

Maria Beikou (1925-2011)

«Ήμουν η χαϊδεμένη μοναχοκόρη του, το φιλάσθενο και ατίθασο Μαράκι, που έπρεπε συνέχεια να προφυλάσσει. Τα κόκκινα μαλλιά μου ήταν κακός οιωνός για τους γονείς μου»

«I was his pampered only daughter, the fragile and unruly Maraki, whom he had to protect all the time. My red hair was a bad omen for my parents...»

«Φτάνοντας στην Ιστιαία σκέφτηκα: «θα φύγω να πάω να πολεμήσω». Ήθελα να πολεμήσω με το όπλο στο χέρι. Είχα ακούσει ότι υπήρχαν αντάρτισσες στη Ρούμελη. Το συζήτησα με τους γονείς μου, οι οποίοι φυσικά, το είδαν αρνητικά. Ήξεραν ότι δεν πρόκειται να υποχωρήσω.»

“Arriving in Istiaia I wanted to fight with a gun in my hand. I had heard that there were guerrilla women in Roumeli. I discussed it with my parents, who, of course, saw it negatively. They knew I wasn't going to back down.

(intro)

N.1: Maria Ferla-Beikou was born in 1925 in Istiaia, Evia. She came from a wealthy family with two brothers and – as she was the only daughter- she had a special relationship with her father. As she recalls:

Q: *«I was his pampered only daughter, the fragile and unruly Maraki, whom he had to protect all the time. My red hair was a bad omen for my parents...» .*

N.2: When Occupation begun, Maria had just entered high school. Maria joins the National Solidarity, helping the work of the first guerrilla groups with fundraisings, clothes, and supplies. In February 1943, she and her brother immediately joined United Panhellenic Organization Of Youth, EPON, the largest youth resistance organization.

Q.: *«In Evia we also had clashes and we took part as EPON members, helping the armed forces. EPON had undertaken the enlightenment and above all the cultural sector. We listened to the radio stations at night and put out a bulletin every day. We were dropping the bulletins in people's homes so they could find out what was going on in the world. (...) We wrote the bulletin on a typewriter and printed it on a polygraph. brother Giannis. It was dangerous, too dangerous, and we had to break the resistance of our parents».*



N.1: While working in the illegal organization, the siblings left home in order to be safe. However, the organization decided that Maria should return home. On her way back, she met a villager suspected for collaboration with the occupation forces. This was confirmed, since on the same day, the Italians raided her parent's house and arrested her father. They took him to the Prison of Chalkida. He was released after the Italian armistice.

N.2: In the autumn of 1943, she went to Athens to study Dentistry while her older brother Giannis was there studying Law. But when she arrived in Athens, she was left alone as her brother had been arrested by the Italians during a demonstration.

Q: *"Without my brother in Athens I didn't know what to do. But I had the connection from the organization of EPON in Istiaia, which I had sewn into my first bra. My connection was a piece of paper that said that the person who holds it is a member of the EPON (...). The student I was told to give my connection to was Leonidas Kirkos. He was the person in charge. He was studying medicine. Leonidas informed me about my brother".*

N.1 : Maria takes charge of the female students of the medical school, while trying to free her brother from prison. Eventually she collapsed from overwork and was hospitalized. After that, their parents demanded their return to Istiaia and eventually Maria and her brother relented and returned.

Q: *"Arriving in Istiaia I wanted to fight with a gun in my hand. I had heard that there were guerrilla women in Roumeli. I discussed it with my parents, who, of course, saw it negatively. Back then, in order for a girl to join the Greek People's Liberation Army ELAS, she had to have the consent of her parents. That is, to give me written permission to present it to the unit I wanted to join. . They knew I wasn't going to back down. My father, who loved me very much, said nothing when I announced to him that I had forged his signature".*

N.2: Maria left with two other girls from Istiaia for the "Free Greece" area in Karpenisi. She joined the XII Division of ELAS with no training and experience.

Q: *«Gradually we gathered, from all sectors of the Division, and so the women's platoon was formed. We were sworn in when the two platoons, the girls and the boys, were formed. (...) I was a captain and party secretary in the platoon. As a captain I was in command with Georgia Palligiannopoulou who had attended the ELAS officers' school in*



Redina. Georgia, who was a soldier, was in charge of military training, while I was responsible for everything else: enlightenment, behaviour, culture, lessons.»

N.2: After joining the armed forces, she began her military training. The first battle in which she participated was in August 1944 at Karpenisi.

Q: *«The fifteenth of August found us outside Karpenisi. It was my name day. The girls were teasing me: 'Aren't you going to offer us something?' I remembered that someone had given me a box of sweetened milk as a present. I opened the box and with a spoon I offered them all. A spoonful to each of them 'for many years and good battles.' That was the wish.»*

N.1: One of the activities of the women was the enlightenment of the villages about the work of ELAS, the resistance movement and the life that they envisioned after liberation, a life of "justice and equality". The living conditions were extremely difficult as well as the practical issues of daily life they faced, such as personal hygiene. Still, women's participation in the armed struggle was viewed with great prejudice at the time:

Q: *"Many people did not look kindly on our participation in the army and many considered us immoral".*

N.2: The liberation from the Germans was a unique moment and Maria singles it out:

Q: *«During the liberation, when we entered Lamia, people had woven wreaths for us, they threw flowers in our wake. It was a frenzy. We had already cut the braids and started styling our hair because we were now free. We tried to look pretty...».*

N.2: After the liberation, during the events of December of 1944 she meets her future husband, Georgoulas Beikos. They leave Athens for Lamia, following the retreat of ELAS. After the arrest of her husband in April 1946 and his imprisonment in Averoff prison, she returns to Athens to be safer. In the spring of 1947, she fell ill with tuberculosis, caused by the difficult living situations, while her brother got arrested and exiled. She is left now sick and lonely...

N.1: During the Civil War, she joined the Democratic Army of Greece, so she could avoid the constant persecution, imprisonment and exile faced by the thousands of resistance members of the National Liberation Front (EAM) and the Communist Party of Greece (KKE).



In August 1947 she goes to the mountain and is initially assigned to the Parnassus headquarters, besides the fact she is still weak and feeble. Maria takes over the organization of the women's platoon. The military training of those women was difficult as most of them did not participate in the armed resistance movement and at the same time the conditions in the context of the civil war were very difficult in terms of infrastructure and supplies.

In February 1949, she left Karpenisi in order to attend the Conference of the Panhellenic Democratic Union of Women in Vitsi at the beginning of March, as a representative of the 1st Division of Thessaly. She remembers:

Q: "My speech made a great impression, because I told them about the conditions of the Democratic Army in southern Greece. The emotion was widespread in the room ,especially when I mentioned the sad events of the chase and the death of many women fighters. I also cried while I was speaking.»

N.2: With the retreat of the Democratic Army in late August 1949, Maria, after staying in Albania for a while, settled in the USSR as a political refugee. There, the loneliness and sadness were very intense for her:

Q: "I remember when I was in the 4th state, in Tashkent, on Sunday I was going to a little river that ran through the state and there was a weeping willow and I was sitting under the willow crying. Sunday was the only time I could cry. I was all alone. I had no family, no one at all."

N.1: Then, in February 1952, she went to Moscow. There, she worked for 27 years as an announcer for the Greek broadcast of the Moscow Radio Station, and studied at the Moscow Film Institute. In her third year, her friend Andrei Tarkovsky suggested Maria to make a film based on Ernest Hemingway's short story "The Killers". The film, lost for many years, was found and re-released in 2005.

N.2: In April 1961, Maria and her husband, who was released from prison in 1959, were reunited after sixteen years:

Q: "He finally came down. How to describe such moments! Only those who have experienced something similar can understand. At first, we felt awkward. Slowly, we began to get used to it.(...) Georgoulas was very sensitive and I didn't know how to behave. Everything had to start all over again and we didn't know how. The love was there, that was self-evident for both of us. There were no moments of doubt. But



physical intimacy was far away, and we had to approach it again with care, slowly. The loneliness had numbed me. I had to get used to it again."

N.1: In the following years they stayed in Moscow, working and making contacts with many intellectuals and Greek artists who ,from the 1960s, began to increase their visits to the USSR.

N.2: Georgoulas' unexpected death in 1975 devastated Maria, who also lost her job at the radio station. She was repatriated in 1976. So, she worked as a translator for the «Great Soviet Encyclopedia» and as an agent for the visit of Soviet artists to Greece. In 2010 she published her autobiographical book, «Afou me rotate, na thimitho» (Since you ask me, let me remember) and starred in Theodoros Terzopoulos' theatrical adaptation of Heiner Müller's play "Mauser". She died in Athens on 28 March 2011, after a long battle with cancer.

Maria was a resistance fighter, a woman of culture, a political refugee.

(outro)



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