
The educational activities of Greek political prisoners in exile and prison

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Abstract

The educational activity that took place in prison and exile, well beyond the confines of the official education institutions, constitutes a specific aspect in the history of education. This activity refers to a recent period in the Modern Greek history from the Inter-War years to the Greek military junta of 1967. Under the general accusation of being a “communist” many educated middle-class and illiterate left-wing citizens from the poorest sections of the urban and rural population, young, old, men and women will find themselves in exile and prison. In this context, the organization of knowledge was based on the instruction of the basic principles of the party world view, and the provision of the basic knowledge: reading, writing etc. Moreover the confined Greek left-wing students develop a new cognitive interest, which incorporates the needs of a “committed fighter – member of the Greek Communist Party” as an utmost pursuit. Third, the educational activity is articulated through the careful assessment of the internal hierarchical relations formed within the prisoners cohabitation groups.

Key – Words: education, nature of confinement, Greek political exiles.

1.0 Introduction

The political persecution, the imprisonment and the deportation of those who have been considered as posing a threat to the respective social status, have played an important role in the history of the Left and the labor movement as well the state’s instruments of repression. Within this context and through the study of the educational programs in Greece, the variety of educational and recreational activities that the prisoners managed to develop is of a particular interest. As from the mid 20’s, when the regime of the 4th of August¹ started the persecution of

¹ The 4th of August Regime was an authoritarian regime under the leadership of General Ioannis Metaxas that ruled the State of Greece from 1936 to 1941.

communists (Koundouros, 1978: 62), until the fall of the military junta in 1974², the left wing prisoners and exiles will try to organize their lives and improve their education.

2.0 Research Problems

The extended period of exile, the different places of exile and imprisonment and the different timing that determined the prisoners' knowledge organization; it is natural to constitute a challenge for the researcher. Moreover, the amount of archives, the memoirs of the prisoners, the determination of the socioeconomic and cultural background of the political prisoners or exiles, require a systematic study and evaluation of the whole range of contemporary analytical tools according to the principle of interdisciplinarity.

An additional problem besides the time gap, relates to the fact that the conditions in prison and exile impose by nature a certain level of concealment. For instance, part of the archive materials relating to the exiles on the island of Anafi was destroyed when it was found by the police officers, whereas part of it remained hidden in Anafi until the political changeover (Kenna, 2004: xv).

Another problem relates of course to the structure of the body of memoirs that have been published, since there is a time gap between the authoring periods due to the fact that they are interrupted by other events, forcing the people who experienced that turbulent period (advent of the dictatorship of Metaxas, II World War, occupation³, civil war⁴, more exiles) to a conscious or unconscious concealment (Voglis, 2008: 79). A typical example of this is based on Kenna's ascertainment (2004: 6), that there is a gap in the historiographical study of the exiles throughout the dictatorship of Metaxas or earlier, whereas there is an overabundance of theories regarding the "great" decade of the 1940's.

3.0 Confinement Features

Deportation and imprisonment throughout this long period were based on a different legal arsenal used by the state in each case, such as the deportation laws in the 1920's, the "special

² The Greek military junta of 1967–74 was a series of right-wing military juntas that ruled Greece following the 1967. The dictatorship ended on 24 July 1974.

³ The occupation of Greece by the Axis Powers began in April 1941 after Nazi Germany invaded Greece to assist its Axis ally, Fascist Italy. With the conquest of Crete, all of Greece was occupied by June 1941. The occupation in the mainland lasted until October 1944. However, German garrisons remained in control of Crete and some other Aegean islands until May and June 1945.

⁴ The Greek Civil War was fought from 1946 to 1949 between the Greek government army and the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE), the military branch of the Greek Communist Party (KKE).

[illegal] act” (or special crime) called as *idionymon*⁵ and voted in 1929, the enhanced legal arsenal throughout the civil war period and the law against spying in the 1950’s (Koundouros, 1978). The specific local conditions and circumstances in each place of exile and prison are also important and affect the exiles’ ability to develop activities. Bertls (2002: 214) for instance mentions that in the case of Anafi, the policemen-to-exiles ration is of particular importance and influences the behavior of policemen, since the large number of exiles causes fear and therefore inspires a relevant respect.

It is also common that the prison buildings throughout the examined period, are unsuitable and unhealthy, allowing prisoners different abilities of expression. Corfu prison, for example, was known throughout the Interwar period for its level of strictness, whereas the building in which it was housed was of British construction, complying with the principles of panopticism (Nefeludis, 1974).

We must also add to those previously mentioned that the state instruments do not always react as a single entity, since although they act as authorized law enforcement bodies, they have their own judgement and they compete each other, and they practically create an informal system, according to which the prisoners and the prison staff may circumvent the rules (Kenna, 2004: 32). Therefore a positively disposed officer (in Averof Prison (Papadouka, 1981: 33)), was vital to the life and the range of activities of the prisoners. As mentioned by K. Sotiriou (1987: 81-83) his wife’s relations with the wife of the former minister Rentis (who were cell mates during the German occupation) resulted to the “exile” of the former minister in Marousi under relatively good conditions.

In conclusion, we could say that the left wing captives in prisons and exiles were experiencing restrictions, austerity, aggressive behavior, and multiple pressures (especially heavy pressures for a declaration of repentance). At this point it is also worth noting that beyond the direct and short term consequences it is impossible to calculate the psychological the mental anguish of these people. Therefore there are reports regarding the pain and suffering of Ilias Iliou, Elli Papa, Chronis Missios, Loui Altouser from being beaten up (Pappa, 2010: 155; Missios, 1985; Papadouka, 1981: 194-195).

4.0 The cohabitation group

The lives of the political prisoners and their efforts to face their vital needs and organize any cultural and educational activities are related to organization. Through the cohabitation groups the prisoners try to collectively face their problems and organize their lives. One of the means they usually use to fight is hunger strike. A typical description of a hunger strike is the one set forth by B. Bertls (2002: 206) in the case of Anafi and the prison of Assos.

⁵ *Idionymon* was a Greek law voted in 1929 by the Eleftherios Venizelos government. It was a law "concerning safety measures for the social establishment and protection of the freedom". It was aiming to penalize the "insurrectional" ideas and in particular to fire prosecution against communists, anarchists and enforce repression against the unionist mobilizations.

The cohabitation groups and the collectives constitute forms of self-organization and collective life. For the communists in exile, a collective was a way of expression and a particular implementation of the political ideology which among others, is evident of the superiority of the communist theory and practice in comparison to the institutions of the bourgeois state and the decadence of the bourgeois society, acting as a form of propaganda aimed towards the criminal prisoners or the community of locals in the places of exile. In times and depending on the conditions many people found themselves in exile although they were not left (in Anafi for example there were old calendarists and Venizelists as well as archeio-marxists (Kenna, 2004: 84 - 85)). The cohabitation group of the political exiles included people of different political ideas, although most of them were communists, due to their political experience and explosion to the repressive practices of the state (Kenna, 2004: 61). Taking a closer anthropological view to these groups, Kenna (2004: 6) refers to them as a form of parallel institutions in total institutions, such as prisons, referring to Goffman's work (1994) and his creational study of such institutes.

The organization of such a group generally entails a secretary and additional sectors and teams, covering both vertically and horizontally the overall number of prisoners-members. Therefore there are educational and entertainment sectors, a special sector for the publication of wall newspapers (manuscripts), shoemakers, tailors, senior cabin members, as well as rotating chores, for every group member. Those members receiving a public subsidy or those receiving a parcel from their family were obliged to render half of it to the common fund of the group (Kenna, 2004: 30). The groups, in the places of exile, as referred by Kenna (2004: 69-73) regarding the exiles in Anafi throughout the Interwar period, could rent houses, turfs, or droves from the locals, so as to ensure their housing and nutrition.

Life in the group is subjected to rules, regarding proper behavior both inside and outside the group that governed the relations of the members of the group with the locals. It is worth mentioning that sexual relationships were strictly forbidden not only among the members of the group but also between them and the locals, and any breach of this rule induced the removal of the member from the group and is referred to as "special [illegal] act" introduced by Stalin" (Stalin's idionymon) (Kenna, 2004: 61; Bertls, 2002: 236-238).

Although left literature praises cohabitation groups, we must forget that according to P. Panagiotopoulos (in Kenna, 2004: 32), they constitute a second (apart from the surveillance mechanism in prison) surveillance system in order to control prisoners, who are subjected not only to the power of the prison's mechanisms, but also to the power of the organization's internal hierarchy. Missios (1985: 9; Floutzis, 1979: 236) vividly describes the way that the groups leadership exercises a usually depressive power on the prisoner-member. Maria Karageorgi (2011) also reveals the negative attitude of the other prisoners towards her due to her husband's removal. Therefore we can assume that the decisions and the participation of the prisoners –members of the party to the various activities of the group entail a certain degree of an unspoken perhaps coercion. As far as it concerns knowledge the point is whether the student – prisoner can differentiate from the official partisan knowledge.

5.0 Features of the educational work in Greek prisons and exiles

Therefore we must always keep in mind that the individuals involved in this educational activity are confined, suffer hardships and struggle with emotional impasse. In this context, studying is a form of defense and a way to face the barbaric conditions, the boredom and the confinement, since a full schedule that includes study, exercise and work, little celebrations and engagement in creative activities, help keep the prisoners' mind and body alert. Before we make special reference to the educational work of the prisoners and the exiles, it must be noted once again that the social phenomenon under research is determined by varying local and temporal conditions and that it extends over a long period of time.

This phenomenon can be divided in different periods (i.e. in relation to the respective political history, the legal arsenal of the state, the groups of prisoners or in accordance with the questions of each researcher). The suggested periodization divides this educational work in three different periods: a) the first period, from 1924 to 1942, b) the second period from 1945 to 1966 and c) and the third period from 1967 to 1974 (Kamarinou, 2005: 29-31). Due to the limited space we are not allowed to refer extensively to each of these periods. We could, however, refer to some general features of the educational work and to some features that may be considered as common.

Throughout the first period organized education used to take place mainly at the infertile and remote sites of exile and in some prisons, and it can be identified more as an ideological self-education, than a collective process. After 1936 the situation changed and the social, educational and political profile of the exile and the prisoners was enriched, resulting to achievement of an educational orientation toward the search for creative elements of a different social-political suggestion, that in a political level will find its expression in the period of the national resistance through the initiatives of organizations such as the National Liberation Front (EAM)⁶ and the United Panhellenic Organization of Youth (EPON)⁷. The second period from the Treaty of Varkiza (Varkiza Pact or Varkiza Peace Agreement)⁸ until 1966 is not homogenous. The conditions and

⁶ The National Liberation Front (EAM) was the main movement of the Greek Resistance during the occupation of Greece during World War II. Its main driving force was the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). EAM became the first true mass social movement in modern Greek history, and even established its own government, the Political Committee of National Liberation (PEEA), in the areas it had liberated in spring 1944.

⁷ EPON was the youth wing of the National Liberation Front (EAM) organization.

⁸ The Treaty of Varkiza was signed in Varkiza on February 12, 1945 between the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) for EAM-ELAS. One of the aspects of the accord called for a plebiscite to be held within the year in order to resolve any problems with the Greek Constitution. This plebiscite would help establish elections. The accord also promised that members of the EAM-ELAS would be permitted to participate in political activities if they surrendered their weapons. The Treaty specified that the EAM-ELAS would disarm.

therefore the ability to undertake educational initiatives were different in the period following the Treaty of Varkiza (1945 – beginning of 1946) in comparison to the period 1946-1949, throughout which the civil war is at the peak until 1952, when the executions are ceased and different in the rest of the period until 1966.

In the first phase, educational activity only reflected the previous educational work. The systemization and the selectivity of the educational lessons enhancing the fields of professional training determine the third phase after the civil war. In the period between 1967 and 1974 that the political prisoners had already gathered enough political experience, Junta had to change its practice and it gradually granted all the prisoners the right to education. Throughout this period and although the multiple divisions of the Left have deprived it of its ideological homogeneity, the confined population made good use of the historical legacy and made it possible to express its opposition to the regime by through its cultural activity (Kamarinou, 2005: 29-31). Moreover it must be noted that it's often the same people, who since the interwar period or the civil war period find themselves in prison or in exile for political reasons for the first time, and they will stay in prison for a long time throughout different periods of the above mentioned periodization. Andreas Floutzis for example, will stay in prison or in exile for 24 years, Elli Paspala from 1950 up to 1963 and from 1967 up to 1968, whereas Chronis Missios, kept in prison from 1947 up to 1973, experiences consequential periods of imprisonment and exile.

The training program in general included: lessons of basic literacy for those completely illiterate, language and writing as well as math. The training program corresponds to a certain degree to the curriculum of the first grade and high school but it can also lead to a higher level education through lessons such as history, philosophy (always in the direction of Marxism), history of the Bolshevik party, Leninism, etc. This higher education study course includes accounting, finance and other lessons, since the exiles aspire to a future professional career after their liberation (given that they are excluded from the public sector).

The first thing that we must observe in all these efforts, which include not only individual study, but also the organization of the lessons in a variety of disciplines, is that the educational activity extends over any official and institutionalized organization of the educational system (not only at an institutional level, but also often as a knowledge content). At the same time, it is a first effort and a particular form of implementation of the institutions of popular education in Greece, in a period, that literacy has reached very high levels (Kamarinou, 2005: 25 - 29). As correctly put by Kamarinou (2005: 56-78), the education in prison, is mainly addressed to adults and regarded as a form of education, without being restricted to it. We must also not forget that there are cases of children in exile and prison therefore care has been taken for their education, i.e. Trikeri (Theodorou, 1975: 132 – 135).

The fact that people from every level of society were imprisoned and exiled (educated people from big cities, illiterate farmers from the province, students, workers, women and men) gave the educated ones the opportunity to offer their knowledge to the illiterate ones and to develop

Ultimately, the promises enshrined in the Treaty of Varkiza were not upheld. The events that followed entailed widespread anticommunist killings of communists.

a consistent educational program, including basic reading and writing skills up to more advanced lessons. Additionally some of the most prominent Greek left wing education reformers, such as D. Glinos, K. Sotiriou, R. Imvrioti, M. Papamavros and others, as well as a number of male and female teachers. Throughout this whole long consistent or inconsistent period of time, the tension or the recession of the persecutions (for example there are many sources according to which the period after 1947, is the period when the executions in prisons start, therefore the educational activities weaken), we come across some form of educational activity is more or less forbidden.

Conveying the reflections of the modern educational theory to the special-status educational system for the prisoners, we can identify the teacher, the student, the state and the knowledge content as the main aspects of this organized learning process, as articulated in different fields of power and suggested by Bouzakis (2002: 21-39) in order to approach this reform, but we believe they can also help us with this study. It is obvious that in case of these prisoners each of these features operates in a special way and mediates the whole framework of confinement: absence of public educational institutions, indirect presence of family, which may adversely impact the individual's choices, pressure for a declaration of repentance (Floutzis, 1979: 187-213), teachers acting in their capacity also as cellmates/exile and party colleagues, double submission of the prisoners to the rules of the prison and the group.

In this context, left wing educators develop a new qualitative relationship with the students, regardless of the context and the limits allowed by the bourgeoisie state (Martinou – Kanaki, 2009: 112). The discourse of the left wing educators (who are now active as organic intellectuals) and the school career of the students are now re-oriented and enriched by the liberation goals, which are in priority. There is also an interest in knowledge (Habermas, 1990: 93-112) which allows, or at least provides the acting subjects a new political view of the school and the learning process.

This interest as well as the social change and the class struggle are directly related to the status of the students, as individuals persecuted for political reasons, a condition, which according to the left wing education reformers in exile reflects in a way the principles of Work School, under particular circumstances. As appropriately underlined by Kamarinou (2005: 29) in comparison to the more recent and infective training programs for criminal prisoners which are characterized by non-self-motivation, the educational program of the political prisoners is characterized by self-activity.

Therefore the approach of the left-wing educational work in prisons can't leave out the understanding of the new qualitative relationship which results from the fact that a political party, such as Greek Communist Party constitutes an integral entity that includes the intellectual-educators and the students. This fact also changes the content of knowledge and the concentration of the students/adults. The testimonies regarding the fact that great and well know educators, such as D. Glinos, found themselves in the position of the student in various lessons, whereas a labor or trade unionist found themselves in the position of the teacher although insufficiently qualified from the point of view of the traditional educational system (Kamarinou, 2005: 104). That means that according to the communist party, educational and scientific knowledge and research in general, are internally articulated through a set of practices, emancipating initiations and demands, which are considered impossible within the framework of the civil institutions. A culmination of this effort

can be seen in the scientific work of *Antaios* journal, in which case educators, economists, agronomists, engineers, doctors etc. make a single and coherent proposal regarding the economic and social development of the country. Besides there is a testimony, according to which the prisoners were taught lessons with a respective content. (i.e. Averof Women's Prison in the 1960's) (Kamarinou, 2005: 180)

We can also not fail to mention the role of the supervision tools in the educational activity, since they are absent from the places of confinement. They usually make whole miniature books by writing or copying whole books or texts so as to occupy as less space as possible. They make good use of every available paper or fabric as stationeries. Teaching instruments, such as globes or musical instruments are constructed by talented exiles from any available material. It also worth's mentioning that the construction of instruments and other articles by the students themselves has been particularly highlighted by the Greek education reformer (see indicatively Imvrioti, 1939). Another very typical example of this is the fact that Michalis Papamavros, the well-known Greek education reformer, undertook, while also confined, to write reading books for the prisoners, applying the principles of Work School and the language processing of Greek education reformers of the pre-war era, in the prison conditions (Papamavros, 1989).

A general observation on the level of language would be that for the first time Russian words such cooptation, udarnik, collective, enter the Greek language, as typical features of the party speech of that time (Kamarinou, 2005: 91). At the same time left wing prisoners agree to the use of demotic language and their preference to a writer is not only a result of the writers' ideological views, but also of the language they use. Particularly after 1930, a period in which Glinos and the linguistic-educational reform are closely related to the Greek Communist Party, the communist political exiles may have a clear view on this matter, with processes and conclusions that date back at the end of the previous century and Psycharism.

6.0 Results

What are the results from this educational work? The comfort or the happiness resulting from this study can't be quantitatively measured so as to answer this question, within the context of the adverse circumstances of prison. There are reports for example, regarding excited adults who achieved a good level of writing and reading (see indicatively Papadouka, 1981: 36-37). Nor can the opportunity of people from distant locations of the country to attend a lecture of Glinos or Svolos be quantitatively measured. An additional research could enlighten us regarding the amount of women exiles from agricultural areas, who after serving their sentence return to their places of origin, having experienced a new form of sociability and organized education for the first time in their lives.

As far as it concerns the Left, persecutions will determine the collective memory and the establishment of a political identity, whereas many members and fighters of the Greek Communist Party will have gained experience from all this time in prisons and exiles, which functioned as a pool of "well-proven members".

Moreover, the prisoners, apart from the partisan and general education, acquired professional qualification. Therefore they were enabled to exercise a professional activity after their

release from prison, such as journalism, accounting, sewing, or hairdressing (Papadouka, 1981: 19-20), whereas, according to Barziotas (1978: 54) the lessons helped the workers and farmers express their political views to an audience. On the contrary the political results of thanatopolitics and biopolitics (Razak, 2008), suggested by the state aiming at a reformation or elimination, brought more repressive rather than ideological results. A typical example of this can be seen in the results of the elections of the 5th of March 1950, which were devastating for the right wing, even in the exile camp of Markronissos, which was declared by the state as a place of reformation (Trikkas, 2009: 82-83). It is also worth mentioning that even the British officers expressed their objection regarding the exile camps in Makronissos (Voglis, 2000: 177). On the other hand, Margaritis mentions the special case of Makronissos and its' successful role in the reorganization of the government army and recruitment, that can't be interpreted only on the grounds of the use of force (Margaritis, 2000).

In conclusion it could be said that the study of Modern Greek educational history, which largely refers to the many "failed" reform efforts, should also include this page of history regarding education in prisons and exiles. The educational work of the prisoners is of interest not only as a particular way of social organization and knowledge, but also because of its relation to the broader reform proposed by the Greek Left (Marmarinos, 1977).

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