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Chairs: Stathis Gourgouris and Maria Hadjipolycarpou

Rapporteur: David Schneller

Speaker: **Elena Mamoulaki**

Visiting Assistant Professor, Program in Hellenic Studies, Columbia University

Topic: **“The Politics of Hospitality: Gender Performativity as Political (dis)obedience”**

Text of the lecture:

Today I would like to talk to you about a specific case of forced cohabitation in the context of exile that will lead us think about the broader issues of hospitality, gender performativity and political action. My research, from which most of the empirical material of this presentation is drawn, involves participant observation and in-depth interviews with more than 100 people -locals and former exiles who had first-hand experience of civil war events on Ikaria, as well as with their respective descendants on the island, in Athens and in a few other places around Greece from 2009 to 2014. - I have tried to understand the reasons and the outcomes of a very exceptional, I would venture say unique, in terms of its specific conditions, historical event:

Consider a small island of the East Aegean, right after a four-year devastating Nazi Occupation that destroyed the limited economy of the island leaving hundreds of famine victims and thousands of underfed people behind. There is no water supply in the houses, no electricity, no sewage system (no toilets), extremely limited medical support (only two on the island), and a lack of schools and education in the majority of the villages. The only means of transportation are some dozens of donkeys and the network – apart from some stone paved alleys- are dirt tracks.

The scarcity of the agricultural production had lead most men migrate as blue-collar workers mainly in America or work as sailors while others worked in charcoal production in other lands. The majority of the working population on the island was women who were left behind to take care of the families, the houses and the fields. Being responsible for almost every aspect the household, they often performed as ‘heads’ of the houses since they decide about children and elders as well as the overall administration of the household.

I refer to Ikaria the midst of the Greek Civil War, when from the summer 1946 warships docked daily off the shores of the island transferring hundreds of harassed people of all ages and walks of life, from all over Greece, who were accused of having some political affiliation with the Left and therefore suspected to be possible fighters in the mainland battles against the rightist government troops in the context of the post WWII civil conflict in Greece. The deportees were accused of being “dangerous for the public security” and proclaimed internal enemies of the country. They were shipped there without any provisions for housing and medical care or even at times food supplies. In short: in a period of just a few months, more than 12.000 exiles were shipped to Ikaria, which at that time had a population of less than 10.000 people.

There were no prisons or concentration camps on the island and Ikarians upon facing this influx of “unexpected guests”, opened their homes to accommodate them– either a disused house, or a room in the family house. They provided food and free land for cultivation to the newly arrived exiles. According to former exiles’ testimonies, the great majority of the local population tried to protect and support them. ‘The Ikarians embraced us’, *‘μας αγκάλιασαν’* is what most of the former exiles said when asked about the locals’ reaction upon their arrival.

Thus, the exiles faced from their part, an “**unexpected hospitality**” though sent as detainees, they were accommodated in family homes (first paradox from the point of view of the government of course) and even more surprisingly this hospitality was often delivered directly by their female hosts who supported and defended them sometimes putting the wellbeing of their families, if not their own lives, at risk -second paradox, considering Greece of the 1940s as a rather conservative-in terms of women emancipation and participation in social life.

In Greek ethnography (Campbell, Herzfeld, Friedl, Papataxiarchis, Rozakou) but also in much of the philosophical literature (Derrida, Levinas) hospitality is often examined “as a practice of sovereignty and control over the stranger in which the host holds the monopoly of agency”. It is an act of interest and, at the same time, one of power. In fact, *filoksenia* not only introduces the stranger into a symbolic schema of political asymmetry but also aims to control the possible danger that he or she represents (Herzfeld 1987b).” However, in the case of Ikaria it seems that we have a different kind and a different culture of hospitality. Hospitality here, as we will see, is offered under risk, and in the context of an affective relationship based on care that fosters relationships of solidarity and reciprocity. Furthermore, as I will try to show, this particular practice of hospitality is among other things, or above all other things, a political action that deserves our attention and can help us expand the notion of the political to include some of its gender performative qualities.

According to Mrs. Toula, a 96-year-old woman living in Ikaria, that I interviewed this July, “The first exiles that appeared in the village were about 12-13 people. They didn’t know anything about us and we didn’t know anything about them. They were tired, hungry, some of them sick. We found houses for them to stay in. After a couple of days there appeared 60 more, then 150, in a couple of months there were more than 300 people in the village. The locals were about 150. They told us ‘you don’t know us? How do you put us up in your homes?’ and we replied ‘yes, you are right, we didn’t know you. But now that you know us tell your comrades who we are so that they know how to behave themselves’”.

Thus, the exiles, for their part, took initiatives to reciprocate the hospitality of the locals in a number of different ways. Working groups were organized – e.g. of doctors, engineers, lawyers, agronomists – and free services were offered by exiles of all professions to locals as well as to each other. Actors and theatre professionals staged plays; musicians taught and performed and teachers and professors taught local children. The exiles also took on technical projects such as building cisterns, roads and water infrastructure for the villages.

While hospitality is usually described as directional (the host gives, the guest receives) and hierarchical [placing the host in a superior position and the guest in moral debt and an inferior position (Herzfeld 1992)], in this case reciprocal interactions between host and guest are valued and both parties gain something from the relationship. So, by this reciprocity the distinction between guest and host is blurred as both learn and grow together. Indeed a characteristic example is that many times former exiles could not tell if a task was carried out by one group or the other.

Thus, the forced cohabitation among locals and exiles was dealt with within a context of widely shared sense of hospitality –or shall we say- reciprocity, and the adoption of interchangeable roles of the host and the guest (who gives and who receives). The fact that the forced coexistence of exiles and Ikarians was transformed into a rather harmonic and fruitful cohabitation and from thereon into a *symbiosis* (συμβίωση/ living together) was not a given from the beginning. Indeed, it was something that the exiles, unlike their experiences in other places of exile, did not expect. “Ikaria turned exile (exoria) into a blessing (evlogia)”. This is a peripheral if not marginal story within the larger context of civil war that challenges the dominant narrative of violence and absolute hate that divided not only the national political field but also communities and even families. So, in contrast to the representation of civil war as a fratricidal disaster, in Ikaria people opted for solidarity not only within a single community but also with the stigmatized “other”.

Civil war and political exile narratives, representations and studies in Greece largely focus either on men –as political leaders, soldiers and prisoners- or on women who participated, fought, and suffered “just like men”, that is female guerrillas, exiles and prisoners. Women often also appear either as mere spectators or victims of civil war conflicts. (pp. 6-7 *Women and Political Conflict*) Some glimpses of the part ‘ordinary’ women play during this conflict can be gleaned in the studies of oral history of civil war but not so much of that of exile. The participation of women in resistance groups along with their sufferings caused by imprisonment, exile and torture have been reported to considerable extent. However, the response of the non-militant, (not participating in resistance organizations) ‘ordinary’ women who made their own modest –but for the actual life of my informants crucial- achievements are in danger of going unrecorded. So in my research I examine female activism not just as a supportive mechanism but as a political initiative that bypasses the institutional framework (the struggle between left-wing organizations and right-wing government) that has been the focus of the majority of the studies so far.

So, let’s have a closer look at what they specifically did as part of their hospitality:

According to an female informant: “As soon as the exiles arrived, we went door to door asking the exiles: what do you have to eat today? Do you have forks, knives, blankets, and clothes? And then we would go again door-to-door to the villagers asking for supplies for the exiles. One would give cooked meal, others bread, potatoes, whatever they could. And then of course we made mattresses from handmade rugs and hay for all of them. We also weaved sweaters for those who had nothing. When we got to know that someone was sick we would barge in their houses and make suction cups (ventouzes) and treat them with alcohol. According to Hamington: “Hospitality is not an abstract concept but a performed activity directed at particular individuals.” (Hamington, 2010:32)

Thus, while men and women both agreed in helping the exiles –women treated them as embodied others; acts of hospitality usually involve physical proximity since it often engages tending to the needs of the body in forms of food, drink, rest, and so on.

So, women in their daily routine were not limited to the domestic sphere, or more precisely, in terms of the argument advanced here, their “domestic” space included much of what we would consider public or another individual’s property. This can be verified not only through the accounts of their tasks around the area of the village but also by their knowledge of political events and the things that were taking place outside their domestic sphere. The information provided by my female informants is not of the kind a peasant woman secluded inside the house would give. Apart from the open manifestations of support (like the attacks on the police officers) women also did things that they were, so to say, unsuspected of, because of these things being political or being illegal. They secretly gave the exiles food and they carried things they gave them for their comrades and relatives in Athens and other places to which they could travel. Since women had so many responsibilities in the household they used to walk the streets, to go to the fields, and they had to look for fodder, water, food. They moved around –what we would call- public space in an apparently natural way that would not trigger the gendarmes’ suspicions. Men’s movements were more suspicious because they were more formal and designated. They would either go to the coffeehouse or to work in a specific field.

According to Butler, gender is constructed “through a series of acts which are renewed, revised and consolidated through time” and which are prescribed in specific social frameworks. As we can see, women delivered hospitality –in their humble but secure gestures- as something “natural” although the arrival of thousands of exiles was something totally unique and shocking for the whole of the community. Even though women were not the actual homeowners, the proprietors of the houses (men were the landlords) or the fields they already acted as “masters of the houses” in their husbands’ long absences and in the context of a specific prevalent *ethos* in Ikaria at the time. Women helped the exiles not in a spirit of charity, or to alleviate their class guilt, or to create relationships of patronage with the “important other” like an investment for the future, but in the same way in which they helped other members of their extended community when in need. They treated them as equals and they created a context of reciprocity for their mutual benefit. That is how this bond was forged and is still remembered.

“Habits of hospitality are imaginative and open-ended responses to strangers and environments on a trajectory of hospitality (Sullivan 2001).” The Ikarians had both the skill and the imagination to make room for a burgeoning number of unexpected guests on the island. If care is both a practice and a disposition, it seems that men had the disposition; but women had both. After the crucial feminist premise “the personal is political” of the feminists and following Iris Marion Young’s line of thought (especially in her late “Responsibility for Justice”), I argue that women’s performativity, initiatives and undertakings show that in this case the *political became personal* in the sense that they assumed responsibility in helping the disadvantaged exiles improve their life conditions – while, in a mutually beneficial way, receiving reciprocal treatment- and although people knew that this unjust calamity was caused by the government, they took upon themselves the responsibility of redressing that social ill themselves.

Women were able to take initiatives and to a great extent assist the exiles organize their lives because they had experience and they knew about a lot of things regarding survival strategies and house keeping: they knew how to grow fruit and vegetables, how to slaughter domestic animals and cook meat, how to make clothes, blankets, mattresses, everything. Some women took part in formal politics too. So, the space women occupied was already somehow public. Women did not have to limit themselves inside the houses like in other parts of Greece. They were used to going out to the streets, to the fields, to the port and thus they interacted with their co-villagers and were used to expressing their opinions. My female informants told me things that show that they knew who was who, which were the parties, what the men were doing, about the war, what was happening.

The Political Exiles Coexistence Groups (OSPE) drafted and imposed upon all exiles a list of ten articles indicating proper behaviour within their group and in relation to the locals. Taking into account that the majority of the exiles were men between 17 and 40 years old, many of them single, who had already been deprived of female companionship for some time, while fighting as soldiers in the national resistance against the Nazis, probably the most discussed article was the one that forbade exile men to have any contact with women (local or exile). The exiles had to obey the OSPE; (for more on their function, see Kenna 2001 and Gritzonas 2001), and suppress their feelings and desires, as offenders were severely punished by exclusion from the OSPE which was created to cover their basic daily needs.

According to many former exiles, this prohibition was as one of the cruelest because of the exiles' age, the lack of affective relationships and the living together with the local women that made the situation even harder. The O.S.P.E. tried to control sexuality and eliminate this temptation by keeping the young men as busy as possible and by promoting the exemplary mentality of a fighter and a hero, an ascetic and a martyr. In the interviews I could trace innuendos about the rivalries among exiles and some cases of discrimination related to the Party hierarchy or the fame and power of the offenders.

Many people on both sides – the exiles and the local women – suffered because of the restriction on relationships on the island. While Ikarians appeared quite tolerant (they openly admitted that “of course there were love affairs, poems, music, serenades, flowers, and marriages and children!) toward those developing affective relationships, in the exiles' communities, any member who would succumb to love would be immediately excluded from the O.S.P.E.[therefore, exiled by their fellows in exile]. Homosexual relationships among the exiles or with the locals were punished in the same way. When I asked former exiles about this they would usually mince their words and admit in the end that very exceptionally something might have happened without being noticed. (I don't know, I had heard once about something, etc). So, Ikarians appear more tolerant and forgiving for people's 'weaknesses'. They often said that exiles would “pick” fruit or other food (olives, etc.) sometimes without asking for permission. Yet, they say that it was natural since they were at times starving. Even women admitted that some men had improperly approached them, but then again, they said, that was normal due to their need for female company. There often appear stories of people with “backward” or problematic ideas and attitudes, but in their narrations Ikarians not severely critical towards them. And according to former exiles' narrations, Ikarians did not exclude the offenders (of the exiles' article 10) from being their guests.

On the other hand, the women exiles, paradoxically enough, were very much oppressed in their own community in a straightforward way.

And those were of course women who had a public, political life and a communist political commitment. The exiles could not control the Ikarian women but they did control their female comrades. Luiza Tzima: “The government police had sent us to exile. As soon as we arrived, our men (the Communists) locked us in the houses so that the other men exiles wouldn’t see us as if something would happen... The security did not incarcerate us, they sent us to exile. And they, the comrades, incarcerated us. They were afraid of us developing relationships with the male exiles. It was something very offensive let’s say. And we couldn’t say anything against all this because it was the guidance and we had to accept whatever they said, the line of the Party”.

Chatzivasileou, in an earlier piece (possibly in part a piece of self-justification for low levels of recruitment of women, as she was head of the women’s section), wrote that the failure of the Greek Communist Party to increase its female membership was mainly due to the fact that its men were “slaves of medieval perceptions about women” (Vervenioti 2000: 118 and 121 note 31, referring to an article by Chryssa Chatzivasileiou published in March 1946).

It is ironical that in Ikaria -which also evokes the utopian communism- the women were freer and more secure of themselves than the communist women. And in this way they could have closer relationships to the exile men than the communist women did.

Conclusions:

Hospitality is historically and socially determined; for Derrida “it is culture itself”. The case of Ikaria stands in vivid contrast to most of the known accounts and interpretations of hospitality as seeking to maintain or advance existing power hierarchies [the ancient classical tradition of hospitality, what Derrida refers to as “conditional” hospitality, or Pitt-Rivers in his study on the “law of hospitality” and also to what Herzfeld accounts for in his “Poetics of Manhood”]. Ikarian hospitality is performed in significantly different ways in contrast to traditional hospitality which has often implied that men, as historic holders of property -including family women and children sometimes- asserted power over the guest. The Ikarian, according to Hamington’s theory of care/feminist hospitality subverts this hierarchy and mitigates the inferred power relations grounded in property to facilitate equal interactions and reciprocal relationships between hosts and guests.

I also want to stress the issue of informality: exiles were not invited, they were unexpected guests. During my fieldwork in Ikaria, I realized that prearranged meetings not only did not work but they were not relevant to their idea of relating to the other. They always told me “don’t call before you come, if you see a light on come in”. They didn’t like formalities like presents, confirmations, phone-calls, etc. I think that this lack of formal structure, implies –the actual disposition towards the stranger–

To sum up, in the vast bibliography on the problem of dealing with the stranger—from the Bible to Derrida- hospitality has been mainly represented and theorized as a sophisticated cultural practice of power negotiation between men’s antagonisms and possible rivalries. However, the case study we have examined shows us that women not only did they not act as delegates or simple executors of their male masters’ wills but

they were many times the actual host(esse)s, the agents of hospitality, conceived and delivered in a way that made the survival, which might have been impossible, a celebrated symbiosis.

This case study is not only important as a record of the anonymous endeavors. It is also important because those specific endeavors, which were precisely often “misunderstood” even by the exiles’ patriarchal leadership, can be the model of an alternative way of thinking about politics and political activism. Women did not perceive their assistance as charity, they treated exiles as equals and they ended up establishing relationships of reciprocity. They felt that what they did was for the wellbeing of the community, a community that would include the unexpected guests.

For the political culture of the Left, resistance and revolution of that time was only related to the actions performed by men and politics was thought to be about demonstrations, strikes, battles, etc., and of course it is - only not exclusively. This case brings again into the foreground the discussion of the relationship between ethics and politics, and hospitality lies at its heart (Arendt, Eimchman in Jerusalem, four grades of responsibility –ethical/political. Perform harmful actions moral, silently support political, to secretly help, moral, to openly help, both moral and political). In their gender performativity, Ikarian women put into practice their ethical choice, which at the same time indicated political partisanship. And even though the groups they supported were under the leadership and primacy of men who were willing to undertake perilous missions and violent actions and risk their own lives for their ideals, some of those ideals –at least gender equality- were postponed for a future time. But the future didn’t come, so at the end of the day women showed in their lives, the possibility of a life closer to those ideals by offering help without prejudice, without the prejudice of gender, class and political beliefs.

Then the point is that politics is often taken as a formal organization and a symbolic manifestation (discourses, demonstrations, strikes, etc.) towards the fulfillment of certain ideals. But then there are also those people whose actions are not so spectacular –they are not prime ministers and they don’t organize massive protests or throw bombs- but their lives and attitudes are closer to political aims of say a more solidarity-driven, cooperative, socialistic or even communist society whereas men –despite fiercely fighting for communism- still had to cope with the values of patriarchy, individualism and rivalries among them. So, if politics is about realizing values in one’s life, women were more consistent political agents than men.

The massive movements of population towards and within the West due to disparities of economic nature but also due to world violence and war make hospitality – as a social relationship between two interdependent agents- an important topic to reflect upon considering its moral and political implications. This example sheds light upon the possibilities of a feminist approach to the social and political understandings and potentialities of hospitality.

It is important to understand women’s hospitality as a political action. Not only because, in the midst of a bloody civil war, any gesture towards one side or the other counted as a clear political statement if not partisanship, but because their motivation departs from an embodied sense of justice which according to their statements, goes even beyond political ideology. Upon asking them “what would you have done if the exiles were on the other side, if they were royalists?” without second thought all my informants

gave the identical answer “the same”. Hospitality as performed and justified from the point of view of my informants is an activism in favor of the disadvantaged and towards social justice. The hospitality offered by Ikarian women towards the political exiles bypassed the dominant political ideology and related hostilities that permeated the socio-political fabric of the rest of the country during the civil war. It was a culture that provided an alternative to the civil war and its atrocities, which prevailed in many parts of the rest of the country. It can be actually considered as the dissolution, if not the elimination, of the very essence of the civil war and, now again, in Greece, it is probably an important lesson to keep in mind.

Question and Answer

This was very interesting. In the Greek tradition, hospitality has certain traditions. The difficulty is in the history. The most important thing, I wanted to ask, is how many of these people remained in Ikaria?

Of the exiles? They were all transferred to Makronisos. They stayed in Ikaria for three years. For three years they lived together, which made a strong impact on those three years on the island. They are now in the third generation and they have memories and relationships with their families; their children and grandchildren know the people that hosted them. There are friendships, there were marriages. I met four former exiles that got married and stayed in Ikaria for some years.

I have a similar question. I just wanted more of the historical context. It seems that there were phases; there was a second group that arrived with their wives after...unless I misunderstood. How does this come from something that closes WWII and is also part of the history of the Cold War?

It's after WWII, starting in 1946. There were waves of exiles, and periods in those three years. In the first period, they were freer, and not so much controlled, until the beginning of '48. But then there were then curfews, tortures, punishments of the locals when talking to or helping exiles, and they sent many locals and exiles to other islands for supporting the exiles. The first year and a half was much easier, not so strict.

Thank you. It was fascinating how you showed how this case study departs from standard Greek ethnographic work. I have two questions. In Ikaria, there seems to be an overwhelmingly strong discourse of exceptionalism – the people, the food, the acceptance, etc. are all exceptional. It seems to me very easy to say now that 60 years later they would have done the same, but Arethousa votes more communist than any other part of Greece. I'm not questioning any of your findings, but I wonder to what degree this discourse of exceptionalism colored people's memories?

There is exceptionalism everywhere.

But it's very strong in Ikaria.

I didn't focus so much on the coloring of memory and the past. What I tried to do was to compare the locals with former exiles. I was more focused on what they said about the hospitality of the Ikarians. I was also interested in what they did during my fieldwork, seeing things really happening, not what they said but what they did, how they dealt with their space, private space, other people. These were my resources.

Thanks very much, I really learned a lot. I have three brief comments stemming out of ignorance. Can you expand a bit on the structure of time on the island? There seems to be a different circulation of time there. The second question is, I think, one of the pictures you mentioned there were Red Cross people there – was this an instantaneous thing? And, can you expand on the impact on studies like yours on the way civil wars are studied? In particular, the experience of the Greek Civil War. Because it seems to me the claim was to decentralize the focus on the civil war.

Let's start from the last question. I've been to some conferences about civil war. It was very interesting to see forty presentations about massacres, about all of these terrible things that happened, that was very meaningful to study and see. Then, it was my turn, and everybody was saying that that's impossible, there's no way that right wing people would take them into their homes. They are lying or it is a naive approach. I was asking what is the theory of friendship, of solidarity, of reciprocity. I was wondering why no one asked what is the theory of hate? I don't believe that Ikaria is exceptional; there are probably other cases. It is a question about focusing. It's also interesting to see men, historians, excited about civil war. I think gender is also part of the field itself. As for the second question, yes, there was a group in 1948 that went to check the conditions. What they wrote is very interesting. They say that we were told to say that they have problems, but our job is not to do that, our job is to measure how much bread they have. It is interesting to see this from the Red Cross point of view. There are studies about the perception of time in Ikaria, this is the most famous topic. In terms of hospitality, I talked a bit about space, and how moving around space creates other categories of public and private. In the same way that they made room for the exiles, they also made time for them. Hospitality is tied to time. This flexibility in terms of time is crucial. Hospitality can't happen if you're not ready to get out of your program, especially with so many people to take care of.

I want to come back to the third question. It seems that one of the things that is innovative in your presentation is that you're taking about a politics that is non-ideological. You're staying that the presumption is "we believe them." That if they were royalist exiles, they would have done the same. But your argument is that it's about politics, it's a political gesture to extend hospitality, which I agree with. Then you began to touch on this issue of gender, which I do think are related. Can you expand on non-ideological politics? And the relationship between ethics and politics? I would like to hear what is that relationship in light of hospitality, and what does gender performativity specifically have to do with this?

What I began to say about these four levels of responsibility is that those who were actively involved the Nazi movement, they have both moral and political responsibility.

Those who supported the regime in silence, their responsibility is political. Those who helped secretly, their responsibility was moral. Those who openly resisted, their responsibility was both moral and political. For this case, it was both moral and political, in this sense. So, it's not exactly non-ideological, it is an ideology, from what I understood from what they were saying, that was more based on empirical facts. They said that they felt that it was unjust for these people to find themselves in this position, so even if they were royalists, it would be unjust to take them from their homes and leave them there to die.

I agree. One could say that the narratives of justice are humanist, one might want to criticize it as a naturalist tendency to be kind to strangers, though I'm saying that you're doing that. But then the question about the politics of it becomes complicated. You're saying that there's a certain kind of justice. That's the very interesting part of the project because you leave yourself open to people saying that it's nonpolitical, that this is kindness.

Especially in this situation in the civil war, and with the risk and all the problems they had, it was not just being nice. What they say was not just about that.

You talked about female activism in terms of hospitality and then political activism. In the interview in which they said that they would do the same if they had been royalists, so I was wondering how could you describe political activism in this sense, because I had the impression that they were pro-Communists.

Not all of them. They had their own ideas. They knew what was happening in the country. Those that said they would have helped even if they were rightists, some of them were communists.

I have the idea many of these people were communists. But could you find those who were in the royalist party?

I tried to find the right wings, and they said the same things. The exiles were shocked when they found out that their hosts were royalists.

But the majority were members of the Communist party.

From the locals? Quite a lot, but also ardent Rightists. They were saying that our communists are bad, but not those, the exiles.

Maybe the question that we need to go back to is part of the exchange you had with Stathis earlier when you said that this was a moral and political gesture. I think that maybe we need to rethink this along the lines of the divide of what is moral and what is ethical. Is it a moral, or an ethical responsibility? If we can think about it as an ethical responsibility then we can reinsert the political into this exchange. Is it a human moral responsibility or an ethical responsibility that the human subject feels toward another human subject? I wanted to ask something slightly different. You said at some point,

unless I'm mistaken, I heard in you a surprise that, while these men were Communists, they still exhibited all the traits that men normally exhibit, they were patriarchal, etc. My question is that isn't this already a performance of an already accepted ideal form of the human being that you are encountering here? The fact that they are Communists doesn't make them a human, right, or perfect, or wrong. Where does this surprise come from, that they were communist and patriarchal at the same time?

That there is a contradiction in very specific ideological issues to which communism aspires.

The surprise comes from the Communist women, this is where it comes from.

No, I'm thinking about a different part of the talk.

You're asking of my surprise. It's not just mine, it's also inside. I said that it's ironical, because it helped me think about the political, this contradiction between the ideology and what people really do, if what the apolitical locals did was political or not. It helped me to think about the political.

Thank you very much, I really enjoyed the parts about gender performativity and how it informed your overall analysis. I want to go back to this issue of memory. To me, it looks very central. The quotes that you used point to this direction. I want to hear more about your methodology on how you deal with this. To go back to that famous quote, that "we would have done the same if they had been Royalists," I'm wondering to what extent we can take this at face value? I'm wondering to what extent we can look at this quote without taking into account the passage of time, the current juncture, their current situation, would they have said the same thing ten or twenty years ago? The ex post facto self-justification, this is one thing. A similar thing, regarding the exiles, a similar issue I wanted to ask is that this all looks amazing, this haven within this unbelievable and of massacre. To what extent does it look idealized? To what extent did these people, who went to Makronisos afterwards, idealized the place where they were before Makronisos? How did the layers of memory, and a subsequent experience, entirely change, color, or alter their signifiers?

I totally agree about what you've said. Of course memory is different than what happened. I worked also with some archives, diaries, letters, newspapers of the period, to contrast the differences, and they (the exiles) also talked about the comparison between Ikaria or Makronisos, or other places. Of course in the presentation, I can't give all the details, and I know that it can seem idealized. There are problems they had in surviving, actually. They were not in an excursion. I couldn't go into details. But all of my informants talked a lot about their surprise of the friendly reception they had. They wrote this in their newspapers and letters. I cannot say that, as they said, "nobody was against us". I found a mayor's letter that says it's impossible for this situation to go on, that it's not fair for those people as well. I cannot question the overall picture much more. But the research is open, maybe in the future I'll find that everyone was lying to me.

That was amazing and inspiring for political activists, thank you. Can you comment a bit on your title? How is gender disobedience performed? We know within political activism, there is a constant quest for contracting gender. There is a struggle between gender subjectivity and political subjectivity. The local woman from Ikaria, they seem to conform to prescribed gender roles. They do not perceive their actions as political activism or political resistance. How does this work?

The political disobedience is by the local woman towards the government. Helping the exiles was disobedient. The political obedience was towards the party. I was thinking about Judith Butler, if I have understood what Butler says, gender performativity can question dominant social structures. From this example, I see a conformist gender performativity that questions, that is disobedient, and a gender performativity, that, apparently at some points, is disobedient and very much political, but at the same time in a patriarchal context, the content is different from a performativity.

I think we're getting tangled in the difference between performance and performativity.

This is great for me because I'm writing, with Elena, a paper on gender and memory. I do have a question. The whole aspect of performing one's gender and helping the exiles – they took on a caregiver role, and therefore they kept their assigned gender role, correct? In giving care?

Yes, it's true, by giving care to the exiles; they performed gender and were disobedient to the government.

The disobedience is in that they were doing something they were not allowed to do.

Oh, by law.

They had an immediate impact.

How were the gender relations among the locals affected as a result of this?

I'm also wondering that. One the one hand, you said that there was this ban on any kind of interactions and relations, but of course later you said that they disobeyed this. It left me confused as to what was the nature of the experience there. How was this issue of fraternization and relations managed itself during their interviews insofar as was it taboo? Or could someone frankly say that they were friends?

Yes, I was surprised. Maybe I should have waited for that. I was surprised that former exiles were making fun when others were sick, or didn't have food. And when it came to this issue, they were crying, many of them, with their wives of fifty years next to them, they cried for this love that they had that they could never approach. Some local man said that they became their role models as men, that young men growing up in Ikaria with the exiles and having this atmosphere of men with political ideals, that they were influenced in their gender roles on the part of men.

Were they romantic heroes?

They took them as role models, as men.

So they didn't feel threatened at all?

This is from people who were children at the time, boys. In terms of the competence of men, I don't have any story, but the thing is that because it was repressed, it wasn't as if it could have been opened. But they were living in the same houses, so some of them found a way. It was not very common.

Was article 10 effective in Ikaria at that time?

Yes.

You brought up hospitality as a way to control a threat. The first thing you said was that women went around knocking on people's doors to see if they needed anything. Was this because of the influx of males?

I said that because most famous anthropological theories on hospitality focus on the fear of the stranger as a way of control. I think this is a different case.

So these women weren't threatened by the influx of strange males?

No, they were already there as prisoners. I asked them if they were afraid, and they said that they were in very bad condition. They were quite controlled. This is an issue as well.

I want to go back to the point of exceptionalism, and relate it with gender relations. I know the whole idea of honor and shame regarding the Mediterranean and in particular the islands is normative. In the typical theories of honor and shame in the Mediterranean, why is the absence of all this a trait of this island? The honor and shame prerogatives in this society.

It seems that in the absence of men, for some periods, there was not so much. The exiles themselves were surprised, in every interview they talk about Ikarian women in every interview. In the ship, they were saying you'll have a good time there, women are easy there. It took them time to realize that some of them were afraid, because if they were seen talking to women they could be accused of having relations. There are many stories of the women teasing them. What I was trying to say in terms of public and private space, the women were going out to the kafeneio waiting for the mail, or going to the port, sending things. When the exiles saw them going into the kafeneio, they were shocked. What is she doing here? There was a different situation. I don't know, but I don't think it was exceptional.

The question that it posits is how much of this was happening in other parts of Greece and has just gone unrecorded? That might be the way of looking at it.

But there are differences.

Yes, but positing whether Ikaria is exceptional or not, we remove from the table the opportunity to ask about difference.

The same question applies to civil war. I don't believe that what was happening in every moment in every part of Greece what was happening in the Peloponnese, for example, was happening everywhere else in Greece. There must be other cases; it's not that exceptional.

Do you know why the government chose Ikaria?

It's interesting what people think, why they were chosen. They said that the government wanted to take revenge against Ikaria for not voting for the king, so that they would send the communists there, to percent the spread of the cancer of communism. Other people say that it was geographical, because Ikaria didn't have any ports. Others are more optimistic, and say that the government said that there are many empty houses because of the migrations, so they sent them here because it would be easier to stay. So there are different hypotheses.

But the government's point of view?

I could not find the document that justifies why Ikaria and not Syros. The question is why us and not the neighbor.

There is some sort of central planning by the government, usually border zones. This place was still being controlled, it was still under surveillance, there's a sense of irony in that, because despite surveillance, certain behaviors became possible within a crack of state control, and we're seen that in other regions. We have men away fighting, absences, and we have seen women taking different roles, because of circumstances. There was maybe not gender disobedience but a shaking of traditional roles, so that's interesting, within the framework of control and surveillance.

We've come to a beautiful end of this discussion, thank you, Elena.