

Grand History in Small Places: Social Protest on Castellorizo (1934)

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Abstract

Early in 1934 there took place on the island of Castellorizo, then occupied by Italy, a series of social protests that locals remember as the μουζόχορες. Expatriates reported these protests as Greek resistance to Italian rule, but compelling evidence shows that nationalism was of marginal importance in them; indeed, the muzáhres seem minimally relevant to the concerns of traditional historiography (i.e., nationalism, resistance, foreign occupation). Nevertheless, historians can exploit this apparently inconsequential microhistory in the same way that ethnographers can draw significant insights from studying contemporary everyday life. Apart from providing insight into the nature of social protest in Greek island communities, the muzáhres reflect both the politics of memory and conflicting perceptions of history in Greek society.

Introduction

The Dodecanese islands were transferred from Ottoman to Italian rule in 1912; it was not until 1947 that these ethnically Greek islands were ceded to Greece. The Italian takeover in 1912 was really a sideshow in the Italo-Turkish war over Libya, and Dodecanesian leaders were initially promised by their new occupiers that their homeland would be granted autonomy; hence the Italians were welcomed as liberators. But it soon transpired that the Italians were much more concerned about augmenting their small empire. After the first world war, having very little to show for their part in that Pyrrhic victory, they sought permanent possession of the islands. In 1923, Italy won this minor struggle, prevailing against vigorous lobbying from Greek leaders and exiled Dodecanesian notables, who waged a propaganda offensive highlighting the “Greekness” of the islands and alleged Italian atrocities. The Dodecanese patriots in exile maintained their rage from various vantage points—Athens, Piraeus, Alexandria, Port Said, and New York—monitoring every conceivable form of abuse, real or imagined. Early in 1934, they reported a number of disturbances that took place on the islands of Simi and Castellorizo, where locals had demonstrated against significant increases in the duties

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on food and fuel. These protests were dominated by women of all ages, although many children and adult males also participated. Any objective observer might have interpreted these disturbances as social protests, but expatriate nationalists, seeing them as evidence of patriotic resistance, confidently predicted a nationalist reawakening among the “enslaved” islanders.¹ These confident assumptions form part of our inquiry.

From the middle of 1912 to the present day, Greek writers have characterized Italian rule in the Dodecanese as exploitative, brutal, and “anti-Hellenic.” The model for interpreting foreign rule has been the “mythicized” Tourkokratia that can be found in Greek schoolbooks today. This version maintains that the Greek people experienced four hundred years of enslavement and unremitting brutality, including a child levy, a head tax, and frequent massacres.² Literature on the Italian Dodecanese is full of allusions to this classic period of «σκληριά». Thus an Italian assimilation policy that prohibited the use of Greek in schools from 1937 onward fostered clandestine Greek classes during the evenings. Dodecanesian writers appropriately labeled these the “secret school” movement, a direct allusion to the *κρυφό σχολιό* of the Tourkokratia. The protests on Castellorizo early in 1934 were also dominated by comparisons with the national awakening of 1821. The following is typical: «Αδάμαστη η ψυχή του Καστελλοριζιού τίποτε δεν τη σκιάζει και τίποτε δεν λογαριάζει. Ούτε δοξασμένους στόλους, ούτε κραταιές αυτοκρατορίες» (Syllogos n.d.:54). The unnamed author claims that this same spirit saw stolid defiance against the Saracens and Suleiman’s Turks (one assumes he means Suleiman the Magnificent), and had also determined Castellorizian participation in the Greek War of Independence. The author refers to two more instances:

. . . και ο ίδιος που η πατρίδα του μια «κοκκίδα» στον χάρτη αφήφισε μια απέραντη αυτοκρατορία και ξεσηκώθηκε (1913), όπως και στην πιο φρικτή περίοδο (1933) της τελευταίας του σκληριάς έκαμε, αφηφώντας μια άλλη τρανή τότε αυτοκρατορία (Syllogos n.d.:54)

Normally, there are very few details concerning the events in such writings. The author assumes that his readers already know the essential meaning of the story: that Greeks are by nature “resisters” of foreign rule, that in due course they “awaken” into resistance, and that Greek history for much of the millennium has been about foreign rule and resistance. Castellorizo was clearly part of that experience—or, rather, Castellorizo gallantly played its part in history. The protests of 1934 were simply the last examples of resistance in the dying days of “slavery” as Castellorizo dutifully conformed to the general trajectory of Greek history as rendered by nationalist ideology and school textbooks. In sum, Greek writers have always presented the Italian occupation of the

Dodecanese as a mini-Tourkokratia, emphasizing the same themes and drawing the same lessons.

Dodecanesian popular memory, however, presents us with a very different story. Most of the islanders certainly despised Italian policies of assimilation and expropriation, and most of them generally hoped for unification with Greece, but they also found much to commend in Italian rule. They readily recall the benefits of high employment, infrastructural development, and, at least before the arrival of Cesare de Vecchi,³ the oppressive governor of the late 1930s, they fondly remember cordial social relations with colonial personnel (Doumanis 1997:167–184). Overall, Dodecanesians recall Italian rule in ambiguous terms, since the Italians were neither wholly good nor wholly bad.⁴ Popular memory is therefore incompatible with Greek written accounts of the Italian occupation, which have been greatly compromised by nationalist ideology.

Demonstrating the inaccuracies and other failings of nationalist historiography is such a relatively easy task that to do so would have little edifying merit. However, to deconstruct nationalist historiography may serve the useful function of identifying the conceptual frameworks and categories being used, thereby prompting one to find more useful alternatives. Historical explorations of small-scale contexts—what we term “microhistory”—reappraise history at its most fundamental level, where nationalist historiography is most vulnerable. Studying history in this way means exploring the histories of ordinary people, those whose presence is normally ignored in historical narratives and yet whose experiences may have significant implications for the broader picture. Employing the microhistory approach and oral history method, this article attempts to show their benefits by reassessing the Castellorizian protests of 1934. The main part of our essay narrates the social protests that took place on Castellorizo from late 1933 to March 1934, using not only Greek and Italian archival and published sources but also a series of interviews with elderly Castellorizians. The interviews provide a more reliable version of these protests than the written sources do; in addition, they introduce important new themes and issues that nationalist historiography, given its conception of history, can never absorb (cf. Passerini 1986:185–186).

While social anthropologists have long been testing grand theories through ethnographic study, Greek historians have been slow to appreciate the benefits of a similar looking-glass. Major strides have been made in Western Europe, where the *microstoria* movement in Italy and *Alltagsgeschichte* or “history of everyday life” movement in Germany have sought to eliminate the distortions of the “giantification” of historical scale by studying phenomena at a level where history is actually made

(Muir 1991:xxi; Lüdtke 1995:13–16). Microhistory helps to retrieve the largely forgotten or ignored “people without history,” reasserting their importance in historical processes. This means raising the status of the history of women, minorities, localities, and regions—giving them a place in the history of the nation-state (Appleby, Hunt, and Joyce 1993:289). Some critics have interpreted this inclusive movement as fragmenting history, thus threatening the viability of history as a discipline. In fact, microhistory seeks to mediate between the extreme relativism of postmodernism and the safe certainties of positivistic history, with the latter’s rigid insistence on what is “serious” history—namely, war, great men, and nations. As Giovanni Levi points out, the challenge is “finding a way of both acknowledging the limits of knowledge and reason whilst at the same time constructing a historiography capable of organising and explaining the world of the past” (Levi 1993:95). Intimate studies of small contexts help equip the historian to deal with the endless debates of history, and with the elusive, although necessary, search for historical truths.

There are hopeful signs that the genre of microhistory is beginning to find its way into the historiography of modern Greece, particularly for the catastrophic 1941–1949 period. Some studies (e.g., Ashenbrenner 1987; van Boeschoten 1993) have focused on individual villages, searching for deeper insights into peasant mobilization, intracommunal struggles, and ideological alignments. Mark Mazower’s success in evoking wartime experience in *Inside Hitler’s Greece* (1993) is partly attributable to his ability to draw the nexus between the micro- and macro-levels, giving as much attention to starving families in Athens as he does to Axis administration at the highest levels. His judicious use of vignettes successfully conveys the immediacy of terror and deprivation, something that pure military history, patriotic rhetoric, and studies of high politics have never achieved. Thomas Gallant’s studies of the Ionian Islands during the nineteenth century (1990, 1994) accord more closely with microhistory classics like Robert Darnton’s *The Great Cat Massacre*, which is an exemplification of history with an “ethnographic grain.” Gallant shows the wider significance of issues that only his ethnographic approach can discern. Thus his analysis of erotic language provides a vivid window into the “. . . internally generated conceptual framework which shapes both unrest, and equally important, acquiescence,” through which he produces a highly original discussion of peasant political agency and ambiguous meanings of protest (Gallant 1994:705). The advent of mass politics in late nineteenth-century Greece makes such studies surely essential for understanding the integration of this nation-state.

Unlike anthropologists, however, who can conduct their fieldwork

and amass a substantial body of material, historians are hard pressed to find extant material that allows for the investigation of peasant “conceptual frameworks.” The great bulk of peasants in Greek history were illiterate and, even among the literate, few recorded their thoughts. Ginzburg and Le Roy Ladurie capitalized on the meticulous gathering of information by heretic-hunting Inquisitors, but such sources are very rare indeed. For more recent history, however, one can exploit oral sources that, if handled systematically, can provide some access to such perspectives. Greece’s decaying villages are potentially rich archives of the nation’s twentieth-century history, if one masters the techniques of securing interviews, asking appropriate questions, recognizing silences and other evasive techniques, identifying recurring images and language among interviewees, and cross-checking information with other sources. Events that took place within living memory can be evoked in vivid detail. While oral sources are very suspect when it comes to assembling hard facts such as dates, they often alter our conceptual frameworks and force us to question the priorities of historiography (Passerini 1987:4–7). Our interviewees inadvertently undermined the established notion that all Dodecanesians were fire-breathing, anti-Italian, patriotic resisters, and at the same time confirmed that Dodecanesians were not cowardly collaborators either. In short, they reminded us of the complexity of human behavior by undermining the schematic use of such categories as “resistance” and “collaborators” that has been the case in traditional historiography. In sum, the oral sources fostered a much more variegated analysis of occupier-occupied relations.⁵

In 1990 and 1992, Doumanis formally interviewed forty-two people, three of whom lived on Castellorizo, for a larger study of the Italian Dodecanese. In 1995 both authors interviewed another seventeen Castellorizians in the eastern suburbs of Sydney, where the majority of expatriate Castellorizians now reside.⁶ The interviewees presented a rather uniform picture of the protests of 1934, despite some differences in detail. We compared this oral tradition with official Italian interpretations drawn from archival material in the Archivio Storico Diplomatico in Rome, and with Greek nationalist interpretations found in relevant newspapers and journals. We begin with a narrative which utilizes the factual content of these sources, and follow this with a discussion of some of the historiographical and methodological implications.

The narrative

Castellorizo is the most isolated of all the Greek islands. Situated 110 kilometers east of Rhodes and a mere 4 kilometers from the Turkish coast, it is barely 9 square kilometers in size. Moreover, since it is largely

barren it lacks the required natural resources for sustaining a viable community. Yet, as with many similar islands, it has a modest harbor that can shelter a moderate flotilla, and in the nineteenth century it was well placed to take advantage of growing trade between Anatolia and the Near East (Pappas 1994:73–90).⁷ The island became a mini-emporium that traded in timber from Anatolia (the Castellorizians converted the wood to charcoal, which they sold to hash-dens), garments, foodstuffs, and sponges. Merchants found the island attractive because, along with other Dodecanesian islands, Castellorizo had been granted privileges by the Sultanate in 1522–1523, exempting locals from imperial taxes save for a nominal annual sum, and granting them free access to imperial waters. Such privileges attracted merchants who, bringing their families and emporiums, opened employment opportunities in enterprises such as sponge processing, boat building, and fishing. Thus, despite their very limited agricultural potential, this island and also Simi and Kalymnos were by 1890 among the most densely populated centers in the Greek world. At its peak in 1890, Castellorizo had some 9,000 people living permanently in tightly clustered dwellings flanking the harbor, with 782 persons per square kilometer. Another 4,000 to 5,000 Castellorizians resided in nearby settlements on the Anatolian coast (Bernard 1976:299–301).

At the turn of the century, however, the prospects for such entrepôt outposts were gloomy. Steam-powered vessels would rapidly supplant caiques and put most local merchants out of business. The rise of Turkish nationalism from 1908 onward served as a warning to all regions and communities enjoying privileges, as the new regime sought to rationalize the empire's chaotic administrative and revenue system. Moreover, the Castellorizian mercantile elite could not resist declaring its Greek nationalist sympathies, thereby antagonizing the Young Turks, who had initially sought to create a modern, multiethnic state. The Castellorizians left themselves vulnerable to Ottoman reprisals in 1912, when all the Dodecanesian islands except Castellorizo were "liberated" by the Italians. (The Castellorizians, like the other island communities, were led to believe by the Italians that the Dodecanese would be transferred to Greece.) In a rather foolhardy move, the locals declared themselves autonomous in order to induce the Italians to save them. Instead, they had to wait two years, by which time the island was taken over by the French. This had the effect during the First World War of making Castellorizo an Entente outpost from which sorties were executed along the Anatolian coast, while the island itself was bombarded in retaliation by Turkish artillery (Pappas 1994:93–127).

The overall result was disastrous. The island was cut adrift from its Anatolian lifeline, forcing most Castellorizians to emigrate to Rhodes,

Egypt, and beyond. By 1921, a mere twenty-five hundred inhabitants were left on the island. In March of that year, the island was transferred to Italy in accordance with the Treaty of Sèvres (which was never ratified), and for a short time the community enjoyed a modest recovery. Some local inhabitants found employment in public and private construction programs on Rhodes, Kos, and Leros, and trading links with sea-bordering centers in Cyprus and the Near East were reestablished, albeit on a much smaller scale than in Castellorizo's heyday. By the end of the decade, however, economic conditions deteriorated again. The decline manifested itself in growing intra-community tensions focused on local government (Pappas 1994:129–147).

Throughout the Ottoman period, the privileged islands of the Dodecanese ran their own affairs with very little outside interference. During the nineteenth century, economic prosperity allowed the Castellorizian local government to introduce a number of innovative welfare measures, including subsidized medical care and pharmaceuticals. The islanders took pride in their municipal achievements, but by the late 1920s the greatly diminished revenue base was unable to sustain novel public services any longer. Nevertheless, the community did not come to terms fully with its impoverished circumstances; local government was even accused of alleged corruption and negligence. Councilors were strongly criticized by some merchants for failing to stop the Italian colonial regime from instituting policies restricting the flow of trade, and later were denounced as collaborators by some of the islanders. In 1932 they were criticized for failing to stop the Italians from ceding to Turkey a number of dependent islets that the Castellorizians had long used for grazing. One issue in particular that angered many Castellorizians was the frequent absence of the elected *δήμαρχος*, Ioannis Lakerdis, who seemed more concerned with running his own bus company on Rhodes. More seriously, the local government found itself being blamed for the doubling of import duties on petrol, coffee, sugar, and flour, which were introduced by the colonial regime in November 1933. Initially, public antipathy was directed at the Italians, and the governor himself, Mario Lago, decided to visit the island later that month in order to hear grievances and launch an investigation into local economic conditions. But on 10 January it was announced that the popular *delegato*, Salvatore Tringali, was to be replaced by the austere Salvatore Grimaldi. Two days later, there was another rise in duties. At this point dissatisfaction over Lakerdis's long absences became acute (BMAE 1934).

The shift of community anger from the Italian administration to Lakerdis and his *δημαρχία* is a significant point. Most of our interviewees

suggested that the Italians exploited the general disillusionment with Lakerdis and encouraged people to demonstrate against their own *dhimarhía*. The implication was that the rise in duties was negotiated between Lakerdis and the colonial government in Rhodes Town. According to oral testimony (6 February 1995) by Venedictos Livissianis, who was among the protesters in January, the *delegato* openly accused the *dhimarhía* of collaboration:

They said to us, "Why are you shouting? Don't shout against the governor. We will tie you all up and send you to Rhodes. Protest against the *sindaco* [*dhimarhía*]. They have a deal with the governor in Rhodes and have agreed to lift duties. Deal with it that way."

The intention was to deflect communal antipathy by dividing the community. Livissianis further recalled how one Italian officer's reluctance to deal with unruly islanders produced a symbolic piece of theater:

I remember a very big Italian, big and fat, who tried to block our way [to the protesters' meeting point]. His name was Baron. He agreed to let us through, but we had to throw him in the water first. He wanted to pretend to show opposition.

By early February, Lago could confirm in his reports to the Ministero degli Affari Esteri (MAE) that the demonstrations on Castellorizo were an internal matter:

. . . Certain adversaries of Lakerdis [have] stirred up and staged the demonstrations in which women have taken part. . . .

The demonstrations have an absolutely personal character. They are always accompanied by cries of "Long live Italy, long live the King, long live the Duce." The faithfulness of the Castellorizians has been well noted. (ASD, B. 7, Lago to MAE, 1 Feb. 1934)

The very fact that Lakerdis decided to return to Castellorizo with the new *delegato*, Grimaldi (21 January), seemed to confirm suspicions that the *dhimarhos* had sold out. The following day he was jostled and spat upon by some fifty people, mostly women, and three days later a group of women in traditional dress pelted his chambers with stones.⁸ Grimaldi felt that the situation on Castellorizo was serious enough to call for reinforcements from Rhodes and to keep Lakerdis under armed guard.

On the following day, twenty armed *carabinieri* arrived. Locals were actually pleased to welcome the vessel bringing them, for they mistakenly thought it was carrying the governor, the popular Mario Lago, who might have taken effective action on their behalf. Grimaldi, however, mistook this well-intentioned popular enthusiasm for riotous behavior, and shots were fired in the air. The disembarking soldiers panicked and

a scramble ensued, with some of the women being struck with rifle butts while others fainted or fell into the water. Some twenty injuries were reported. The alleged male ringleaders of this supposedly planned riot were arrested. More demonstrations during February led to further arrests and, on 1 March, police were again ordered to disperse female protesters. A violent exchange ensued, with some of the women again being pushed into the harbor. The *delegato* reported another *periodo di crisi* to his superiors in Rhodes, although he reassured them that it was a purely local matter (ASD, B.7, Grimaldi to Lago, 2 March 1934).

Events reached a climax on 25 March, when the whole community assembled at the Cathedral of Saints Constantine and Helen to commemorate the Holy Annunciation and the Greek War of Independence. Inspired by the example set by the warrior-bandits (κλέφτες) of 1821, many felt it was an appropriate time to demonstrate against Lakerdis. According to a Lakerdis supporter, one Mihalis Koungras, interviewed on 14 March 1995, many local women became hysterical and lost control:

One woman was at the top of the bell tower, another at the other bell, and at the end of the church service the bells started ringing frantically and these women started shouting and encouraging everyone to march down on the *dhimarhía*. . . . They [the women] were beasts (θηρία), very aggressive.

Demonstrators marched on the *dhimarhía* and broke in, vandalizing Lakerdis's office and that of his deputy, Yorgos Paltoglou. Troops intervened and violent scuffles broke out. Evdokia Jackomas recalled in her oral testimony (14 March 1995) how the violence was deeply distressing both to occupiers and occupied alike, and how the popular Tringali, who was reappointed *delegato*, ostensibly to restore calm, pleaded with the crowds:

I remember Tringali standing at the top of the steps that day and he was pleading, "No more!" He said, "Let's work this out for the sake of the island and the regime." The governor decided to act on the matter this time, and Lakerdis was forced to resign on 1 April, and a caretaker was appointed to run the *dhimarhía* until the next elections.

Some historiographical and methodological implications

In attempting to assess the nature of the *muzáhres* one finds that the written source material offers limited assistance. The Italian archival material provides very little detail, not so much because the events themselves on tiny Castellorizo were possibly deemed insignificant as because colonial personnel were keen to show their superiors in Rome

that all was well among the *Isole Italiane dell'Egeo* and that Governor Lago's policies produced stability and progress. Fascist Italy was quite proud of its achievements in the Dodecanese, especially of its development programs, which were regarded as products of Mussolini's youthful, energetic *Nuova Italia*. The Italians anticipated that their colonial subjects would happily accept all that was offered, as well as embrace Italian rule and even become Italians themselves. Indeed Lago practiced a particular approach that was quite appropriate for achieving such goals. It entailed fostering good relations with the colonized, cultivating his own image as a benevolent and good-humored governor, and introducing necessary, albeit unpopular, measures gradually. His style, decidedly "un-fascist," incurred criticism from his fascist superiors, hence any reported incidents of *irredentismo* or popular disenchantment could be seen as a failure of his particular approach. Lago's message to Rome was that the *muzáhres* were "not worth worrying about," but he was keen to highlight Castellorizo's long-term problem: "Castellorizo, which can be seen by the naked eye by the Turks on their walks on the opposite coast, has become an island isolated in the middle of the Mediterranean" (ASD, B.7, Lago to MAE, 3 March 1934). Several days later, Lago drew attention to the unpopular *dhimarhos* and indicated the manner in which the Italians would deal with the problem:

The actual agitation against the *sindaco* [*dhimarhos*] of Castellorizo is a form of demonstration of unease by this population especially after the loss of the islets. It is not possible [for us] to hand out effective aid. I always give instructions to the *Delegati* to be wary of and to avoid difficulties. (ASD, B.7, Lago to MAE, 13 March 1934)

Oral testimonies reveal that Lago was quite a popular figure in the Dodecanese, but by 1936 he had failed to "Italianize" the Dodecanesians, and his fascist superiors believed his failure was due to his lack of ruthlessness. His successor, de Vecchi, decided to assimilate the population by force, which, not unexpectedly, produced the opposite effect. Resistance to Italian education and other cultural policies was now commonplace.

Greek writings are even less helpful than the Italian sources for understanding the nature of the *muzáhres*. As mentioned earlier, these writings adhere closely to a stereotypical interpretation of foreign rule. Thus the protesters experienced a nationalist awakening triggered by tax rises, while Lakerdis is presented as a cruel traitor who connived to have these rises imposed and took his share of the proceeds. The most recent Greek study of the *muzáhres* provides a typical example of the effects of nationalist discourse. Its author, Kostas Tsalahouris, begins his article with the words: «Στις αρχές του 1934 γράφτηκε στο Καστελλόριζο

μια από τις λαμπρότερες σελίδες του εθνικοαπελευθερωτικού μας αγώνα», thus contextualizing the *muzáhres* within modern Hellenic history generally, which is about redemption after “400 years of slavery.” Tsalahouris denounces Lakerdis, in boldface type, as one who «πρόδωσε συνειδητά την πατρίδα του» (Tsalahouris 1991:1), meaning that the traitor conspired with foreigners to foil the εθνικοαπελευθερωτικό κίνημα. Tsalahouris supports his case by reproducing extracts from reports by the Greek consul in Rhodes. These refer to an incident in 1930 when Lakerdis was implicated in the murder of a political rival. By implication, the man he was accused of poisoning, one Mihalis Spartalis, is exalted as a martyr for Hellenism (Tsalahouris 1991:1; AGFM 1930–34). While the essential features of the *muzáhres* are spelled out very quickly, neither the complex reasoning motivating the protesters nor the course of events is of any interest. Tsalahouris’s retrieval of the *muzáhres* from obscurity is based solely on the premise that it is a page in the history of the εθνικοαπελευθερωτική κίνηση.

A similar interpretation emerges from Dodecanesian expatriates writing in the mid-1930s. They claim that Castellorizo was ready to follow the example set by the heroes of 1821 (see, e.g., *Aneksartitos* 20 March 1934, *Dodekanisos* 11 March 1934, *Tahidromos*, 7 March and 5 April 1934). One would assume that Castellorizian writers in Athens, Alexandria, and elsewhere, aware of the manifold problems facing their island, would have known better than to present the *muzáhres* in this fashion. Many no doubt had first-hand experience of the island’s politics, and some may have had altercations with Lakerdis himself. Expatriate reports might therefore be dismissed as calculated propaganda, as willful misinterpretation, yet a nationalist uprising on the island was also reported by non-Castellorizian writers, including the Greek consul in Rhodes, who might have been expected to provide a more accurate report to his superiors in Athens. He described Lakerdis as a collaborator, profiteer, and an enemy of Hellas, who, in order to secure his financial position, gave his services to the Turkish, French, and Italian causes and propaganda. «Τοιοῦτος εἶναι ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸν ὁποῖον οἱ Ἴταλοί ἀνέκαθεν ἐπιμένουσι νὰ ἐπιβάλλωσιν ὡς Δῆμαρχον Καστελλορίζου» (Tsalahouris 1991:2; AGFM 1930–34).

The uniformity of the written accounts in this case suggests a general predisposition rather than an organized propaganda offensive. Despite compelling evidence to the contrary, nationalist writings appear as Foucauldian discourse—namely, a tradition of knowledge that is presented as the truth. The moral force of the discourse outweighs any rational rules of evidence. The authors display a predisposition to interpret historical phenomena in a particular fashion, their faith in national ideology eliminating any doubts. A petty fracas between local

women and the *dhimarhía* over prices is not deemed “history”; yet Tsalahouris was able to identify *History*, not through willful distortion, but through patriotic insight. For him, the *muzáhres* cannot be other than a chapter in the εθνικοαπελευθερωτική movement because Greek character is such that Greeks will always resist foreign occupiers, whether Turk, German, Bulgarian, or Italian. This very predisposition must be seen as part of the practice or poetics of patriotism. The constant recapitulation witnessed in Greek texts reflects how history writing in Greece has long been a patriotic exercise among amateur writers and many professional academics. There might be debate over facts and figures, but the discourse is never appraised. As such, nationalist historiography displays excellent potential as a subject for investigation by anthropologists, who deal with the various uses or functions of “history” in social life.

In sum, history has certainly had a function in confirming a writer’s level of patriotic sensibility, as well as conveying his or her world view. But what of history *per se*? What does the *muzáhres* offer that is strictly historical? Extant sources provide a far more complex, and therefore richer, historical experience. The prominence of active women and the use of traditional dress at one particular point were telling signs of a community’s moral protest. Raised import duties had a direct impact on families and their access to food. It was widely felt that Lakerdis had not fulfilled his responsibility to defend the interests of the community; rather, he was seen to have connived with extra-community interests. Similar disturbances, which took similar forms, were reported on the island of Simi. Nationalist writers were also quick to construe these as a glorious page in the history of Greek resistance. Simi in fact bore an economic and social history similar to Castellorizo’s; its population had plummeted for the same reasons. And here, too, the *dhimarhía* became the focus for community resentment (Doumanis 1997:64).

The significance of a community’s moral protest in such important historical processes as the Industrial Revolution and class formation was established by British Marxist scholars in the 1960s. But one of the criticisms leveled against many of these scholars was their tendency to depict moral communities as too cohesive. They failed to allow for internal division and its possible significance in the course of protest action (Desan 1989:57ff.). As for oral historians, they often have great difficulty identifying such divisions since most communities hide their internal differences from outsiders, preferring to present an image of internal cohesion.⁹ The present study was facilitated by virtue of the fact that one of the authors (N. Pappas), Castellorizian by descent and well-known among Castellorizian expatriates in Sydney, was made privy to the fact that there were bitter community divisions at the time of the

muzáhres.¹⁰ Consequently when word spread among the Castellorizians of Sydney that an investigation was under way, some felt duty bound to put forward the case of their respective faction. No doubt much information was concealed lest reputations and self-images be compromised; nevertheless, a new dimension of the *muzáhres* was uncovered regardless: a class dimension. Castellorizo had been a divided community, at least since its self-proclaimed autonomy in 1912, and this division expressed itself roughly along class lines.

The role of Lakerdis in local politics is important here. In March 1913, he had helped to lead a band of thirty armed Cretans liberate Castellorizo from Ottoman rule; shortly afterward, he served as the island's military governor at a time when Castellorizians enjoyed a period of quasi-autonomy. Factional conflicts nevertheless developed. Lakerdis was deeply embroiled in these struggles, which were so bitter that, on a number of occasions, the Greek government was forced to intercede and impose order. When the French decided to seize Castellorizo in December 1915, Lakerdis was appointed *chef de la police*, and in May 1920 was installed as *dhímarhos* (Pappas 1994:112, 117). When the Italians assumed control, Lakerdis was reappointed *dhímarhos* upon French recommendation, and when free elections were held in 1928, he was returned. He won again in 1932, when his supporters filled all the seats in the twelve-man council. Lakerdis's record does not present the image of a classic collaborator; indeed, his role in liberating the island from the Turks suggests quite the opposite. Despite allegations by his opponents of vote rigging, his electoral successes in 1928 and 1932 reflected substantial local support.

Lakerdis was a charismatic factional leader who, according to interviewees, represented the lower classes. The loyalty he inspired was partly associated with the favors he distributed; he filled seventy-five positions in the bureaucracy with his supporters. By 1932, he was so well entrenched that he felt he could be absent for long periods in order to develop his bus company on Rhodes while continuing to influence matters on Castellorizo through his close supporters. His principal opponents were the merchants or *οι πλούσιοι* (the rich), headed by the Stamatoglou family. According to one supporter, Mihalis Koungras (interviewed on 14 March 1995), it was the Stamatoglou faction that put the women up to mischief in 1934:¹¹

Lakerdis was a man who helped the island. He helped the poor and wealthy. . . . "The Italian" [generic for the Italians] had nothing to do with it. The police, the *mareciallo*, and the *carabinieri* tried to keep order. The Stamatoglou family were behind it all. But they were too smart to get involved at the front. They watched things from a distance.

Yorgos Fermanis (interviewed on 21 March 1995) also felt that the Stamatoglou clan were using popular discontent to further their own political interests:

In my opinion, the women didn't rise up to oust Lakerdis. We were originally protesting about the taxes that had been imposed. I remember that we went to the *dikitirio* with an Italian flag held in front [of the procession]. The Italians immediately showed that they would not tolerate such conduct and it was then that the Stamatoglou family turned everyone against Lakerdis.

Another defender of Lakerdis was Evdokia Jackomas. In her testimony, Lakerdis was not a "bad man," and, in view of the island's long-term problems, the demonstrations against him were unfair. Someone had to shoulder the blame, however, and she reserved it for Lakerdis's deputy, Yorgos Paltoglou. Many others saw both Lakerdis and Paltoglou as corrupt politicians pocketing public money as the island's fortunes quickly diminished. Maria Poulos (pseudonym; interviewed on 21 March 1995) recalled a popular rumor about Lakerdis and women: "He wasn't, how can I say . . . he was dirty. He used to take young girls and he 'kept them for his bed,' as we say. I can't say it any differently. Everyone knew he had girls almost as slaves and that he slept with them. Even his wife knew. But she was old." Poulos went on to allege that Lakerdis's wife was του δρόμου (of the streets), a prostitute from Alexandria. For many other Castellorizians, Lakerdis had become a monster, an arch villain who murdered some of his enemies and raped many young women. According to the Greek consul in Rhodes, Lakerdis held his fellow Castellorizians in contempt, and once responded to protesters that he would ". . . not leave the island without reducing it all to ashes." The veracity of these sensational claims need not detain us, but they show the depth of intracommunal animosity early in 1934. The interviews indicate that Lakerdis inspired either intense reverence or utter contempt. His star shone during the French period and the early years of Italian rule, so long as material conditions on Castellorizo improved. But as conditions worsened in the early 1930s, the tide of support began to rise in favor of his factional opponents, and his extended absences looking after his bus company on Rhodes further diminished his standing. By early 1934, he faced a communal backlash.

Such local-level investigations help dispose of simplistic interpretative schemas such as "resistance-collaboration." One recent study of a Messenian community during the Greek civil war shows how preexisting intracommunal conflicts reconstituted themselves according to the politics of wartime, as one faction aligned itself with the new regime. The interwar struggle between fascism and the left resonated with, but

did not characterize, local politics (Aschenbrenner 1987:108). Such an alignment between a local faction and the occupying regime, resulting in the persecution of an opposing local faction, is the normal scenario. On Castellorizo, foreign rule certainly affected power play among the island's notables, though in 1934 the occupiers were evidently sacrificing their favored faction for the sake of colonial order. This reflected the relationship between the colonial regime and the localities, as the former presided over freely elected local governments that could never be either openly anti-Italian or pro-Italian.¹² Lakerdis was not necessarily a "collaborator"; yet, like most people in his position, he had to deal with the occupiers and interact with them, thereby making himself vulnerable to opponents within the community. During the crisis of 1934, Lakerdis's enemies managed to make such accusations stick. Nor were the Italians above exploiting Lakerdis's vulnerability themselves.

The very limited role of nationalism early in 1934 offers food for thought on another major issue: Italo-Greek relations. Nationalism must have had some influence, even if none of the interviewees acknowledged its importance. It is hardly a coincidence that one of the protests took place on 25 March; moreover, as popular disenchantment focused firmly on the Italian regime before being directed toward Lakerdis, it is unlikely that Castellorizians did not draw inspiration from nationalist rhetoric and imagery. Nationalism *per se*, however, was not the cause or motivating factor of dissent. The fact that the oral sources contradict all the written accounts leads to questions about occupier-occupied relations. What, for example, was the popular estimation of the Italians? The people of the Dodecanese were aware that small islands were easily controlled by any large foreign power and that open resistance to Italian rule was futile. Castellorizian autonomy between 1913 and 1915 was made possible by the sufferance of the Great Powers; it was not maintained by local power. However, although Italian rule was accepted as a *fait accompli*, the islanders reserved the right to dislike or appreciate features of Italian rule privately, without being seen to consent to the Italian takeover (cf. Passerini 1986:192–195, 1987:129ff.). Indeed, the islanders left considerable scope for objective appraisal, and hence were quite appreciative of many Italian policies and programs. These positive features, coupled with less appealing experiences (such as later assimilation policies), produced an ambiguous Italian legacy that is reflected in Dodecanesian popular memory.¹³ Among Castellorizians and Dodecanesians generally, Italians are often remembered as having been warm, cultured, and enterprising. For Evdokia Jackomas, a schoolgirl at the time of the *muzáhres* (interviewed on 14 March 1995), "No one can say the Italians were not good. They were wonderful! Such gentlemen! We admired them and they looked after us. Those that were shouting

against them during the *muzáhres* were those who were not getting their way. It would be a crime to say that the Italians were not good to us.”

Interviewees conveyed this idea with personal anecdotes or simply by repeating phrases that could be heard all over the archipelago. These include «Οι Ιταλοί ήταν καλοί» or «Δεν μας πειράξανε οι Ιταλοί». Indeed, the recurrence of such testimony forms part of a popular discourse on Italian rule that has never appeared in print, arguably because it could be interpreted by outsiders as unpatriotic. Despite the moral efficacy of national ideology and “history,” however, many Castellorizians were prepared to deny nationalist interpretations in favor of what they understood as the truth. As Livissianis (interviewed on 6 February 1995) said of the protests:

Things got worse [in March] as some of the women made a lot of fuss and got carried away. They would tuck their blouses into their *vrákes* like men and go from door to door encouraging people to demonstrate. They were not going on about patriotism then—it was a movement against Lakerdis and his party by that time. . . . By the end we didn’t think we’d done anything particularly anti-Italian.

Dodecanesian relations with the Italians are difficult to define if conventional conceptual categories like consent/dissent are used as criteria. While the inadequacies of nationalist historiography’s resistance/collaboration model can easily be demonstrated, more acceptable conceptual frameworks are difficult to construct. In her classic oral history of the Turin working class under fascism, Passerini shows how ordinary workers negotiated power with their occupiers on a day-to-day basis. While they did not display much political dissent, Passerini did identify cultural resistance in such things as songs, jokes, and resistance to official pro-nationalist programs (Passerini 1986:186–190, 1987:80–101). Passerini’s ethnographic evidence undermines conventional ideas of Italian fascism and its totalitarian power, while at the same time offering a highly original view of power relations as experienced in quotidian contexts. At the very least, Passerini disposes of claims that Italian workers conferred their “consent” upon fascist rule through their inactivity.¹⁴

Dodecanesians are quite conscious of the fact that they are vulnerable to accusations of complicity, which is interpreted by some as meaning nothing less than collaboration. The islanders are also aware that their positive memories of Italian rule are shameful according to the strictures of official nationalism, which claims that all Greeks with moral worth would have openly resisted their adversaries. Yet interviewees revealed that official expectations regarding what ordinary people could

do under foreign rule were unrealistic. Many of them had read about "1821" and had to come to terms with their own record under "slavery," which in turn prompted them to reassess the terms in which occupier-occupied relations could be discussed. In short, interviewees inadvertently undermined the collaboration/resistance model that historians had imposed on them, largely because it failed to account for the way in which Italian rule had actually been experienced.

Conclusions

In a recent article, Christian (1991:238) argues that since historians have become exclusively concerned with detailed research, they have neglected to deal with "larger questions of meaning, significance, and wholeness that alone can give some point to the details." Christian's solution is "big history," or history that deals with the whole of time. Microhistory serves a similar function, showing that an inductive road in the search for meaning can be equally rewarding. The quotidian context is the point of reference whence human understanding begins and history is experienced. It is no accident that Carlo Ginzburg, who wrote the classic book of microhistory, *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976), also produced a monograph—*Ecstasies* (1991)—whose spatial and temporal dimensions are unparalleled. World and microhistory each serves a kind of back-to-basics function, helping scholars to sharpen their theories, test their paradigms, and reassess their conceptual frameworks. Each also forces historians to contend with the question "What is history?" Anthropologists of Greece have shown far greater interest in this question than historians have. The former, having produced ethnographies that investigate the manifold uses of history in public and everyday life (e.g., Sutton 1994), have noted Greek society's obsession with "history." We still know too little about how ordinary people participated in history *per se*, but judging from the impact that *microstoria* has made in Italy and *Alltagsgeschichte* in Germany, one can only assume that its influence on the historiography of Greece will be equally beneficial.

NOTES

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¹ Dodekanisiakí, November 1934.

² By “mythicized” we mean the stereotypical representations found in Greek school-books and in much academic literature dealing with the Tourkokratia—representations of unrelentingly cruel Turks and oppressed and patriotic Greeks. See Millas 1991.

³ De Vecchi, one of the senior members of the Fascist Party, acquired a reputation for heavy-handedness. He served as governor of Somalia and as Minister for Education. His appointment to the Dodecanese was considered a demotion.

⁴ Of the forty-two Dodecanesians interviewed by Doumanis for his study of the Italian occupation, only a minority recalled the occupation in terms of oppression and resistance. All of these people also happened to be well educated by local standards, with at least a secondary school education. These *μορφωμένοι* presented their “textbook rendition” in order to present a “correct” history and to express their level of patriotism at the same time. For a detailed analysis of these *μορφωμένοι*, see Doumanis 1997:90–124.

⁵ A similar problem was highlighted in the historiography of Vichy France, in which standard myths of a “nation of resisters” and a “nation of collaborators” were employed, without sensitive reflection upon popular behavior and its manifold meanings. The political ramifications of questions of “wartime resistance and collaboration” have been analyzed by Rousso (1994). See also Mazower (1995:272–294).

⁶ The people interviewed for this project were informed, from the beginning, that the resulting tape-recordings and transcripts would be used as source material for an academic journal article, and that their names and testimonies would be “in the public domain.” We have employed one pseudonym, even though it was not requested by the person in question, for we thought that she might feel compromised by cited portions of her testimony at a later stage.

⁷ The close contacts between the island and the Near East are reflected in part by the fact that the word *μουζάχρες* is derived from an Arabic term for protest.

⁸ The significance of women here, and use of traditional costume, reflect the local feeling that the community’s moral values were being jeopardized.

⁹ Interviewees are normally prone to use evasive techniques to give prying interviewers the preferred image of communal unity. This seemed to have happened in the case of Françoise Zonabend, whose study of a French village (1984) concluded that it was not traumatized by the second world war because the Germans did not come near it. As Fentress and Wickham have argued (1992:99), Zonabend’s research does imply that there were deep fraternal divisions during the war, and that the interviewees had successfully hoodwinked Zonabend into accepting their preferred image of unity.

¹⁰ One of the interviews was conducted by Pappas alone because the interviewee felt comfortable only with him, having known him personally. Pappas organized all the interviews except for three. It is significant that N. Doumanis, a non-Castellorizian, neither was told about the *muzáhres* by his Castellorizian interviewees, nor found any mention of it in the one important book on Castellorizo (Vardamidou 1948), but encountered it only after sifting through old newspapers in Athens.

¹¹ It is quite possible that women protested without requiring male directives. Koungras’s assertion is typical of male responses to women’s protests. Males often do this

to deflect possible criticism about their own failure to participate, or simply to deny that women can take the initiative. Unfortunately, so few of the women protesters still survive, or could be found, that we cannot confirm or deny Kougras's assertion.

¹²In fact the Italians gradually abolished free elections. By the late 1930s only card-carrying fascists could attain public service positions.

¹³Positive representations of the Italian Dodecanese were more readily provided by illiterate or semi-literate interviewees. They were obviously less inhibited than their more educated counterparts, who in turn were much more wary of the moral dilemmas of countering official history. Among the latter group, interviewees would either rigidly retain a nationalist interpretation or present both positive and nationalistic interpretations. It is characteristic that, in their interviews, both Basil Galettis and Venedictos Livissianis, having initially described the Italians as invaders who violated local liberty, later showed great nostalgia for the friendships and laughter they shared with Italian personnel, and even went on to say that the Italians were *καλοί*. For a lengthy discussion of such disemic responses, see Doumanis 1997.

¹⁴She identifies the communist leader Palmiro Togliatti and the historian Renzo De Felice (Passerini 1987:5–6)

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