tradition in arts and literature (including some of the most influential Greek poets, writers, painters and educators), and having integrated the traditions of the post-1922 Asia Minor refugees, Lesvos provides an ideal setting for critical political thinking and democratic, participatory political culture.

Combining the local intelligentsia with the craftsmen, merchants and rural workers, the island's unique socio-political conditions enabled the formation of a strong leftist tradition. At the same time, even though the island also has a rich religious tradition and important Orthodox monuments, the Greek Orthodox faith and religious beliefs seem to peacefully coexist with the leftist and Communist political beliefs. A typical example is Mantamados, a village in the northeast of the island, known as the "small Moscow" due to the high electoral percentages of the Communist Party. Meanwhile, the village patron saint, St. *Taxiarchis* (Archangel), is highly respected among the local population, leftists included.[23]

Lesvos is also known as the "red island" because of its strong Communist, leftist and democratic traditions. Within its local culture of tolerance, during the Civil War, those on the right were tolerant of the guerrillas and as noted above, the fighters of the DSL did not commit atrocities against the local population as a form of retaliation. The mutual tolerance is reflected in the fact that the last two DSL guerrillas to drop their arms, Giorgos Skoufos and Kostas Achlioptas, left the mountains of Lesvos in 1955, more than five years after the official termination of the Civil War.[24] The two guerillas managed to survive thanks to the sympathetic attitude of the local communities.[25]

Within this tolerant setting and following an unofficial bottom-up reconciliation process, the exhumations in Lesvos can be roughly placed into three periods: the first attempts took place in absolute secrecy from the early 1950s until the early 1960s; the second and most visible wave occurred in the 1980s during the democratic consolidation; finally, in 2009, there was renewed interest in exhumations. Because of the clandestine nature of the first exhumations, information about them is limited, coming from either oral testimonies or material traces uncovered in subsequent exhumations. We therefore focus on the second and third periods, identifying six

cases of successful or attempted exhumations initiated and undertaken in most cases by former comrades, relatives and (mostly leftist) local administration representatives. Out of these six cases we elaborate on the sixth, unfinished exhumation, as an exemplary case, which we believe best demonstrates both the local specificities of Lesvos and the political complexities of silencing and resistance to strategies of silence in the wider framework of negotiating Civil War legacies in Greece. **(FIGURE 7.2 HERE)**

On August 1, 1982, the former comrades of Dimitris Pitaoulis, the captain of the Democratic Army of Lesvos (DSL), attempted to exhume his remains in the Agiasos pine forest (*Megali Limni*) where he was accidentally killed when his gun went off on December 10, 1947.[26] During the exhumation his comrades realized that the makeshift grave had already been excavated and some of the bones were missing; probably due to a previous secret exhumation by his relatives (Skoufos 2009:197). The remains were transferred by Pitaoulis's comrades to his hometown, Agiasos, to the offices of the Partisan Basis Organization (KOB), where they are still kept. A few months later, on December 5, 1982, at the outskirts of the town of Mytilene in Kratigos, another exhumation took place on the site where seven DSL fighters were executed on April 29, 1947. On July 24, 1983, in Lambous Mylous, six guerrilla fighters killed during the *Seitan-Ntere* Battle (February 21, 1948) by governmental forces and whose bodies were thrown along the roadside, were exhumed by relatives, former comrades, Communist Party representatives in Lesvos and locals.[27] **(FIGURE 7.3 HERE)** A few months later, on October 9, 1983, in Aghia Paraskevi, another exhumation took place, this time of five guerrilla fighters; among them were three well-known DSL captains. The DSL captains and fighters were killed by the gendarmerie and governmental forces on October 1950 during the last civil war battle in Lesvos. Their corpses were degraded in several villages and then buried in a field outside the

village. **(FIGURE 7.4 HERE)** Two years later, in 1985, the mayor of Eressos, Giorgos Karakousis, with the support of the Communist Party (KKE), attempted to exhume the body of Manolis Philipou, also known as Karakostas. A native of Eressos, Karakostas, was killed along with four others during a battle in the spring of 1947. Their bodies were displayed in the village square and then buried in a common grave in the cemetery. No remains were found, however, in the area indicated as the site of execution.

On the New Year's Eve 1948, eight months before the official end of the Greek Civil War, 13 guerrilla fighters of the Democratic Army of Lesvos were ambushed by governmental and paramilitary forces in Lesvos (Ippeios area). They were killed by a woman refugee from Asia Minor, Eleni Iordanoglou (or Zoulfie Hanoum), known also as "Tserkeza", who settled on the island after the 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe. She was closely connected to the local authorities, including the gendarmerie (especially Gendarmerie Commander Skourtis), but reportedly also had ties with General Plastiras who had served as the Prime Minister in several occasions.[28] She offered to feed the guerrilla group. They decided to accept her invitation, despite their initial hesitation and suspicions, mostly because they had not eaten or drunk water for days. They explored the area before entering and they made her taste beforehand the food and beverages she offered: *vasilopita*, the traditional Greek pie cut for good luck on the final day of the year (on New Year's Eve), *melomakarona* (*foinikia* in the dialect of Lesvos), soft Christmas cookies and wine. She left the hut (*dami)*, lit her cigarette and ignited the hut which was surrounded by ammunition. The 13 fighters were buried in the ruins; six of them were killed on the spot; the remaining seven however, managed to escape severely wounded. The bodies of the six guerrillas were informally buried by the authorities in a ditch near the village cemetery. **(FIGURE 7.5 HERE)** Almost 60 years after their death, in the summer of 2009, the local

authorities, along with the local representatives of the Greek Communist Party and the relatives of the victims, decided to exhume their bodies, to properly bury them and to have a political memorial.

The exhumation process, however, proved to be more complex than expected. First, it was conducted without formal approval by the state. Second, the bones that were found belonged to a female suicide,[29] not to the guerilla fighters. Thus, local claims that relatives of the killed guerrillas secretly removed their bones in the midst of state terrorism in 1952 were confirmed. In fact, it was revealed that the bones of one of the guerrillas had been kept in secrecy for years at a relative's house.[30]

The locals recall that at the time, these six corpses were moved over a period of days in a carriage from village to village, until they started to smell and had to be buried in a common grave. They say that in another instance, the dead bodies of guerrillas were exposed in an open pit, with an inscription reading "come and throw a rock on the bones of the anathemas."[31] Most of the dead were displayed in central parts of the village, usually in the village square and were moved from village to village for derision and vilification by the local population before being buried in makeshift mass graves, even in landfills.[32] This was the case with two guerrilla fighters who were killed in the spring of 1949 and buried in a dump; but when people secretly left flowers on this "burial site", the authorities had to bury them elsewhere (Kalogeras and Koutskoudis 2002:49).

Within the Greek Orthodox religious tradition, the bodies of the dead and the rituals of burial and mourning have important symbolic connotations. They help the family to honor their dead, to mourn and to heal.[33] The relatives clean the corpse and dress the deceased in good clothes. Following death, the soul is understood to wander for 40 days in the surroundings of the

dead. For this reason, a candle at the family house should remain lit. The body is buried for at least three years for it to decompose. The decomposition process is crucial, since it is during this period, that the person's sins are to be forgiven; if the bones turn white, the sins are forgiven and the deceased rests in peace and is admitted to Paradise (Buck Sutton 2001).[34] The bones are then transferred to the ossuary. During the decomposition period, the grave becomes a sacred place for close relatives and is visited often, cleaned religiously by the women of the family, and adorned with flowers, candles, personal belongings and a photograph of the dead.[35]

If we shift the focus of attention to the link between the Greek-Orthodox doctrine and the local traditions in Lesvos the picture becomes even more fascinating. More specifically, one of the striking features of the local identity is the harmonious blend of two seemingly contradictory identities: the religious-orthodox with the leftist-communist. Lesvos is celebrated as a place of worship of two orthodox saints (*Rafael* and *Taxiarchis*) whose reputation for (allegedly) causing miracles exceeds Lesvos. Simultaneously, as already discussed, it is also known as the "little Moscow", as it remains a stronghold of the Greek left. Yet, the vast majority of leftists in Lesvos have traditionally been religious. During the Nazi occupation in 1940s, the leader of the only organized resistance group, the National Liberation Front (hereafter EAM), was the Bishop of Lesvos, Dionysios. In his first speech after the liberation of the island, he stressed that "Christianity and Communism are two movements that run parallel in their struggle for bringing about peace and justice in the world" (cited in Marantzidis 1997:60). This contradicts the national experience; throughout 1940s there was a clear rift between the communist-led EAM and the Greek Church, which became even more acute during the Civil War. Hence, the pivotal role of exhumations in the Greek-orthodox doctrine coupled with the unique local blend of orthodox faith with communism, may partly account for the emergence of a pressing demand to

unearth the remains of local victims of the Civil War. So, let us proceed to the examination of the conditions that enabled this outcome.

Why did exhumations take place in Lesvos?

The Lesvos exhumations extend over a period of 60 years, but three features remain constant: they are informal, local and depoliticized. The elements overlap, making Lesvos a unique case. The first exhumations in the early 1950s and early 1960s were carried out by the relatives, wives or other close family members in absolute secrecy, because of post civil-war persecution, fear and harassment.[36] Those occurring in the early 1980s, during the period of "national reconciliation" were more organized, but again quite informal, with no official endorsement by political parties or the government. They were typically initiated by the local communities: relatives, former guerrilla fighters, local representatives, including members of the Communist Party, and local residents. And as the most recent "unsuccessful" exhumation in the summer of 2009 indicates, all three factors remain salient today and are distinctive of the Lesvos context. In their informality, they are also indicative of the overall nature of reconciliation in Greece.

When we look at the almost 60 years of exhumations in Lesvos, we see that despite the ongoing silence about some aspects of the Civil War and the occasional manipulation or marginalization of past experiences, memories and traumas, the case of Lesvos indicates that the past can be re-written and memory re-created or retrieved (Verdery 1999:3) in more inclusive terms, through localized, depoliticized acts of resistance.

As has been noted, the exhumations in the early 1980s were initiated by the local communities, the relatives and former cadres and, in some cases, by the local representatives and

local cadres of the Communist Party, but were not directed by a central Communist Party order. However, it should be emphasized that in the "Tserkeza" exhumation, the initiative belonged to the village (Euergetoula) mayor, Mihalis Polypathellis, who was elected with the support of the right-wing party *Nea Dimokratia* (New Democracy). In fact, during the exhumation, the mayor stated to the local newspapers that beyond the event's historical dimension and significance, "the dead are dead and are at least entitled to be buried like everyone else…we also believe that these incidents should be highlighted for many reasons" (July 1, 2009, Newspaper Empros). Furthermore, besides the KKE-supported mayor of Agiasos, Hrysanthos Hatzipanayiotis, and the former guerrillas, among them the only living survivor, Thrasyvoulos Bousdos, a retired senior officer of the Gendarmerie, Thanasis Siskas, was also present.[37] Additionally, the former DSL guerrilla fighter, Giorgos Skoufos, stated during the memorial that the intention "is not to blame and seek the guilty, the [local political] opponents [or our co-villagers] who were misled or feared…they are forgotten and most importantly forgiven. But we will never forget and forgive the real culprits of this national tragedy, [namely] the British and American imperialists [and their collaborators]" (July 1, 2009, Empros). Despite that this was an organized event, the context largely remains informal; the Prefectural Committee of the Communist Party was informed, but a license to proceed was not requested on a governmental level.

For the local communities, former comrades and relatives, a proper burial and the rectification of a past injustice is the primary motive, while the Communist Party seeks the restoration of historical truth, regardless of how inconvenient that truth may turn out to be.[38] For the relatives, a proper burial according to the Greek Orthodox Christian beliefs and traditions seems to be key as it can rectify past wrongs, and help them to heal and come to terms with their traumatic memories. The localized and depoliticized processes of the Lesvos exhumation and its

silence should also be perceived as an instrument deployed by local communities and relatives to protect their children from traumatic truths, thus breaking the cycle of trauma and violence. Let us give a more concrete example. The father of two of our interviewees from the village of Eressos was executed during the Civil War for being a member of DSE. Being a relative of a leftist was a major stigma. For this reason, his son could not find a job to support his family while he was prohibited from migrating to Western Europe as his record was stigmatized by his father's activities. So, for several years after the Civil War, even though younger, the female members of the family assumed the role of breadwinners. Thirty-five years after the conclusion of the war, the son became the mayor of the village. One of his first initiatives was to unearth the remains of victims of DSE who were killed in the battle of Eressos (Aetos). The exhumation was unsuccessful, as it seems that information over the burial site was wrong. Still, even after several decades he felt that he had a moral obligation to address this issue, as his own father was executed in Athens but the body was never recovered.

Regardless of the specific motives, scope and objectives, they are all interrelated, pointing to the importance of knowing the fate of the dead, to the symbolic capital of the bones, and to the political and historical meaning of the remains.[39] Humanitarian exhumations have the potential to bridge the gap between the often conflicting tensions between the individual right of the relatives to know the truth and the societal perception that silence is the best way to move forward.

Conclusion: Lessons from Greece

There are several important insights to be gleaned from the investigation of the understudied Greek Civil War. Although Greece's policy of reconciliation is based on silence,

the outlier case of Lesvos shows that it is often an analytic mistake to equate the national level with local experience. The exhumations in Lesvos show that local communities can resist hegemonic silence. Victoria Sanford rightly asks: "How silent are silences"? (2003:7). It is frequently argued that societies tend to "forget" or to deal with the past by forgetting. Yet the experience of Lesvos illustrates that people *do not forget*, they decide at times *to remain silent* and this is an instrumental – not a passive – decision.[40] Remaining silent does not necessarily indicate that local communities surrender to this silence; in fact, in Lesvos exhumations were subtle acts of resistance. As Scott argues, acts of resistance "require little or no coordination or planning; they often represent a form of individual self-help and typically avoid any direct confrontation with authority or with elite norms" (1985:29).

In Lesvos, the three waves of exhumations had a strong local identity. They were seen as a rectification of a past injustice, but they were depoliticized and definitely did not provoke a counter-reaction. Political parties remain the central actors managing the political memory of the past; the only way to circumvent this top-bottom approach is through bottom-up action, taking ownership of the situation. In fact, local ownership is of paramount importance in explaining why exhumations took place in Lesvos but not in other parts of Greece.

The Greek experience can provide useful lessons to contemporary post-traumatic societies. Even more than six decades after the conclusion of the Civil War, both political parties representing the defeated, as well as the civil society, remain reluctant to proceed to exhumations. Unearthing and identifying dead bodies can lead to the forced acknowledgment of inconvenient truths about the past that have the potential to delegitimize well-entrenched, albeit false, views of the parties involved. For example, the Communist party purports to be the heir of DSE but abstains from implementing a policy of exhumations because the bodies could

potentially reveal the truth about violently recruited soldiers. In addition, the decision by the defeated to open a mass grave could lead to a resumption of demand for exhumations by the relatives of the victims of "red terror", certainly an inconvenient aspect of DSE (Kalyvas 2004).[41] Moreover, the remains constitute a *corpus delicti*, and the state is legally accountable for the fate of the buried in its territory. Unearthing the grave in Florina and identifying Slav-Macedonians among the dead could lead to a heated legal battle. Finally, Greek civil society remains reluctant to demand the acknowledgment of human rights abuses because it has not achieved a sufficient level of financial, structural and ideological independence from the state.

In short, although in several neighboring countries, exhumations have been central to the effort to address the violent past, for the time being, Greece remains resistant to these external human rights norms. But as the case of Lesvos indicates, even within a well-entrenched culture of silence, acts of resistance can emerge and challenge that silence.

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[2] The landmark law on the "Recovery of Historical Memory" (Law 53/2007) included provisions for the recovery of the bodies of those victims buried in mass graves and signified the symbolic break with the silence imposed during the transition to democracy (Aguilar 2002).

[3] This is reflected in the literature of Transitional Justice, where the majority of scholars insist that retributive (trials, policies of lustrations) and restorative policies (truth commissions) facilitate the consolidation of democracy and should be implemented during the transition (Minow 2002; Sikkink and Walling 2007). For a more critical approach that challenges the view that dealing with the past is a *sine qua non* precondition for moving forward, see Snyder and Vinjamuri 2003. For a more critical position of the concept of transitional justice as a form of establishing the western "Liberal peace" project, see Newman et al. 2009.

[4] For a discussion of the legal framework covering the problem of enforced disappearances, see Scovazzi and Citroni 2007.

[5] Interestingly, neither the National Army nor the veterans of the DSE have conducted systematic research to determine the precise number of those disappeared or buried in common graves. This indicates a broader problem in the study of the Greek Civil War related to the absence of systematic research on the local dynamics and the practice of violence. For some interesting exceptions, see Kalyvas 2002 and Van Boeschoten 1997.

[6] Interview with M.S., June 11, 2012.

[7] This is a growing phenomenon in international politics; it is also known as post-transitional/delayed justice (Kovras in press).

[8] Within the Christian Orthodox tradition, Panourgiá argues: "death is not considered the end of life, but rather the beginning of another dimension of life…the dead person is automatically transformed into a possession of the religion and the Church" (1995: 188, 188-192).

[9] The official commencement of the Civil War is still a contested issue within the Greek academic and public debate. We employ the 1946−49 approach, underlining however that the first conflicts between the different resistance groups occurred in 1943 and that the preceding periods, namely the Occupation and Resistance periods are tightly connected to the outbreak, nature and outcome of the Civil War. Among the prevailing approaches in relation to the civil war period, is the so-called "theory of three rounds" that recently re-emerged in the civil war academic discussion. For more in relation to the "three rounds theory", see Iatrides 2002, Marantzidis and Kalyvas 2004; for a critique of this approach, see Panourgiá 2004, 2009.

[10] For the historical context of the Greek Civil War, indicatively see Baerentzen et al. 1992; Close, ed. 1993; Kotaridis, ed. 1997; Mazower ed. 2000; Nikolakopoulos et al. 2002; Carabott and Sfikas, eds. 2004; Margaritis 2002. For more in relation to the persecution, incarceration and terrorization of the leftists, including women and political refugees, indicatively see Panourgiá 2009; Voglis 2002; Vervenioti 2000; Voutyra et al. 2005.

[11] In certain rural areas (on a micro-level), this friction and the civil war's ideological framework have connotations in the everyday reality of the population; they define and affect social identities, political views and social relations even today.

[12] These bands were formed by the government in 1946 under the names MAY (*Monades Asfaleias Ypaithrou*, Country Security Units) and MAD (*Monades Asfaleias Dimosyntiritoi,* Municipal Security Units) (Voglis 2002:71).

[13] For more details about the DSL, see Kalogeras and Koutskoudis 2002.

[14] Elli Svorou, a 25 years old woman from Lesvos, was among the 22 political detainees who were executed (or died) during their incarceration. For more information in relation to the victims in (or from) Lesvos, see Kalogeras and Koutskoudis 2002:79-108.

[15] Interview with G.K, May 4, 2012.

[16] The most significant laws were those enacted in 1982 officially recognizing the National Resistance against the Nazi Occupation (N.1285/1982); in 1983 a ministerial decree enabled thousands of political refugees to return to Greece. Yet this did not include those of non-Greek descent, mainly targeting the Greek Slavic-speakers in northwest Greece.

[17] The coalition government became known as the "government of national reconciliation", because it signified the symbolic end of the civil war.

[18] For an interesting analysis of the politics of memory see Marantzidis and Antoniou 2004 and Van Boeschoten et al. 2008.

[19] Perhaps the most vocal NGO in Spain is the "Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory" which set the demand for exhumations at the top of its priorities.

[20] Interview with M.S. June 11, 2012 and G.K. June 10, 2012.

[21] On the Macedonian conflict see Loizides 2007.

[22] See Kizos and Koulouri 2006:331, 335.

[23] For more on Mantamados and it being referenced as the "little Moscow", see Marantzidis 1997; for the relationship between religion and communism in Lesvos, see Marantzidis 1995.

[24] See Kalogeras and Koutskoudis 2002.

[25] In any case, the enactment of Legislative Decree 3382 in 1955 conferring benefits on the "bandits" (referring to the guerrillas) who voluntarily surrendered should not be ignored; for more, see Skoufos (2009:19).

[26] In this area, DSL fighters had dug out and built underground hideouts and shelters (*ambria*).

[27] See Kalogeras and Koutskoudis 2002:40.

[28] In 1945 and 1950, 1951−52, primarily in the context of coalition governments.

[29] According to oral testimonies, she was a villager from the area of Ippeios who allegedly committed suicide because of an illicit affair.

[30] More information on the "Tserkeza" ambush and exhumation can be found in Apostolou 1999:55-57; Skoufos 2009:232-234; Kalogeras and Koutskoudis 2002:45-47; Newspapers Empros July 1, 2009 and July 27, 2009 and Neo Empros July 29, 2009; also see the interviews with M.P. June 9, 2012 and S.B. April 26, 2012.

[31] See the interview with M.P. June 9, 2012.

[32] Several cases can be found in Kalogeras and Koutskoudis 2002:44, 48.

[33] See Panourgiá's (1995) anthropological study of death, pain, mourning and memory in Athens; in relation to the mourning rituals in Mani, see Seremetakis (1991).

[34] See Panourgiá 1995: 188-192, especially pp. 191-192; Panourgiá is also arguing that within the realm of the Greek Orthodox religious beliefs, the undissolved body might also denote holiness (1995: 191). Also see Danforth (1982).

[35] Neni Panourgiá (1995: 189) describes the grave as a "home" within the cemetery, which is considered as a "homeland".

[36] See the interview with M.P June 9, 2012; also see Skoufos 2009; Kalogeras and Koutskoudis 2002.

[37] See the interviews with M. P. June 9, 2012 and S. B. April 26, 2012; also see Newspaper Empros July 1, 2009 and July 27, 2009.

[38] Interviews with D. M and G. M., June 12, 2012.

[39] See Verdery 1999, especially, p. 33.

[40] This point is also raised by Santos Julia (2008) with regard to the Spanish experience.

[41] For more about "white" and "red" terror, see Kalyvas 2000:142-183 and 2002:188-207; Sakkas 2000:184-209; Sarafis 2002: 165-175.