

Charalampos Babis Karpouchtsis

German Foreign Policy and Greek Martyr Communities

Reconciliation Policy for Places
of Memory in Greece and the Role
of Recognition

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Memory in Greece and the Role of
Recognition

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This work demonstrates that the Jena approach holds water: Reconciliation begins amid conflict. It is up to us to lead the process.

Berlin

23.01.2024

Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Identity and Professional Experience	2
1.2	Overview	6
1.2.1	The Economic Crisis as a Catalyst	7
1.2.2	A Newfound Interest in Bilateral Relations	10
1.2.3	German Federal Presidents in Greece: From Weizsäcker to Gauck	11
1.2.4	New Proposals and Policies for Reconciliation: A Brief Overview	13
1.3	The Role of Civil Society and Local Communities	14
1.4	Distomo 2017: “Do not put the German Flag Upon the Victims”	16
2	Current State of the Art and Relevant Literature Review	19
2.1	Literature on Greek-German Relations	21
2.1.1	Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: Greece as a New Case	30
2.1.2	The Role of Villages and Their Identities	35
2.2	Reconciliation Theory: An Analytical and Practical Tool in a World of Conflict	37
2.3	Reconciliation in Inter-state Conflict: Clarifying the Term	38
2.3.1	What is to Be Reconciled?	39
2.3.2	The Political Science of Reconciliation: A Hands-On Approach	40
2.3.3	Reconciliation in the Midst of Conflict: Dimensions of the Process	42

2.4	Transitional Justice, Types of Reparation and their Dichotomies	44
2.5	Recognition: Establishing a Basis for Reconciliation?	46
2.5.1	Recognition: What, Who, Which and How	47
2.5.2	Horizontal and Vertical Approaches to Recognition: Personal and Institutional	50
2.5.3	Aristotelian Recognition: Anagnorisis—an Experimental Excursion	51
2.6	History, Memory and Narratives: Remembrance as a Political Arena	52
2.7	Summary: Responding to the Gap in the Existing Research	55
3	Guiding Questions, Hypotheses, Scope and Methodology	57
3.1	Guiding Question	57
3.2	Hypotheses	59
3.3	Scope and Methodology	60
3.4	Limitations	62
4	Background: Structures, Historical Numbers, Maps	65
4.1	Death and Destruction in Numbers (1940–1945)	65
4.1.1	Famine, Shootings and Displacement	66
4.1.2	Lost Infrastructure	67
4.1.3	Destruction Mapped: Villages in Ruins—Rural Areas After the Occupation	69
4.2	Greek Local Governance Structure Today	69
4.3	Maps of Greece’s Administrative Regions with Martyr Cities and Villages	72
5	Historical Overview	85
5.1	Greece 1940–1949 and its Narratives	85
5.2	Post-war Realpolitik: Rapprochement in Silence	89
5.3	Criminal Prosecution and Punitive Justice: Greece’s Shortcomings	93
5.4	Reparation, Compensation, Restitution and a Forced Loan ...	95
5.4.1	A Legal Case? Pursuing Justice Despite the Obstacles: The Unique Road of Distomo	102
5.5	German Civil Society in Places of Terror	106
5.6	Friendship Without Reconciliation? <i>Gastarbeiter</i> in Germany and Military Junta in Greece	108

5.7	Official Symbolic Acts: too Little, too Late?	112
5.7.1	Symbolism Before 2000: Between Neglect and Sporadic Remembrance	112
5.7.2	Symbolism After 2000: Slowly Thawing the Conflict	113
5.8	Explaining (the Lack of) Symbolic Acts In Retrospect	115
5.9	Concluding Remarks and Periodization	116
5.9.1	Periodization	117
6	Memory Politics and Greek Martyr Communities: A Shifting Landscape	119
6.1	Greek Civil Society and Memory: Martyr Cities and Villages	121
6.1.1	Martyr Cities and Villages: Clarifying the Term	121
6.1.2	Institutional Recognition and the Network of Martyr Cities and Villages	124
6.2	The Politics of the Network of Martyr Communities	126
6.2.1	Greek Holocausts: A Problematic Name	126
6.2.2	The Network's Goals: Symbolism, Pragmatism, and Memory as Agency	130
6.2.3	Agency: Advantages and Challenges for the Network	132
6.2.4	Representation within the Network of Martyr Communities: Balancing Numbers	136
6.3	Other Relevant Actors: Civil Society, Associations, and Reparations as Agency	138
6.3.1	The Invisible Player: Local Organizations and Memory	138
6.3.2	The ESDOGE: Struggling for Justice and Recognition	141
6.3.3	The Hellenic Parliament: Reparations as Focal Point of Politics?	144
7	Initiatives of Cooperation and Reconciliation—Diverging Positions	149
7.1	The GGA: Local-Level Cooperation in the Absence of Martyr Communities	150
7.2	Greek-German Action Plan: Between Foreign Ministers on Equal Footing	153

7.3	The GGYO—Friendship Without Reconciliation the Next Generation?	157
7.4	The Zukunftsfonds: An Affront or a Forward-Looking Initiative?	163
8	“Small Places, Large Issues”—The Cases	171
8.1	Methodological Approach: The Case Studies	174
8.1.1	Interview Partners	175
8.1.2	Structuring the Interview	176
8.2	Challenges for the Field Research and the Interviews	179
8.2.1	Finding the Interviewees: Contacts, Trust, and Pragmatism	179
8.2.2	The Interviewee and Her/His Self-Presentation	181
8.2.3	Transcription Period, Interviewee Approval and Disclosure	181
8.2.4	A Question of Language: Greek, German, and English	182
9	The Case Studies: Similar Vision, Different Approaches	183
9.1	Lechovo	184
9.1.1	Interviewees, their Organizations, and their Roles	184
9.1.2	General Overview	185
9.1.3	Engagement with Germany	187
9.1.4	Findings	196
9.2	Kalavryta	198
9.2.1	Interviewees	198
9.2.2	General Overview	199
9.2.3	Engagement of Germany, Engagement with Germany	201
9.2.4	Findings	215
9.3	Servia (by Kozani)	218
9.3.1	Interviewees	218
9.3.2	General Overview	218
9.3.3	Engagement of and with Germany	221
9.3.4	Findings	229
9.4	Kandanos and Floria	231
9.4.1	Interviewees	231
9.4.2	General Overview	231
9.4.3	Engagement with and of Germany	234
9.4.4	Floria and the Wehrmacht Monument	239

9.4.5	Kandanos and Floria on Memory and Reconciliation	246
9.4.6	Findings	257
9.5	Municipality of Agios Vassilios: the cases of Kali Sykia and Saktouria	258
9.5.1	Interviewees	258
9.5.2	General Overview	258
9.5.3	Engagement of and with Germany	262
9.5.4	Findings	274
9.6	Viannos	275
9.6.1	Interviewees	275
9.6.2	General Overview	275
9.6.3	Engagement of and with Germany	279
9.6.4	Findings	288
9.7	Chortiatis	290
9.7.1	Interviewees	290
9.7.2	General Overview	290
9.7.3	Engagement with Germany	293
9.7.4	Findings	304
9.8	Distomo	305
9.8.1	Interviewees	305
9.8.2	General Overview	306
9.8.3	Engagement of and with Germany	309
9.8.4	Findings	328
10	Conclusion	333
10.1	Summary of Findings	335
10.2	Limitations	343
10.3	Contribution and Added Value	344
10.4	Outlook	345
	Bibliography and Sources	349

About the Author

Charalampos (Babis) Karpouchtsis born 1987 in Thessaloniki, graduated from the German School of Thessaloniki, studied Political Science at the Free University of Berlin and subsequently did his M.A. in European Studies of Politics at the University of Bath (UK). After working as a political consultant in Berlin, he returned to academia.

His doctoral dissertation on the reconciliation process between Germany and Greece from a political science perspective was written under the supervision of Professor Martin Leiner at the Jena Center for Reconciliation Studies (JCRS), at the Friedrich Schiller University Jena. In October 2023 he earned his doctorate degree with *summa cum laude*.

Since 2022 he has been a research associate and project coordinator at the Chair of Political Theory at the Helmut Schmidt University/University of the Federal Armed Forces in the project “Artificial Intelligence and Public Communication”. He is a founding member of the Democratic Resilience Center. His focus lies on Conflict Studies, International Relations, Memory Studies, Strategic Communication and Strategy.

Abbreviations and Foreign Terms

AA	Auswärtiges Amt— <i>German Foreign Office</i>
<i>andartes</i>	resistance fighters
ANFM	Association Nationale des Familles des Martyrs d’Oradour-sur-Glane— <i>National Association of the families of the martyrs of Oradour-sur-Glane</i>
<i>anthropoi</i>	in English: humans, in German: Menschen
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
ASF	Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste
BDPi	Bund Deutscher Pioniere— <i>Union of German Military Pioneers</i>
BGH	Bundesgerichtshof— <i>Federal Court of Justice</i>
BMFSFJ	Bundesministerium für Familien, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend— <i>Federal Ministry of Family Affairs</i>
BVG	Bundesverfassungsgericht— <i>Federal Constitutional Court</i>
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CPS	Christian Peace Service
DDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik— <i>German Democratic Republic, Eastern Germany before 1990</i>
DIMAR	Dimokratiki Aristera— <i>Democratic Left Party</i>

EAKK	Ethniko Apospasma Katadioxis Kakopoion/ Kommouniston— <i>National Detachment for Chasing Criminals/Communists, Jagdkommando Schubert</i>
EAM	Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo— <i>National Liberation Front</i>
ECJ	European Court of Justice
ELAS	Ellinikos Laikos Apeleftherotikos Stratos— <i>Greek People's Liberation Army, the military wing of EAM</i>
EMU	European Monetary Union
<i>Entschuldigung</i>	in Greek: sygnomi or synchoresi, in English: sorry or forgiveness or apology
ESDOGE	Ethniko Symvoulío Diekdikisis ton Ofeilon tis Germanias pros tin Ellada— <i>National Council for the Reclamation of Germany's Debt to Greece</i>
EU	European Union
<i>exileosi</i>	in English: atonement, in German: Sühne, Buße
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
GDP	Gros Domestic Product
GDR	German Democratic Republic (East Germany—DDR)
GFR	German Federal Republic (West Germany—BRD)
GGA	German-Greek Assembly— <i>originally in German: Deutsch-Griechische Versammlung, DGV</i>
GGFF	German-Greek Fund for the Future— <i>originally in German: Deutsch-Griechischer Zukunftsfonds, DGZF</i>
GGYO	German-Greek Youth Organization/ Office— <i>originally in German: Deutsch-Griechisches Jugendwerk, DGJW</i>
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICS	International Civil Service

<i>kosmos</i>	in English: people, in German: die Leute—(also the cosmos with another connotation)
<i>laos</i>	in English: the people or peoples, in German: das Volk
LVR	Landschaftsverband Rheinland— <i>Landscape Union of Rheinland</i>
<i>martyriko</i>	martyr or martyred, adj. n.
<i>metamelia</i>	in English: repentance, in German: Reue
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Greece
MOS	Morfotikos Omlios Servion— <i>Educational Club/Association of Serbia</i>
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Association
ND	Nea Dimokratia— <i>New Democracy, party in Greece</i>
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
Occupation (with capital O)	The Occupation (with a capital O) refers to the period of the occupation of Greece by German, Italian and Bulgarian forces and includes the time 1941–1944 (1945 for the island Crete). In Greek transliteration it is called <i>Katohi</i> .
PASOK	Panellinio Sosialistiko Kinima— <i>Panhellenic Socialist Movement, party in Greece</i>
POAEA	Panellinia Organosi Agoniston Ethnikis Antistasis— <i>Panhellenic Organization of Fighters of the National Resistance</i>
<i>Scham</i>	in English: shame
<i>Schuld</i>	in English: blame or guilt
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands— <i>Social Democratic Party of Germany</i>
SS	Schutz-Staffel
<i>Sühnemassnahmen</i>	lit. atonement operations—reprisals
<i>sygnomi</i>	in English: sorry or apology, in German: Entschuldigung
SYRIZA	Synaspismos Rizospastikis Aristeras— <i>Coalition of the Radical Left, party in Greece</i>

TJ	Transitional Justice
UMVMVP	Union mondiale des villes martyres—villes de la paix— <i>World Union of Martyred Towns—Peace Towns</i>
<i>Verantwortung</i>	in English: responsibility, in Greek: euthini
<i>Vergebung</i>	in English: forgiveness, in Greek: synchoresi
<i>Verzeihung</i>	in English: forgiveness, in Greek: synchoresi or sygnomi
WDR	Westdeutscher Rundfunk— <i>West German Television and Radio</i>
WUCP	World Union of Cities for Peace
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

List of Figures

Figure 4.1 Burned villages as mapped by the Ministry of Rebuilding, (Doxiadis, Ministry of Rebuilding 1946, p. 129) 68

Figure 4.2 Local governance structure in Greece in Greek, English, and German 71

Figure 5.1 Periodisation—Reconciliation process in different time periods since 1950. 118

Figure 9.1 List with interview answers—an overview 330

List of Photos

Photo 9.1	Sign greeting those entering the village of Lechovo	192
Photo 9.2	Sign for those leaving the village of Lechovo	193
Photo 9.3	Monument in Lechovo's main square	194
Photo 9.4	Monument on Lechovo's main street	195
Photo 9.5	Exterior view of the Dimotiko Mouseio gia to Kalavrytino Olokaftoma (Municipal Museum of the Kalavrytan Holocaust)	205
Photo 9.6	Statue in the museum's yard	206
Photo 9.7	The two plaques in front of the statue	207
Photo 9.8	View of the memorial for Kalavryta	208
Photo 9.9	Close up view of the cement structure, listing the names of the dead and the date of the event	209
Photo 9.10	Sign in front of the memorial for Kalavryta	210
Photo 9.11	Narrow viewpoint on the Kapi Hill as part of the memorial	211
Photo 9.12	The artwork "Kalavrytan Mother" next to the tomb entrance. Her closed stance refers to the petrified women of Kalavryta	212
Photo 9.13	View from the cross down to the memorial and to Kalavryta	213
Photo 9.14	Plaque in front of Servia's city hall	228
Photo 9.15	Sign at one of the entrances to Servia	229
Photo 9.16	The Greek memorial in Floria	246
Photo 9.17	View from the Floria Greek memorial to the Wehrmacht monument across the street	247

Photo 9.18	Close up view of the monument, reading in German “Fallen for Great Germany on 23 May, 1941”	248
Photo 9.19	First bilingual plaque at the Wehrmacht monument	249
Photo 9.20	Second bilingual plaque at the Wehrmacht monument	250
Photo 9.21	Third bilingual plaque at the Wehrmacht monument	251
Photo 9.22	Bilingual plaque from ASF at Kandanos Waterworks	252
Photo 9.23	Memorial with replicas of Wehrmacht signs put up in Kandanos on the east side of the main square	253
Photo 9.24	Memorial with different plaques on the west side of Kandanos’ main square	254
Photo 9.25	Original sign the Wehrmacht put up after Kandanos’ destruction	255
Photo 9.26	Original marble sign the Wehrmacht put up after Kandanos’ destruction	256
Photo 9.27	View of the monument of Saktouria, dedicated to the fallen (statue on the right) and the mausoleum to the left, by the village church	270
Photo 9.28	The mausoleum in Saktouria, the names of those executed appear on the low wall	271
Photo 9.29	Memorial in Kali Sykia	272
Photo 9.30	Memory plaque on the side of a building	273
Photo 9.31	Memorial in Seli, affording a view of all the villages of the Viannos’ massacres	285
Photo 9.32	Side view of the memorial	286
Photo 9.33	The memorial in Amiras with mist in the background due to the rain, the wooden cross is barely visible	287
Photo 9.34	The monument in Ano Viannos	288
Photo 9.35	Sign at the entrance to the village of Chortiatis	300
Photo 9.36	Sign in front of the memorial in Chortiatis	301
Photo 9.37	View of the memorial’s entrance	302
Photo 9.38	The memorial of Chortiatis	303
Photo 9.39	Front view of the main memorial of Distomo	322
Photo 9.40	The ossuary with the engraved list of the names of the dead and their ages	323
Photo 9.41	View of Distomo from the memorial	324
Photo 9.42	Distomo’s Museum for the Victims of Nazism	325
Photo 9.43	War monument of Distomo	326
Photo 9.44	Trilingual street sign pointing to the memorial	327

List of Maps

Map 4.1	Greece with administrative regions (<i>peripheries</i>), 2022	73
Map 4.2	Central Macedonia and Eastern Macedonia and Thrace	75
Map 4.3	Epirus and Western Macedonia	77
Map 4.4	Thessaly and Central Greece	79
Map 4.5	Western Greece and Peloponnese	81
Map 4.6	Crete	83
Map 5.1	Greece divided in occupation zones, until September 1943	87



Introduction

1

In 2000 the conference papers from “*Versöhnung ohne Wahrheit? Deutsche Kriegsverbrechen in Griechenland im Zweiten Weltkrieg*” [translation by the author: Reconciliation without truth? German War Crimes in Greece during World War II] (Giebeler et al. 2001a) were published. The conference as well as the publication drew attention to a widely unknown aspect of Greek-German history: the Occupation of Greece and its legacy, highlighting the overlooked nature of this issue, addressed missed opportunities and suggested proposals for reconciliation. The conference took place after families of the village Distomo sued Germany for the 1944 massacre committed by German forces.

After the conference, a long period of relative silence ensued. In Germany, the issue remained largely unknown; however, the economic crisis of 2008/2009 resurrected the shadows of the past with new vigor. Memories of World War II (WWII), the occupation of Greece and questions concerning reparations and compensation rose again. Interestingly, 14 years after this conference, Germany began a policy of reconciliation towards Greece. This chapter of European history remains unknown to the greater European public and estranges German audiences. The well-tended image Greece has created to promote tourism seemingly consists only of ancient gods and magnificent beaches, idyllic islands and classical ruins. The sinister chapters of massacres, deportations, and massive destruction have been given little attention, and the shift in German foreign policy towards reconciliation is new and offers room for analysis. Yet it is important to note that this shift did not occur until Greece’s economic collapse and the blows the country’s image received, followed by a deep divide in Greek-German affairs.

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In the following sections, I explain my personal and professional engagement with Greek-German relations, the issue of WWII and German occupation of Greece. I then provide an overview of this topic, examining the new approach in German foreign policy and the economic crisis' role. Before introducing my main hypotheses and questions, I will review the less-known Greek martyr cities and martyr villages and the role of German policies towards them.

1.1 Identity and Professional Experience

Since 2015 I have worked in Berlin as an independent political consultant focusing on Greek-German relations. In the summer of 2015 I met with the cultural association of the village Lechovo (in Greek transliteration: *Enotikos Syllogos Lechoviton* “*Profitis Ilias*”) and discussed a variety of possibilities for the village. Notably, the Lechovites had been *Gastarbeiter* and worked *en masse* in Germany during the past decades and many people had a close relationship with Germany. Some had been born in Germany, many had worked in the country, and many spoke German in the village. According to the residents' claims, approximately 80% of the village's estimated 1,000 inhabitants had some type of connection with Germany, a number that I did not corroborate but which seemed reasonable according to my observations. The village had already closely cooperated with the German General Consulate of Thessaloniki and ran two projects with funding from the German-Greek Fund for the Future, the Deutsch-Griechischer Zukunftsfonds, GGFF, and participated in two youth exchanges between Lechovo and Berlin, and Hamburg. It is important to note that the GGFF is located within the German Foreign Ministry (Auswärtiges Amt) and is not a bilateral fund, but rather a unilateral German initiative. Furthermore, in 2014 the local community of Lechovo declared the former German Consulate General of Thessaloniki, Wolfgang Hölscher-Obermaier an honorary citizen of Lechovo.

The cultural association of Lechovo decided to organize a large conference to focus on a widely unknown chapter of Greek-German relations: The Occupation of Greece and the subsequent pain, manifested in the destruction of Greek cities and villages, where crimes, deportations, and massacres against civilians took place. In Greek these are called martyr cities and martyr villages (in transliteration *martyriki poli*, *martyriko chorio*). In 2021 the total number of such martyr sites (in English often also referred to as martyred) was 124. Lechovo is one such martyr village, burned to the ground in 1943 and its inhabitants displaced.

Together we began working intensively on the Forum Memory and Education: Places of terror and remembrance in Greece. We set out to organize a large

and significant forum in which Greeks and Germans addressing bilateral relations would come together. We invited local and national politicians, mayors and civil society representatives of martyr communities, professors, and researchers from both countries, and drafted a program designed to: a) highlight Greece's martyr communities comprehensively with a particular emphasis on the martyr communities of Western Macedonia and the Jewish community of Thessaloniki; b) discuss ways of remembrance in both Greece and Germany; c) evaluate the legal and political challenges in the relationships between the two countries, including the question of reparations; and d) provide a basis for cooperation between the two countries on the academic and civil society levels by bringing together accomplished participants.

The forum was scheduled to meet at the end of May 2016, and we began advertising in the fall of 2015. I served as project manager and was the only full-time professional for the forum, working as a contractor for the association of Lechovo. All Lechovo association members and its managing board worked pro bono during this period. For the event, we secured the support of the mayor of Kalavryta, then also president of the Network of Martyr Cities and Villages. Moreover, representatives of over eight Greek martyr communities, including local politicians and civil society representatives and the involvement of experts from both countries were to participate. To finance the project, we secured funding from the GGFF, material support from the Municipality of Amintaio¹ and pro bono services from the association's members and board.

Use of GGFF funding proved to be a controversial issue, especially for Greek martyr communities, victims and their representatives. GGFF funding was believed by Greek communities to be linked to Greek reparation claims, and perceived as a way of evading the issue of reparations by funding projects. Thus, one of the first and central questions raised by Greek and German NGOs, citizens and politicians was the GGFF's connection to Greek claims for reparations and restitution from Germany resulting from the occupation of Greece during WWII. The German Foreign Ministry, the German Ambassador in Athens and the General Consulate of Thessaloniki repeatedly reassured various key actors that this fund was not connected to the reparation claims, and that such actions were necessary for establishing trust. From my perspective, it made sense that such a fund would not be connected to the issue of reparations, just as a martyr village association could not represent all Greek victims or the Greek state or government and would not be authorized or responsible to address such questions. Communities such as Kalavryta, one of the most known places of terror in Greece, had already used the

¹ The village of Lechovo belongs to the municipality of Amintaio (or Amyntaio).

Fund. The issue was also discussed in the media, including an article in which Greek national hero Manolis Glezos claimed to have been assured that the GGFF was not connected to Greek reparation claims.

While organizing the forum, the Lechovites and I sought to communicate Greek trauma and discuss it with people from Germany in order to preserve history and memory. This was to provide publicity, awareness, and knowledge for the Greek public, but particularly for the German public about the little known tragedy caused to Greeks by German soldiers during the occupation.

I was born in Thessaloniki in 1987 to Greek parents, and we moved to Germany in 1995 because my mother was a teacher for Greeks living abroad. We returned to Thessaloniki in 2001, and I studied at the German School of Thessaloniki. Naturally, we used German history textbooks. To the surprise of most Greek students in the German School of Thessaloniki, the occupation of Greece, its victims, the deportation and murder of the Greek Jews, the destruction of villages and towns, and the famine caused by the triple Axis occupation were absent from our books. What is more, our teachers—sent from Germany—had no knowledge of Greece’s more recent history. They were somewhat confused by the national holiday of October 28th, which commemorates what is termed “No-Day” and marks the beginning of the Greco-Italian war in 1940. This war resulted in Greece’s victory over Mussolini’s troops, after which Wehrmacht troops rolled into Greece to aid Germany’s Italian allies. Our teachers’ ignorance was difficult to grasp, especially after so many years of German *Aufarbeitung*, of working and dealing with the past. It was clear to me and to the Lechovites who had been in Germany that the broader German public had and still has little to no knowledge about what took place in Greece during WWII. Therefore, raising awareness seemed imperative.

Efforts at raising awareness included publicity in both Greece and Germany through various media outlets in Berlin as well as in Thessaloniki and Western Macedonia, where we introduced our event and ideas, held press conferences, and gave radio and television interviews. The closer the date of the forum, the more we increased public relations and communication efforts. But as we did so, voices objecting to our forum became louder; although my Greek and German mobile phone numbers and my email address were available on all online and print outlets we used, these parties chose not to reach out to us directly. The language they used to attack the forum made use of harsh vocabulary, including the words collaborators and traitors (in Greek transliteration: *synergatis* and *dosilogos*). These terms directly refer to the period of Greece’s occupation and imply

working with the enemy and reflect the worst characteristics of recent Greek history: Collaboration with the Nazi occupation forces as betrayers, informers or accomplices.

Still, very few participants canceled and only one speaker was absent from our event. Over eight martyr places, more than fifteen researchers, and over six local political representatives from martyr cities and villages, including the president of the Network of Martyr Cities and Villages took part in the forum. In its concluding assembly, the forum provided suggestions for future action, including stepping up contact and cooperation, commemorating the events in Germany, and upholding and pursuing the Greek claims for reparations (see Appendix 1). The association of Lechovo and I were and remain certain that we did the right thing: Keeping the memory alive, presenting and discussing history from different perspectives, offering a small contribution of peace building and democratic thought within Greece, Germany and Europe. We did this without silencing any of the issues, including horrific crimes and the matter of reparations. An example is the open letter sent by Argyris Sfountouris, who survived the massacre at Distomo and who criticized our action (Appendix 2). We also addressed lack of knowledge and feeling of neglect while formulating a perspective for future joint initiatives of cooperation and dialogue for reconciliation. Many of the ideas developed in this forum have been pursued or implemented since; and what is more, many personal contacts formed during this forum persist, adding to the unique character of open dialogue and friendship.

The experience of the forum led me to a deeper consideration. I realized I had a limited understanding of the friction points and could not fully grasp their multi-faceted nature. The deep division brought on by the economic crisis and the worsening of Greek-German relations in 2010–2016 demonstrated how heavily the shadow of the Occupation burdened bilateral affairs. Distrust towards Germany spread in Greece and divided martyr places to those cooperating with German initiatives and those who refused to. After having worked closely on over 20 different projects in three years with Greeks and Germans, including with scientists, civil society organizations, educators, politicians, dignitaries, diplomats, and youth workers, I wondered about the divisions and why terms such as *collaborators* are employed. My professional experience led me to explore the discrepancies between the policies and the political levels at which they were applied, and examine the often contradicting voices within Greek and German civil society and local politicians in support of and against participating in reconciliation projects. The role of memory was central to various local and national actors, while suspicions among survivors of Greek places of terror towards Germany increased. The Greek parliament continued to discuss German reparations

for damages and crimes committed during the Occupation while Germany firmly silenced the subject. The German public seemed oblivious at best—if not hostile—to the Greek case. And so while German politicians spoke of reconciliation, Greek martyr villages stressed the role of justice and compensation.

This unresolved issue drew my interest, as did Germany's sudden change of gear towards reconciliation. As a political scientist, I wanted to contribute to a European discussion of the trauma of WWII in Greece and shed light on this topic from the perspective of my discipline. Thus, I decided to undertake my own research and focus on what I perceived as some of Europe's least-known places of terror and memory, namely the Greek martyr communities. Places of terror of Greece have been mainly researched by historians but not by political scientists, leaving a gap that needs to be addressed. My background as a consultant allowed me to draw upon different contacts, personal experiences and firsthand knowledge, and it provided me with the will to undertake and complete my research. It was clear I had to confront the matter of writing in Greek or German, which would necessarily exclude non-Greek or non-German readers. Therefore, I chose the language of this thesis to be English in order to overcome the language barrier and make the research available to a broader range of readers, and as a common language for Greeks and Germans when addressing memory and history. I seek to offer a profound understanding of the darkest chapters of Greek-German relations and the legacy of this period, and boldly hope to shed some light onto the long shadow of the Occupation, especially the experience of Greek martyr towns and villages.

1.2 Overview

Greece and Germany are partners in multiple unions, including the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the European Monetary Union (EMU). Their bilateral history includes peaceful and calm, war-ridden and dark sides, mutual dependencies and economic asymmetries and in recent years the darker sides have gained political, academic, and public attention. Germany and Greece were enemies in both world wars. During World War II (WWII), Germany and its Axis-allies Italy and Bulgaria occupied Greece. This is an important reference point in modern Greek history and this period is generally referred to as the Occupation, meaning the whole period of occupation.² During

² Hence, when the term the Occupation is capitalized it refers to the period 1941–1945 and all the characteristics it includes.

this period, multiple atrocities were committed by the Wehrmacht and the other occupying forces, leaving a bloody trail throughout Greece. While the legacy of 1941–1945 is a part of Greek public memory and public dialogue, the economic crisis served as a catalyst and reintroduced this period to a broader public.

1.2.1 The Economic Crisis as a Catalyst

The European economic crisis of 2008–2016 demonstrated how fragile relations are amongst EU member states and highlighted the role of the past and its legacy in inter-state relations. This applies to Greece and Germany in particular, whose bilateral relations deteriorated and reached an unexpected low during this period. The recession greatly affected Greece, impacting its economy and society tremendously and causing poverty and unemployment to reach unforeseen heights in a time of peace. Greece's image suffered greatly, not just because of the economic reality but also because of the European crisis management and media reporting (Kaitatzi-Whitlock 2014). Large German media outlets led the attack on Greece's image and on its citizens' work ethics, and German politicians supported this practice to a certain extent. An unprecedented wave of hostility and mockery of everything Greek swept through Germany; it seemed that "money is where friendship ends" (Bickes, H. & Butulussi, E. & Otten, T. & Schendel, J. & Sdroulia, A. & Steinhof, A. 2014; Bickes and Butulussi 2012).

While the condition of Greece's economy and society worsened, blows to the country's image angered and embittered the Greek public, especially vis-a-vis Germany. Anti-German sentiments were spreading through the media, the public and political parties. Germany, German newspapers and politicians were being counter-attacked in a vain cycle of insults, using old clichés of Germans being "bad hegemon" who "have not changed"³ and who "humiliate the Greeks by dictating policy and impoverish them with austerity measures" ... "and that, after all they have done to us". It is this last phrase that is often heard in conversations on the topic in Greece. "After all they have done to us" was a dialogue opener and is relevant to this research.

³ The writer recalls various discussions in Greece with people of different social, educational, and economic background attacking Germany and especially certain well-known German politicians as "Nazis". Particularly the sentence "what they did not achieve with tanks, they now achieve with banks" was characteristic. Of course, this is one approach and is not representative of all Greeks.

During the period 2010–2018 the media played a central role in Greek-German dialogue and have had an enormous and negative effect on public image and public opinion in both countries. Symbols associated as traditionally Greek were deliberately misappropriated: A trembling Parthenon, the Athenian Acropolis ruined, and statues such as the Aphrodite of Milos making an obscene gesture are just a few of the leading images that appeared in German print and web media with regards to the Greek crisis. These images were often accompanied by terms such as *Betrüger* (cheaters) or *Pleitegriechen* (broke-Greeks), berating Greece's image and its citizens by extension in the German public (Bickes et al. 2014; Katsaounis et al. 2014). Media campaigns drew on clichés of the “ouzo drinking laid back Greeks” (Mylonas 2012) who want “the hard earned money of the German tax-payer” (Adler-Nissen 2017; Rehrmann 2022, pp. 78–83).

Reactions in Greece included demonstrators depicting Chancellor Angela Merkel in Nazi uniform and caricatures depicting the German Minister of Economy Wolfgang Schäuble as a *golem*. Linking current politicians with Nazi symbols and employing past images of crematoria and concentration camps in the context of austerity measures was used to attack the image of Germany and its politicians in the Greek public.

Media outlets in both countries utilized these images, meaning the Greek media portrayed the German images of Greece and vice versa, triggering a cycle of action and reaction, deepening the impact, bashing and worsening public opinion (Antoniades 2013). Resentment ran deep in both countries. It is interesting to note that the depiction and symbols employed by the media reveals stereotypic images of the other in each country. While in Germany the image of Greece was that Greeks were lazy and corrupt, the image of Germany portrayed in Greece was that of a Germany that did not change, a Germany that at its core remained power-hungry and pursuing a strategy of European domination. Citizens in both countries were alarmed and insulted by these views and depictions (Roose et al. 2017).

Tourism tells a different story. During the crisis, Greece was a leading destination for German tourists although in the polls, most Germans seemed to oppose bailing out or supporting Greece during the crisis (Tzogopoulos 2016). This was not just the case in Germany but also in other countries, yet no other country unleashed a comparable media attack against Greece. This again was perceived as lack of solidarity, a complete opposite of Greek perception up to that point. Traditionally Greece has been a firm supporter of the European Union. Greeks' trust in European institutions and participation in European elections were consistently high, yet this changed during the crisis along with Germany's image. In Greece, polls reflected a decline in trust for European institutions as well

as a new wave of anti-German sentiment. This new “Anti-Germanism” (tvxs.gr 2012) in Greek media is demonstrated by frequent use of Nazi comparisons, that is between the Third Reich and contemporary Germany. Favorable responses to Germany plummeted fast in Greece. Once one of the most popular countries in Greece, Germany fell out of favor (Kappa Research online 2019). Pew Research Center (2019) reflected similar findings. Hostility between the two countries was even picked up by the online edition of the youth and lifestyle magazine *Vice*, which asked, “Do Greeks and Germans actually hate each other?” (Maragkidou and Boeselager 2015).

The hostile atmosphere resulted not only from media coverage but also from political rhetoric. It became evident that Greeks did not have fond memories of the Occupation, while most Germans seemed to have never heard that Axis forces, including the Wehrmacht occupied Greece during WWII (Schultheiß and Chrysos 2010; Klemm and Schultheiß 2015). And so it was even more confusing for the German public when voices demanding reparations for the horrors of the Occupation grew louder. The gap in knowledge about the worst part of German-Greek history is inconceivable for most Greeks; this is what German Federal President Joachim Gauck (2014) called *zweite Schuld* (second guilt), namely the lack of knowledge of the crimes committed in Germany’s name in Greece.

The German public had and still has little to no knowledge of the horrors Nazi Germany and its allies inflicted upon occupied Greece during 1941–1945. In 2020, the occupation of Greece was still not included in German history schoolbooks. It is therefore no coincidence that the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation office in Athens picked this issue in 2015 and hosted an event to bring together scholars and historians from the renowned German Georg-Eckert-Institute to discuss textbook research with Greek scholars involved in writing and publishing texts and schoolbooks on Greek history. While the scholars from Germany supported further research into the era of Otto the Bavarian King of Greece, they were reluctant to include Greek WWII trauma in the German schoolbooks.⁴ The meeting was not fruitful. The German side missed another opportunity to broaden their public’s knowledge, especially their pupils—although Germany had proposed to create a joint youth organization to bring youths from both countries closer to each other. This failure to reach common ground demonstrates *en miniature* Germany’s refusal to recognize Greek trauma in general by excluding a narrative with a profound impact on bilateral relations. According to one expert interviewed for this research, it is debatable whether German media and politicians would have employed such ridiculing and ignorant rhetoric in the context of the economic

⁴ The writer was present in the event as an observer.