



ISLANDS
OF
EXILE





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ISLANDS

OF

EXILE

THE

CASE

OF

LEROS





RATIONALISING

BETH HUGHES

VIOLENCE

PLATON ISSAIAS



REFUGEES ON AN
ISLAND OF EXILES





On January 20, 2014 Fadi Mohamed, a teacher and displaced individual from Afghanistan stood still in the concrete peer of an island he didn't know the name of. The island is Leros, Greece. In a video issued by Greek NGOs, he seems lost and stays silent the entire time coast guard officers wearing surgical masks and gloves deliver protein cans and water bottles to him and a few others on the peer. Fadi had just lost his wife and three children, when Gönzuru, the small fishing boat that was carrying them from the Turkish shore to Greek territory and the 'safety' of European soil capsized near the island of Farmakonisi, 12 nautical miles northeast of Leros. In total 11 Afghan civilians, 8 of them children under the age of 12, died that day.

In a press conference that followed on January 25 in Athens, the 16 survivors overwhelmingly blamed the Greek maritime security force for this tragedy. Together with many Greek and European NGOs, Amnesty International argued that there was sufficient evidence to bring this case to court, or at least to further investigate serious human rights violations that took place in the cold, wintry waters of the Aegean Sea.

The migrants claimed that the coast guard not only did not help, but caused their already sinking boat to capsize when attempting to tow them back to Turkish waters at high speed. They also testified under oath that the coast guard, when realising that the vessel was rapidly sinking, cut the rope and let them to drown. Only after stronger migrants fought back and started climbing onto the coast guard boat,

did they start rescuing survivors from the water. They also reported that coast guard officers fired in the air and pushed and kicked people away from the rescue boat.¹

With an area smaller than 4km² and with a population of 10 people, according to the 2011 population survey, Farmakonisi belongs to the Leros municipality. The entire municipality includes mostly unpopulated islands, and covering an area of 74 km² its total population is 7,900 people. Like the entire Dodecanese cluster of islands and the Turkish coast on the other side of the sea, it's heavily militarised. The small army unit, stationed on a 10-day rota on Farmakonisi's isolated grounds, belongs to the special forces engineering regiment located in Partheni, a camp in the north of Leros island. Partheni is one of the most notorious military installations in Greece, a ground marked by postwar political conflicts — a space of displacement, incarceration and torture.

During the 1967-74 dictatorship, left-wing citizens were exiled in Leros as political prisoners. Detained across the island these men and women experienced an institutional violence occurring within a rather peculiar architecture. White, rather simple, rationalist private buildings, properly designed public infrastructure that included among others

¹ These descriptions resonate with many similar cases in the Aegean and Libyan Sea. This dreadful event is only one among hundreds, which surface, or remain unknown, every month in the media to illustrate the migration crisis in Europe. Ongoing wars and conflicts in North Africa, Asia and especially the Syrian civil war have pushed thousands to flee and find refuge on European soil, often with devastating consequences. The extremely important work of Forensic Oceanography, led by Lorenzo Pezzani and Charles Heller, has shown how the very protocol of 'search-and-rescue' missions and the extreme militarisation of the European security apparatus have profoundly increased the risk of dying at sea.



a market, a generous theatre, a church, two schools and a tower clock, organised a regular yet exotic township. Large military barracks were scattered opposite of the town and the camp of Partheni, with their facades often covered by characteristically large letters and their interiors full of Fascist, Nazi and Greek nationalist propaganda and wall paintings, some dating from the 1930s.

Before arriving to Leros, the exiled would have heard of the Royal Technical School that operated in Lakki between 1949 and 1964. Moreover, they were likely to know of another equally notorious facility, the psychiatric hospital. In any case, its distributed facilities would have been unmissable when entering the Lakki bay by boat.

The camp in Partheni and the little town of Lakki were designed and built during Mussolini's Fascist regime, when the Dodecanese islands were part of the Italian sovereign territory. Between 1912 and 1943, Leros was one of its most precious military stations in the Eastern Mediterranean, with its heavy artillery and well-protected, hidden port of Lakki, or Portolago as Italians called it, becoming a myth in itself between naval officers, pilots, commandos, paratroopers and spies on all sides.² Famously, Leros was one of Winston Churchill's obsessions in his attempt to intensify and

² Its legendary status was captured in Alistair MacLean's 1957 novel "The Guns of Navarone" that was based on the battle of Leros, an event considered the last defeat of the Allied Forces in WW II. J. Lee Thompson's critically acclaimed movie of 1961 based on the book, made the small island of Leros known internationally, possibly for the first time in its recent history. Famously, Leros was one of Winston Churchill's obsessions in his attempt to intensify and to further expand British colonial rule in the East Mediterranean. In his plans, the deep, natural port of Lakki/Portolago was considered an essential asset for the Royal Navy in an attempt to destabilise a post-WWII Turkey and eventually control the waters from the Bosphorus Strait and the Dardanelles to the port of Haifa and the Suez Canal.

to further expand British colonial rule in the East Mediterranean.³ In his plans, the deep, natural port of Lakki/Portolago was considered an essential asset for the Royal Navy in an attempt to destabilise a post-WWII Turkey and eventually control the waters from Bosphorus Strait and the Dardanelles to the port of Haifa and the Suez Canal.

Back in the early hours of January 20, 2014, the coast guard departed from Aghia Marina, Leros' main port. This was the first European soil the 16 devastated, freezing refugees stepped on. *Refugees on an island of exiles.*

More than four years later, in the spring of 2018, more than 1,000 people are kept in the so-called 'Leros hotspot', or 'hospitality centre' as the Greek government calls temporary refugee camps. Two different prefabricated unit types, organised in a series of streets on a regular grid system and confined within a perimeter of a barbed-wire fence, are placed in a large open field defined by two large 1930s abandoned buildings. In one of them, one can still read the large painted letters, now fainting: 'Caserma Avieri' (aviators barracks). The camp is enclosed by the coastal road of Lakki and the southwest limit of one of the three sites of the Psychiatric Department of Leros Hospital, known as the 'villas'.

This essay presents the key findings of a research project that started in early 2014 into architecture and urban form in light of contemporary militant

³ This has been captured and discussed in many instances, most importantly in: Anthony Rogers, *Churchill's folly : Leros and the Aegean : the last great British defeat of the Second World War* (London : Cassell Military, 2003).







institutional analysis, mental healthcare and political history. Leros' politicised and traumatic existence has been defined by its service under various regimes. The project focuses on the last century, from the Italian occupation of 1912-1943 until today, covering a rather neglected case of Italian Rationalist architecture, namely the plan of the town of Lakki/Portolago.⁴ The project follows the transformation of the infrastructure built by the Italian fascist administration, to notorious mental healthcare facilities, camps for political prisoners and violently displaced children from mainland Greece, to current occupation as detention centres for refugees. Leros is a living testimony of all military, security and disciplinary apparatuses deployed by the Greek state since the end of WWII. The brutality and unprecedented violence of displacement, confinement and bodily restriction exists within an idealised colonial architecture that celebrated a mystified, Fascist pan-'Mediterraneanism'. It's a space and an exemplary landscape defined by water, geography and the south-eastern Mediterranean environment, and yet it performs a series of rather different functions — or not?

The essay addresses a series of questions that frame the research project, investigating the role and agency of architecture in processes of institutionalisation, de-institutionalisation and subjectification in Leros, especially

4 The town planning and the particular architecture of Lakki/Portolago is absent, or rarely mentioned in studies of Italian, rationalist architecture, with the exception of the work of Vassilis Colonas. Colonas has done work on architecture of the Italian, fascist period in the Dodecanese, but without expanding into the post-WWI history of the town. For more, see: Colonas, Vassilis. (2002) *Italian Architecture in the Dodecanese Islands 1912-1943* (Athens: Olkos), 66 - 71.

the Rationalist town of Lakki/Portolago. What kind of architecture accommodates military, security and mental healthcare institutions? What kinds of relations exist between these institutions and their architectures? Most importantly, how does the particular military set up of the town, the masterplan, and singular buildings organise social relations, employment and an entire ecology of detention, confinement and care? Finally, what is the role of mental healthcare protocols in the development of cities and towns?⁵

The presence and influence of Felix Guattari in the de-institutionalisation process of the Leros Psychiatric facility in the early 1990s makes it an extremely interesting case study for how radical psychiatry confronted what Felix Guattari called 'a real psychiatric prison, a concentration camp, without the presence of any medical staff, not even a psychiatrist',⁶ when he visited the island in 1991 during ongoing attempts to reform the globally disgraced institution.⁷

5 This last point has become particularly relevant through the work of Susana Caló and Godofredo Pereira and their current research project on CERFI. See their recent article: Godofredo Pereira, and Susana Caló, 'From the Hospital to the City', *Journal of Critical Thought*, 2 (1), London, 2016, 50-58.

6 « véritable baigne psychiatrique, camp de concentration sans la présence d'aucun personnel soignant, sans même un psychiatre. », Félix Guattari, *De Leros à La Borde* (Éditions Lignes, 2012), Préface de Marie Depussé, post-scriptum de Jean Oury, XX.

7 The psychiatric hospital on Leros became the centre of a scandal due to the 1981 visit of journalist Mario Damolin, material from this visit was later published in *Der Spiegel* and the *Observer* breaking international news.







THE PLAN AND





THE
OBJECTS





Today a continuous crust of urbanisation encircles the waist of the island of Leros, barnacled to the sides of its deep bays and harbours. The remaining two-thirds of the island are somehow imperceptible, unknown and inaccessible, annexed from the central population due to large military bases and infrastructure. This unusual configuration creates uneasy contrast to the typical archipelago tropes of seaside and hilltop villages scattered across dry island landscapes, quietly hosting small, contained communities. This agglomeration appears more as a mainland urban development, like the start of a city or campus. The island's vernacular is swamped by large infrastructures for military, marine and healthcare systems – housing filling in the patches between the institutions on the campus. This anomaly is not an accident but rather a clear function of the planning and urban development strategies of the Italian occupation that established a clear demarcation of rank, ownership and class across the island and, through extensive programmes of expropriation and redistribution of land, built this rigid hierarchy into the territory. The concentration of these activities is around the bay of Lakki, formerly known as Portolago. Agricultural redistribution and the extensive militarisation of the island pressured the remaining 'traditional' fabric into the thin stretch between the harbour and remaining infrastructures.

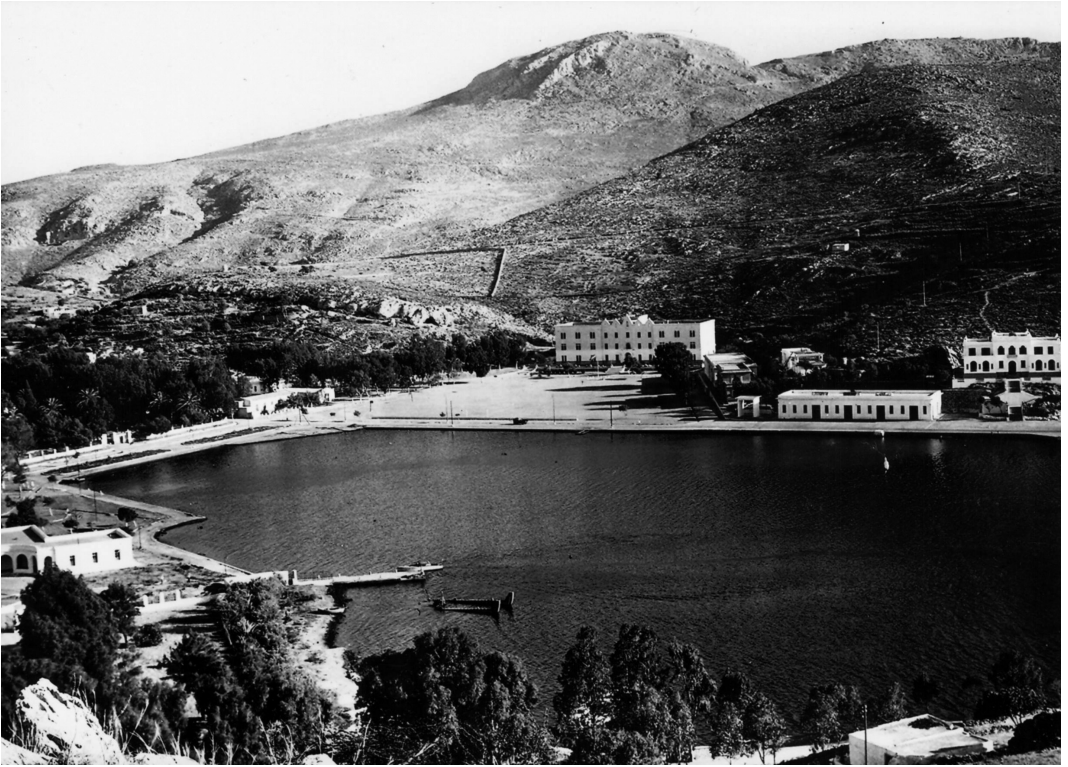
The peculiarity deepens as one enters the harbour of Lakki. Four large and imposing naval barracks flanking one side as ferries, boats and yachts dock at

the most peculiar of all villages in the Dodecanese, perhaps the Mediterranean. Planned around the gentle curve of the harbour, with an axial plan that mirrors the curve of the bay, this small township that can be traversed in minutes, is a unique and much overlooked exemplar of Rationalist Italian architecture. An experiment in planning, imagined as the model village, and a strategic eastern out-post of a failed colonial power, Lakki, and Leros, harbour a far more complex history than their modest size and reputation indicate.

The village carefully positions subtly designed institutional and civic edifices (theatre, casa del fascio, school, church and market) in a considered plan, to support rows of prototypical villas along curvilinear streets. This architecture from the Italian occupation is an exceptional form of architecture and planning, foreign to the traditional vernacular of other islands or the adopted neo-classical vernacular prevalent in the Dodecanese. Yet, these strange objects operate beautifully in the climate, settle perfectly in the weather and conjure a calm ease of occupation. The elegance of the architecture belies the sinister history that is palpable in the strange urban forms, the large military infrastructures and the model town on a forgotten Greek island.

Prior to the Italian occupation of 1912, Leros was one of the more obscure islands of the Dodecanese. Owned in the remnants of the Ottoman Empire, Leros was in a strange cultural limbo and existed relatively autonomously under Ottoman rule. In the resolution of WWI and many exchanges of land across







(DODECANNESO - ISOLA DI LERO)

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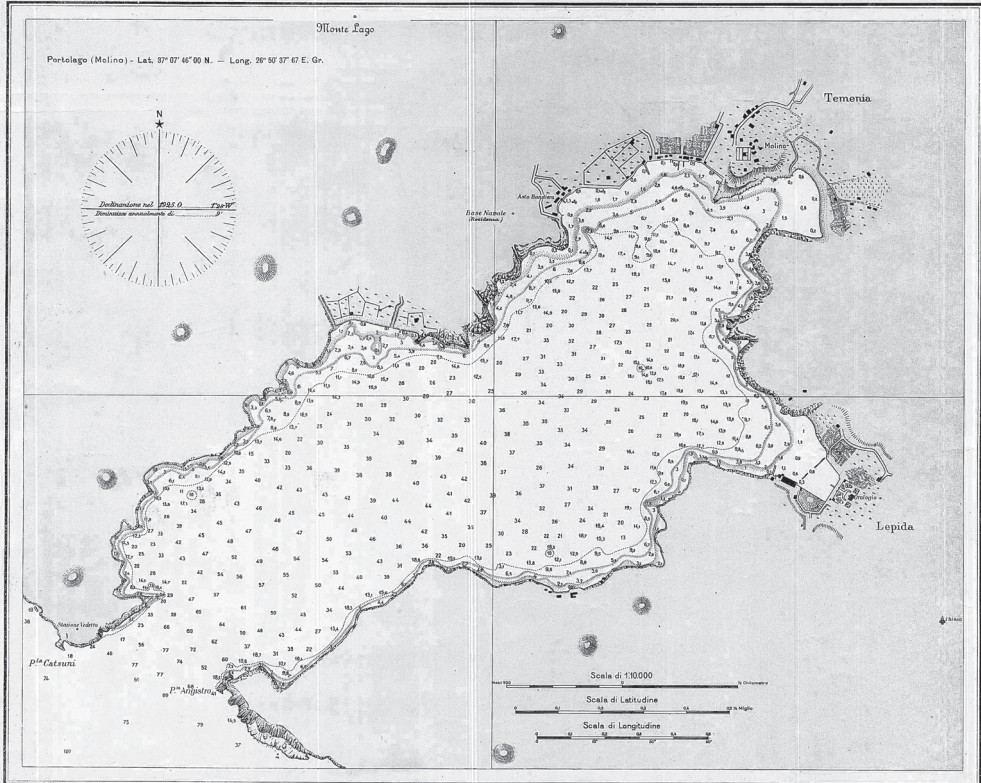
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Europe and the Mediterranean, Leros, as with all the Dodecanese, came under Italian control. Italy's occupation of the Dodecanese emerged out of unrest in its northern African colonies and in an effort to shore up and advance its power, Italy pressed into the Greek archipelago wresting control of the islands from the Ottomans. During the first half of this period, Italy's claim is tenuous and reinforced through military presence.

Leros, with the deep natural harbour of Lakki/Portolago became Mussolini's focus for launching his naval operations for the domination of the eastern Mediterranean. It became the centre for a strategic plan of a new state-empire, with a forceful Italian presence on the island as early as 1923 with the establishment of the airbase in Lepida. Central to all of Mussolini's strategies for the construction of his state and his legacy was architecture. Fashioning himself as the master-builder of a new empire, Mussolini sought to immortalise power, control and might through the physical construction of a new architecture and environment. The beautiful village of Lakki, as alien as it is, is now settled in a distinctly Greek culture, is an experiment in this construction of a state image — the model town. But the architecture and the planning of the harbour is more than just about symbolic power, it is rather an entire ecology, an infrastructure of buildings and services and policy and economic frameworks that sustain a system dependent on processes of control and detainment, supporting a perpetual cycle of exile.

Historic archives of Leros and Rhodes include extensive bathymetry and mapping from the Italians, recording the ideal strategic location and natural formation of Leros' harbour. The harbour becomes the focus of infrastructural and civic efforts, with residential, public and medical structures on one side, and naval on the other. To complement the nautical strength in the south, an airstrip and military base secure the northern half of the island in Partheni. To this day, now used by Greek forces, this area is annexed and hidden from the rest of the island, with one road in and out of a controlled territory. This has stunted all urban development on the northern half of the island, forcing all civilian life to the southern side. These two poles of defence are networked and reinforced through an elaborate system of defences and tunnels, built by the Italians during their 32-year occupation.

The Italian occupation of the Dodecanese can be characterised by two phases. In the first phase (1912-1923), Italian control is imposed through military processes and presence, in which Italy's ownership of the territory is ambiguous and not officially recognised. During this period the key building project is the airport in 1923 in Partheni on the northern edge of the island, giving consistent and expedient access to the island for the Italian military and personnel. Following the official absorption of the Dodecanese into fascist Italy, the region becomes formally known as the Italian Aegean Islands. This latter phase of the Italian occupation of the island, 1923-1943, is characterised





by a fervent ‘Italianisation’ and a shift from military rule to political rule. Italy imposes the fascist ideology through politics, culture and social activity. This period is when Leros is rapidly developed by the Italian regime and is clearly reflected in the urbanisation of the harbour of Lakki, renamed Portolago at that time by the Italians.

The southern side of the bay is efficiently developed as a naval base, with the land acquired through extensive land expropriations. The naval base is divided into two key zones: southwest for naval infrastructures and technical facilities, including two hangars for hydroplanes, storage rooms, offices, administration and pilot quarters, and a northeast area for housing. With the development of the island, a transition in architectural style from neo-Renaissance architecture (Novecento) to a form of Modernism takes place that attempts to integrate with local and vernacular traditions as seen in the early designs of Florestano di Fausto.⁸ Some of these buildings still host the Greek navy today, although in a much diminished capacity. The main structures of the historic naval base now lie in ruin – four large imposing barrack buildings. Three of the barracks, closest to the peninsula, large, austere and imposing blocks, are a counterpoint to the delicate scale of Lakki. Masonry

⁸ Colonas, Vassilis. (2002) *Italian Architecture in the Dodecanese Islands 1912-1943* (Athens: Olkos), 66 – 71.

and concrete frame buildings, built in the Italian tradition of construction with brick floors, unlike the stone and brick vernacular, have a standard gridded column and beam construction allowing for flexibility of occupation and use.⁹ The generic nature of these buildings and their monumental scale made them practical and valuable buildings that would go on to multiple iterations after 1947, when Leros and the Dodecanese would become part of the Greek territory. The fourth barrack is of a slightly different architectural language, while the other buildings are utilitarian in character, it is more decorative, with mouldings to create a coronated parapet in a style very similar to other Italian buildings on Kos and Rhodes. This is the barracks for the sea-pilots. In the front of the building is a formal forecourt and steps, the scene of many official events and parades.

In the shift from military to political rule, Italian governance and control is wrought through planning and development. Following the curve of the bay beyond the barracks to the north-east, the officers residential area is elegantly laid out in a series of 1-2 storey generous villas, settled amongst rows of trees, exotic palm trees and garden landscapes.

⁹ Giglio, Annalisa. “The Decorative History of Concrete in an “Other” Modernism: Italian Architecture of the Dodecanese (1912-1943)”, *Second International Congress on Construction History*, 1251-1269.







The compound includes entrance guard-posts and swimming pools, a clear demarcation of rank and authority. As Italian rule is formalised, the Italian population swells, increasing demand for housing for officers and their families. To support this growth, and to consolidate Italian social, cultural and political life, the governor of the Dodecanese, Mario Lago, founds the new town of Portolago on the opposite shore of the naval base in the Rationalist style of the Italian fascist state.

The urban plan was approved in 1934, and by 1936 7,500 people lived in the new township. Formed of 6x6 streets on a curvilinear grid, the town is like no other village, with almost all buildings designed by Rodolfo Petracchi and Armando Berbabiti. The layout follows a strict hierarchy that arranges civic buildings, a series of villa typologies designed to support the different ranks of the population and community infrastructure for sport, leisure and retail. Key civic buildings (a casa del Fascio, theatre and school) line the waterfront, serving as the backdrop for important parades and state visits. Behind this waterfront is an intimate street with small-scale local shops and retail. The central axis runs perpendicular to the harbour and forges up the topography, flanked by the central market and church, and leading out to fields and sporting equipment. Moving progressively out from the central axis are the residential streets, with location and typology arranged by rank: higher ranking officers in the central streets live in one to two-storey freestanding houses, lower ranking officers in the middle zone

in two-storey complexes containing four apartments, and then workers living in buildings at the periphery in two-storey apartment buildings. All of the houses are very carefully designed for the climate, with some of the more higher-ranking typologies enjoying generous high ceilings with considered entrance spaces and circulation, set in well-designed gardens.

The rigid structure and carefully choreographed stage-set, perfect for the pageantry of reform and power, can be understood to create an equally rigid class structure in strict adherence to the principle of *gerarchia* (hierarchy)¹⁰ as established by the Fascist manifesto. The settlement of the town was deliberately planned, with lands reclaimed from Greek locals upon occupation in a process of land redistribution, to create a dedicated space of the colony, enforcing a clear hierarchy between the ruling Italian population and the subservient Greek population who are shifted to the periphery and excluded from the life of Portolago. This physical demarcation is further emphasised through a series of policies around language, economy and politics that denies access and equality to the local population. The dedication to the principles of *gerarchia* is explicit in the formal arrangement of the exemplary pieces of Rationalist architecture and its symbolic communication through decoration and material. It is an architecture designed to impart authority and to strictly regulate a person's status

10 Ghirardo, Diane. "Italian architects and Fascist Politics: An evaluation of the Rationalist's Role in Regime Building", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol.39, No.2, May, 1980 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press) 109-127.





and role – it is an architecture of control. In the case of Leros, this is emphatically represented through the urban plan, with a strict social hierarchy especially implemented around the bay of Portolago. There is intense and distinctive regulation and segregation of classes of society and military rank, reinforcing adherence to specific societal roles. This structure fosters the perfect ecology for an urban form and reciprocal society, designed to control and surveil.

The plan of Lakki is carefully accented with key civic buildings that give orientation, hierarchy and character to the village. These five buildings are quite beautiful in their simplicity and considered use of indoor and outdoor spaces suited to the Mediterranean climate. More humble in scale and language than other Italian colonial architecture, the buildings of Lakki are a sensitive response to the Greek context and vernacular.

The new school sits at the entrance to the site, its curved colonnade set back in against the hillside. The interior spaces offer a generous and unique space of education. Open courtyards and breezy corridors create opportunity for classes taught outdoors, the proportion and scale of each space is very well considered. Today these spaces are used for the local school and the courtyard is filled with children learning Greek instruments and Greek dance-classes.

The theatre and casa del Fascio frame the main central axis back away from the cornice into the landscape. Again, the use of the curved form allows the building to detach itself from its neighbours, highlighting its position

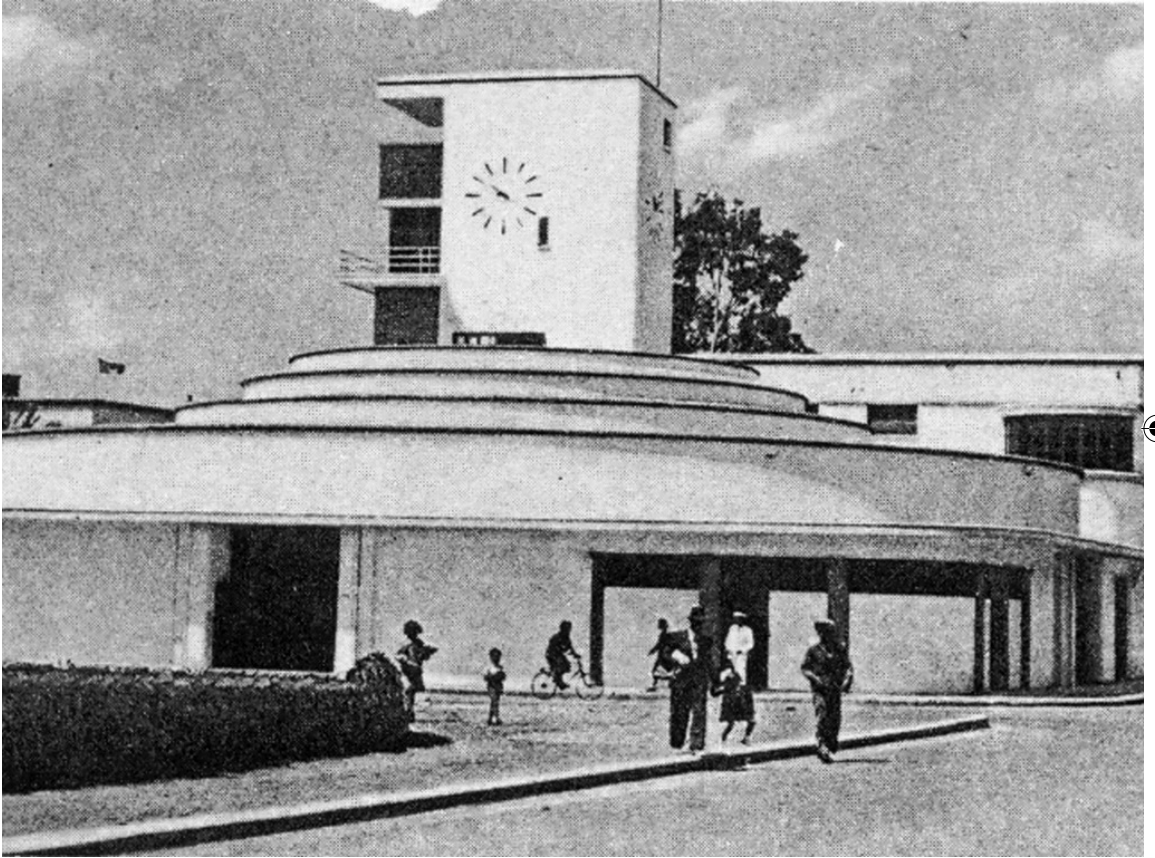
and also opening up to the main access — presenting itself both to the water and to the street. As you continue up the axis you encounter the market, perhaps the best piece in the collection, and terminate at the church. The gently domed space of the market opens into a central garden creating an oasis in the plan — a simple layout offering such enjoyable space, perfectly suited to the climate and context. Today the courtyard of the market hosts a *cafe-neio*, an idyllic setting for idling away time.

Between the township and the villas is another significant piece of civic infrastructure, a large military hospital campus, one of the key medical facilities of the Dodecanese. Elegant courtyard structures are thoughtfully designed with climate in mind. The extensive scale of the hospital site is significant relative to the population of the island, the legacy of which will earn Leros its greatest notoriety.

Extending beyond the concentrated efforts of the harbour of Portolago, an extensive network of infrastructure, supporting buildings and military apparatus were developed across the island between the military base and airport of Partheni to the north and the bay of Portolago. Underground a series of tunnels as part of the defensive strategy burrowed into the terrain, on hilltops are a series of surveillance, offensive and measuring apparatuses to watch, hear and pursue oppositional forces.

As an epilogue to the description of the architecture and its implementation, it is important to note the relationship to the local population







— Italian architecture for an Italian military community, clearly designed to impose their ideal living conditions on the island.

The land for new settlements, towns, buildings and infrastructures across the Dodecanese were acquired through land expropriation and a series of policies that gradually wrested land from Greek locals into Italian settler ownership.¹¹ Greek farmers were pushed out of their farming lands into a new class demographic, clearly established through these policies — land planning and reclamation becomes a mechanism for once again exerting *gerachia*. Greek farmers are forced into labour for construction and become the new workforce to implement the many building plans. These policies forced the Greek population into subservient labour roles and denied them their independence and subsistence, typical on other islands. In 1943, after 20 years of occupation, the local population were no longer accustomed, educated or equipped for the subsistent lifestyle of agricultural production, but rather entrenched in a system of employment and labour — Leros had a ready-made unskilled labour force that could be readily employed and utilised in the creation of new Greek institutions that emerge as part of the rebuilding of a new nation.

11 This approach was far-reaching in particular in relation to agricultural lands where a series of legal impositions systematically took agricultural land from the local population to hand over to the Italians: 1924 decree forbidding Greek landowners from planting seeds or cultivating their land; 1928 decree handing over any land left fallow for three years to the Italian government and passing these over to Italian farmers; and a 1929 decree expropriating all lands held by Greeks and handing it over to Italians who wished to introduce new kinds of farming or crops. Colonas pp 71,72







DISPLAC



C E M E N T







In September 1943, Fascist Italy collapses, and with the resignation of Pietro Badoglio the Dodecanese come under German control until the capitulation of Nazi Germany to Britain in May 1945. For the third time in four years, the island falls into the hands of a new administration, overseen by the British state until 1947, when the Dodecanese are handed back to Greece in the redrawing of the nation's boundaries. On March 7th 1948, the island is officially incorporated into Greek national territory.

But from 1944 to 1949, Greece is in a state of civil war. Extremely impoverished and internally conflicted on many fronts, the ensuing 25 years until the fall of the 1967-1974 military dictatorship, are defined by perpetual political turmoil, a quasi-continuous civil war of various intensity and levels of democratic or authoritarian ruling. The deep divisions between the right and the left in Greece are visible and acknowledged even today. Leros is caught in the confluence of this contested landscape. The large infrastructures delivered by the Italians serve as the ideal hosts for new modes of detainment, confinement and control in the name of patriotism and progress. This violence will continue many years after 1974 and the fall of regime of the Colonels. It plays out not only in forms of discipline of the citizenry, but also economic reform policies that seek to buttress and consolidate the many islands of the archipelago to bring them into the fold and clearly establish them as part of modern Greece.

On March 31st 1949, the Ministry of Social Welfare announced that there are 340,000 abandoned children in Greece. In the wake of WWII and the ensuing civil fighting in Greece, the nation faced a crisis of orphaned children. The case, the destiny and the personal and collective histories of these children is still heavily politicised issue in Greece; often and from the opposing camps, both state run institutions and the military forces of the Greek Communist Party have been accused for child kidnapping. In October of 1947, Queen Frederica of Greece started a fundraising programme, The Queen's Fund, to address the plight of the refugees and orphans - this funded the first seven orphanages, *paidoupoleis* (children's cities), food distribution and two training schools.¹² Purported as the saviour of long-suffering children, these orphanages in fact served as centres of indoctrination.¹³ There is evidence to suggest that many of these children were in fact not orphans but children of communists who were in prison or exile, officially declared 'dead' by the Queen's Fund because of their political leanings.¹⁴ By 1950, the Queen's Fund had financed 54 *paidoupoleis* across the country, nine of which remained operational until the end of the 1950's, with few open until the 1970's. The children were raised in a strict militarised and highly political environment aimed at raising loyal

12 Queen Frederica of Hellenes, (1971) 'A Measure of Understanding'. Macmillan, London

13 Danforth, L.M., Van Boeschoten, R. (2012) 'Children of the Greek Civil War, Refugees and the politics of memory' Chicago University Press, Chicago and London

14 Ibid







subjects that would follow Greece's traditional values. They often wore uniforms, slept in dormitories of up to 30 children in each room and ate in shared dining halls adorned in nationalist iconography. In addition to studies and prayers, they were assigned to work details and had little exposure to life outside the compound — much like life in a military barracks.¹⁵

Also in 1947, King Paul set up the Royal National Foundation to 'raise the moral, social, educational and living standards of the Greek people'. As part of this, the King established the Royal Technical Schools on the islands of Crete, Kos and Leros. Financed by the Queen's Fund, they opportunistically occupied whatever buildings were available, from barracks and hospitals to lavish villas.¹⁶ The most famous of the Royal Technical Schools, Leros, opened in March 1949 in the former barracks of Lakki/Portolago harbour. The Italian Naval barracks of Leros, large-scale building designed to accommodate sizeable numbers of people, were ideal for hosting and training vast numbers of children — it was soon to become one of the largest and longest running such institutions in Greece. The school differed from the orphanages programme in that it was for older boys, aged fourteen to twenty, often young leftists, captured partisans from jails and internment camps, in parts transferred from other *paidoupoleis*. Leros Technical School ran under strict military discipline, staffed and- managed by

specially chosen officers from the Greek Army. The explicit remit of the school, as articulated by the King himself, was to re-educate and reform young leftists and to bring them 'back into the national family'. After visiting the school in 1950, the British ambassador's wife to Greece, Lady Norton, praised the school stating, 'communism must and will spread. This is the only country in the world where real creative work is being done to combat the cancer of bolshevism.'¹⁷

Students were trained as carpenters, bricklayers, house painters, tailors and electricians, and graduates would receive a diploma signed directly by the King. Correspondence outside was censored.¹⁸ The students' life followed military protocol with units, groups and unit leaders sleeping in military bunks on straw mattresses with military blankets, their uniforms made from recycled military equipment.¹⁹ At any given time, the school was training 1,300 students.²⁰

The Royal Technical School of Leros remained operational until December of 1964, allowing for the last of its graduates to complete their studies. After 15 years an estimated 16,000 were re-educated in Leros. Today the orphanage (barracks) is in total ruin, having been unused for over 40 years. The floors and ceilings are collapsing, as are parts of the stairs, making it inaccessible. The walls are still covered in murals and decorative slogans encouraging obedience and dedication to the motherland. Beyond the re-education

15 Danforth, L.M., Van Boeschoten, R. (2012) 'Children of the Greek Civil War, Refugees and the politics of memory' Chicago University Press, Chicago and London

16 Ibid. pp 198

17 Ibid. pp 102

18 Ibid. pp 170

19 Ibid. pp 170

20 Ibid. pp 170





of the Greek youth, the *paidoupoleis* and technical schools served as essential propaganda of the monarchy's good works. The activities and successes of the schools were documented and disseminated through a dedicated magazine, awash with images of the regents visiting the schools, demonstrating their benevolence and the success of the programme. The formal spaces, generous waterfront promenades and building forecourts, proved especially effective for the ceremony of a royal visit, just as they had for the Italian occupation prior.

In 1957, as part of a state programme of economic invigoration for regional Greece, there is a concerted effort to decentralise key services and institutions from Athens. Leros is identified as a key site for mental healthcare. In 1958 the State Mental Hospital opened, transferring people from other areas of Greece. Housed once again in former barracks and hospital buildings, the psychiatric facilities in Leros would confine over 3,000 patients at a time, making it one of Greece's largest mental institutions. The facilities were expanded in 1961 with the establishment of the 'institution for maladjusted children' — the Leros Child Care Centre (CCC) of the Patriotic Foundation for Social Welfare and Care (PIKPA). Many of the children were not strictly psychiatric patients, but rather cases of Down syndrome, autism and cerebral palsy. Some of the original patients continue to live on the island in the same facility today, with a total of 914 children admitted over a thirty-year period.

With the introductions of the

asylum, orphanage and political prison, the island population grew 23%. This is not only due to the additional population of the institutions, but the employment offered meant that the local population remained in Leros, whereas the trend in other islands was one of mass depopulation. While figures vary, at least 60% of the island's workforce was associated with the asylums. In 1988 the per capita income was relatively high in comparison to the rest of Greece (280,000 drachmas vs 200,000). The island enjoyed almost no unemployment with people often having several jobs.²¹

Whilst the historic Italian buildings were large and therefore convenient, they were not fit for purpose. The children's hospital, PIKPA, with many patients suffering from physical disabilities as well as mental concerns, had multiple storeys without lifts or ramps or handrails, meaning that non-ambulant patients were confined to their rooms on the ground floor their entire lives; the eating areas were next to the toilets; there were endless problems with heating; the electrical wiring was inadequate, outdated and dangerous; tap water was not safe for drinking and there was generally no hot water; and the kitchen was in a separate building with food transported in buckets. The hospital was predominantly staffed with untrained locals from Leros, their role being more to surveil than to support. There were very few professional healthcare workers in the hospital and the conditions in the adult psychiatric

21 J.Tsiantis, A.Perakis, P.Kordoutis, G.Kolaitis and V.Zacharias, *The Leros PIKPA Asylum, Deinstitutionalization and Rehabilitation Project*. pp 11-43





facility were particularly atrocious. Infamously known as the ‘island of the psychopaths’, Leros was the last resort for the mentally ill or infirm where the ‘incurables’ were sent, as patients were never expected to leave.²²

In 1982, when photographer and journalist Mario Damolin visited the island he took a series of photographs of the patients of Leros and wrote an article that was first published in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau* in August 7 1982, and then picked up by *Der Spiegel*. Damolin’s pictures showed inmates (patients) chained to beds, naked, hosed down by staff to manage their waste. The publication of *Der Spiegel* article precipitated a flurry of journalists to the island and an international scandal broke with a publication in the *Observer* in response to the atrocious conditions in the hospital. The main men’s psychiatric facility, in a former barrack at Lepida, was the site of the most shocking and difficult events.

Overcrowded and crushed with people, additional temporary facilities had been built at the bottom of the building. Patients were kept in dormitories of one hundred or more men in a permanent state of squalor, with vomit and excrement left on the floor. The varying illnesses and needs of the patients were not considered, with patients of all capabilities and conditions lumped together in a space of control rather than support, with no means to differentiate treatment or care depending on ailment. The patients were kept in

total isolation, watching TV twice a week, no canteen or independent space or the smallest opportunity for autonomy, letters were censored by hospital staff and rarely passed on, and if a patient was given leave to enter the town, the local population refused to serve them. At the time of Damolin’s visit, there were only a total of two doctors, seven nurses and one social worker for the 1,000’s of patients detained on the island. The nursing staff used to be tradesmen or fishermen, often without even having completed a high-school education, they traded their precarious life for the steady employment by the hospital. Adjacent to the historic Italian building was a small, detached pavilion, built by the Greek state, known as the ‘house of the naked’, were approximately 80 men lived naked all year round, segregated and fenced off left almost to fend for themselves. Interviewed in 2015 for this project, Damolin was still shocked by his experiences in Leros over 30 years ago, and adamant of the significance of the islands history.

The press coverage caused a wave of public outcry, and having recently joined the European Union in 1981, the backlash from the European press forced Greece to review not only the practices in Leros but all of Greece. In 1983, the reform regulation 815 was passed, outlining anew practice for mental healthcare, which also coincided with the establishment of a National Health System, which was influenced by British legislation. The legislation aimed to reduce the quantity of hospitals, the number of beds in psychiatric clinics and to develop mental health care

22 Damolin, Mario *Frankfurter Rundschau* in August 7 1982







facilities in general hospitals and at the primary care level with in the community care, combined with vocational training and rehabilitation. Leros was to ban all new admissions, to improve conditions and develop reliable training programmes and a more consistent provision of medical care.

But reform was met with huge resistance from the island, and this was one of the greatest impediments to change. The changes implied significant impact to employment and the island responded with hostility towards the reforms due to fear that jobs and income would be lost. The change in mental healthcare was thus slow and failed several times due to local resistance and ineffective implementation. The 1988 European report on the reform of Leros, following European funding to support the reform, was extremely critical. To address the issues in Leros and Greece as a whole, a conference 31st October 1989 of psychiatric experts was convened in Leros, and included a comprehensive visit of the island's institutions to review the facilities. Central to this group of experts was Félix Guattari, who documented his visits to the island in diary format in 'Le Leros A la Borde', which included photography of the patients taken by his wife Josephine Guattari. Despite the shocking conditions of Leros and the immense troubles it faced, Guattari insisted that the institution can be reformed and remain open, he writes:

An important dimension in the problem of Leros is the complicity of the 9000 inhabitants, that relay, in some way or another, the complicity of Greece as a

whole. During a whole era, the few rare people that denounced the scandal experienced severe retaliation, even physical. The shepherds and the fishermen find it normal to guard the crazy like an animal park. In truth they respect far more the beasts. We have fear of the crazy, we mythify their presumed violence, they have the 'bad eye'. Epileptics in particular are considered an evil influence. 960 people live in direct dependence of the concentration camp, and the economy of the island rests on its activity.

Over the ensuing years, the island of Leros underwent a challenging process of de-institutionalisation, including the slow reduction of scale of facilities and considerable reform of its practices. Central to this process was to shift the approach and attitude of the staff, with extensive training programmes implemented to transform the patient relation to their carers. Today, the mental hospital still operates but in a completely different form. The large psychiatric hospital in the former barracks was shut down, reducing the patient population to 700 by 1998. Facilities are now hosted in the former officers' villas built by the Italians. Here patients live in a share-house arrangement and are free to come and go as they want. Some patients live there permanently, having now been decades on the island, others come from neighbouring islands for a short stay of less than a month. PIKPA still operates but does not take new patients, it is supporting the 'children' that are now middle-aged adults, having been institutionalised their entire existence. A group of the PIKPA children from Leros have been set up independently in Athens in a share house where they





lead autonomous lives outside the boundaries of an institution — these are all necessary steps in a process of institutional reform.

While the conditions in Leros were undeniably shocking, it is crucial to put this in the context of global practices in mental healthcare. At the beginning of the ‘deinstitutionalisation’ to date, mental healthcare around the world was disconcerting. Institutions such as the PIKPA reflect the common understanding in the first half of the 20th Century, that children with disabilities or ‘disturbing behaviour’ be moved (and isolated) in institutions to protect society from them.²³ But by the mid-1940s it became clear that long-term institutionalisation had a seriously detrimental effect on cognitive and emotional development of children and the landscape started to shift. However, only in 1971 with Article 23 did the UN General Assembly declare that people with disabilities should have ‘to the maximum degree of feasibility the same rights as other human beings’ (Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons) and it was not until 1989 that articles referred to the rights of handicapped children in regards to rights of care and education. Guattari emphatically noted the fact that Leros, whilst extreme, was not alone in this horror, in his papers, as he advocated for reform not closure.

23 Szymanski & Crocker, *Medical Psychiatric Practice*, edited by Alan Stoudemire MD & Barry S. Fogel MD, 1989



CONCLUSION





‘PURITY



IS

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This problem of reform and the questions of what an institution is, which parameters define it and how a particular institutional architecture — if this category exists per se — responds to change of protocols, habitual practices, and even definitions or conceptions of the ‘normative’, is central to our study of Leros and the township of Lakki/Portolago. What is crucial here is to understand exile, detention, confinement, indoctrination, and the architecture that allows the above not as accidental or even pragmatic developments, but as relational, diagrammatic conditions that operate in an infrastructural field of possibilities. Leros testifies that the logistics and the logics of warfare as well as the project of displacement and the very conception of “undesirables” and the “displaced” produce first and foremost two things: the legal and social apparatuses that produce these subjects, and spaces that this violence is exercised. Therefore, it’s always within the asymmetric relations of labour that both the subject of the confined and the one of the guard is produced.

The project does not claim that architecture is the cause of this. And while the architecture of the Italian Rationalist period has its own qualities, it is also constructed within a very specific diagram. What is our interest here is not the degree in which “fascist” architecture of various degrees could exist, or even if any kind of architecture could be more or less “fascist. Rather our claim is that the relationships established by the plan and the architecture, the strict imposition of gerarchia, established a unique urban form and social fabric.

Tens of thousands of people exiled, detained and isolated and surveilled in Leros and the town of Lakki/Portolago, occupying, living, by most importantly being serviced, policed and confined by a series of institutions — the Royal Technical School, the Greek Military, the Psychiatric Clinic, the national and European police and security apparatus of control of the refugee flows — that employed local population. The inaugural moment of the Italian military town, set up these relationships permanently: class, labour, gender segregation, multiple zones of controlled and restricted access, military and civilian infrastructures interwoven with a multiplicity of scales: the Med, the archipelago, the island, the town, the village, the building-object itself. Ultimately, the role of the Lerian, has become one of the guard the discipliner, the cook, the cleaner, an extremely precarious service provider, her and himself in exile and completely dependent on these institutional forms. If the Greek state pushed tourism, leisure and small-scale construction industry for most islands and towns on the mainland as the main economic activity, there was a much different strategy for Leros; to become an island of exiles.

The population is so economically inculcated in the process of control that it has become a self-perpetuating demand. The argument is thus that neither one thing in or of itself is of substantial scale — neither the population, the large barrack infrastructures well-suited to this application, nor the Rationalist architecture in and of itself, is unique nor the cause, but rather the coexistence and confluence of all





these factors have created a campus of surveillance and exile. It is precisely the interdependence and co-existence of architecture and labour that perpetuates the island's role as an apparatus of control.









THE
CASE
OF
LEROS

