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# ‘Remembering’ the Early 1940s Greek Famine: Fiction and Collective Memory, 1950–2019

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The memory of the early-1940s Greek famine has rarely been researched. A narrative attributing full responsibility to the Axis occupying forces, mostly Germans, and focusing almost exclusively on the 1941–2 ordeal of Athens was shaped by 1950. This became the official collective (cultural) memory and remained largely unchanged until the early twenty-first century. The financial crisis that Greece experienced since 2009 further enhanced this memory, bringing the focus exclusively on the German responsibility. This article interrogates the adult fiction works that dealt with this famine in the period 1950–2019, exploring whether these reflect the official collective memory and its changes. Furthermore, it explores how fiction has dealt with two aspects of the famine that are not included in the official collective memory: the black market and famine prostitution. The selected fiction works are utilised as ‘archives’ of the collective memory that prevailed at the time of their writing.

We weren’t hungry anymore. Not that we were living like royalty, mind you, but with what little Signor Alfio brought us every week we managed to stay on our feet. [...] Signor Alfio kept on seeing Mother: better for him than going to some streetwalker not to mention no worry about venereal diseases. Besides he was married back home. [...] So that’s why he preferred to satisfy his sexual needs with a nice clean-living little housewife.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The memory of the Greek famine of the early 1940s has only occasionally been studied to date.<sup>2</sup> The famine, one of the last European famines, was considerable in terms of mortality.<sup>3</sup> Though it constitutes the backdrop to all references to Greece’s years of occupation (1941–4), we still know little about

<sup>1</sup> Pavlos Matesis (b.1933), *The Daughter*, trans. Fred A. Reed (London: Arcadia, 2002), 1st Greek edn 1990, 29. All translations are by the author, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> Violetta Hionidou, “‘It’s Good that You Came along Mario to Confirm What I Say, Because She Would not Believe any of It’: Memory, Forgetting and Cultural Trauma of the Greek Famine” (“Καλά που ήρθες Μάριε, να τα επιβεβαιώνεις, γιατί δεν θα τα πίστευε.” Μνήμη, Λήθη και πολιτισμικό τραύμα του κατοχικού Λιμού), in *Civil War: Cultural Trauma (Εμφύλιος, Πολιτισμικό Τραύμα)*, eds. N. Demertzis, Eleni Paschaloudi and Giorgos Antoniou (Athens: Alexandraia, 2013), 289–322; Violetta Hionidou, *The Greek Famine of the 1940s through Oral Histories. The Cases of Chios, Syros and Mykonos (Η κατοχική πείνα μέσα από προφορικές μαρτυρίες. Η περίπτωση της Χίου, της Σύρου και της Μυκόνου)* (Athens: Patakis, 2020); Violetta Hionidou, “‘We Went Through a Lot that ... Cannot be Discussed, Cannot be Written’”: Remembering the Greek Famine of the Early 1940s,” in *Heritages of Hunger: Transnational Perspectives on European Famine Legacies in Education, Commemoration and Musealisation*, eds. Marguerite Corporaal and Ingrid de Zwart (London: Routledge, 2024), 115–33.

<sup>3</sup> Violetta Hionidou, *Famine and Death in Occupied Greece, 1941–1944* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 192; Stephen Wheatcroft and Cormac Ó Gráda, “The European Famines of World Wars I and II,” in *Famine in European History*, eds. Guido Alfani and Cormac Ó Gráda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 240–68.

how it has been remembered since and how the memory evolved over the years. Hionidou argued that an official, national (cultural) collective memory was shaped by the end of the 1940s, one that has remained largely unchanged until the early twenty-first century.<sup>4</sup> This attributed full responsibility to the Axis occupying forces, mostly Germans, and focused almost exclusively on the ordeal of Athens during the winter of 1941–2.<sup>5</sup> This famine narrative was reproduced in diverse media but was never addressed through public discourse until the start of the twenty-first century.<sup>6</sup> The recent financial crisis that Greece has experienced since 2009 further enhanced this official collective memory, fixating on the role of the German occupation.<sup>7</sup> Such an endurance of a collective memory is remarkable when one considers the extensive political and social changes that occurred in Greece in that period. Among the themes that are left out of this official collective memory are the black market and prostitution. While the former is part of the (unofficial) collective memory, the latter is not. Still, all themes are present in the fiction literature. This article examines whether the fiction literature published in the period 1950 to 2019 reflects the official collective memory.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the article explores how fiction engages with the themes of black market and prostitution that are left out of the official collective memory. The article argues that while the fiction works mirror the official collective memory, including its recent changes, they also deal with those aspects of the famine that were not part of the official collective memory.

In Memory Studies, literary texts, along with other cultural products, are seen as some of the many ‘vessels’ or ‘vehicles’ of memory.<sup>9</sup> Literary texts reflect the memory narratives that circulate within a community at the time of their writing.<sup>10</sup> Following their publication, they can become ‘producers’ and/or ‘transmitters’ of memory, influencing, in turn, the collective memory.<sup>11</sup> What is of interest

<sup>4</sup> Hionidou, ‘It’s Good,’ 289–322; Hionidou, ‘We Went Through.’ On cultural memory see Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,’ *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125–33; and Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. Sara Young (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 28–33. The term ‘official’ refers to the collective memory having been created from above and endorsed by the state.

<sup>5</sup> Hionidou, ‘It’s Good,’ 289–322. This official national memory contrasted with local collective memories that focused on the distinct experiences of a specific locality and, frequently, its heavier mortality, with different issues being of central significance for different localities. While only Athens is referred to, her twin city of Piraeus is tacitly included in all accounts.

<sup>6</sup> The famine has been depicted in many films (see for example Dinos Katsouridis (dir.), *What Were You up to during the War, Thanasis? (Τι έκανες στο πόλεμο Θανάση?)* (Athens: Dinos Katsouridis, 1971), art installations (see for example Giorgos Hatzimehales, *The Hunger in Athens in the Winter of 1941–1942 (Η πείνα στην Αθήνα τον Χειμώνα του 1941–1942)*, *National Museum of Contemporary Art*, 18 Jan.–15 Mar. 2009) and rarely in monuments (see K. Valsamis, ‘The Mother of the Occupation ’41’ (‘Η Μάνα της κατοχής ’41’), situated in the Athens First Cemetery).

<sup>7</sup> The political parties and especially Alexis Tsipras used the occupation and famine as a political tool, stressing the role of Germany in both the crisis and the occupation (Panages Panagiotopoulos, ‘Political Uses of History 2010–2012: Radical Left and Futile Signification of Trauma’ (‘Πολιτικές χρήσεις της ιστορίας 2010–2012: ριζοσπαστική αριστερά και αλυσίτελής νοσηματοδότηση του τραύματος’), in *Civil War, Cultural Trauma (Εμφύλιος. Πολιτισμικό Τραύμα)*, eds. N. Demertzis, Eleni Paschaloudi and Giorgos Antoniou (Athens: Alexandria, 2013), 269–72; Violetta Hionidou, ‘Remembering’ the Greek Famine of the Early 1940s: Oral Histories, Individual Memories and Collective Memory,’ paper presented at the ‘Famine Stories and Survival Legends: Legacies to the Following Generations’ workshop held at Uppsala University, Sweden, 2017; Giorgos Antoniou, ‘The Adventures of an Oral History Archive in the Greek Public Domain,’ *Contemporary European History* 32, no. 1 (2023): 52–56). The 2019 vote of the Greek parliament to pursue official talks with the German government regarding the Second World War reparations has also contributed to the centrality of the occupation years, and consequently of the famine, in the public consciousness (Renee Maltezou and George Georgiopoulos, ‘Greek parliament calls on Germany to pay WW2 reparations,’ 17 Apr. 2019, (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-germany-reparations-idUSKCN1RT1PL>) (last visited 25 Feb. 2022); Hionidou, ‘We Went Through’).

<sup>8</sup> The 1940s literature is not included in this article as it could be argued that it reflects largely first-hand experiences but also predates the creation of the official collective memory.

<sup>9</sup> Yosef Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 27; Guido Bartolini, *The Italian Literature of the Axis War: Memories of Self-Absolution and the Quest for Responsibility* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 33.

<sup>10</sup> Erll, *Memory*, 160; Bartolini, *Italian*, 33. The theoretical base of this article owes much to Bartolini’s excellent discussion (Bartolini, *Italian*, chapter 2).

<sup>11</sup> See Robert Gordon, *The Holocaust in Italian Culture: 1944–2010* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 8; Bartolini, *Italian*, 33; Erll, *Memory*, 160. See also Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memory: Michael Rothberg,

in this article is the memory-reflective capacity of a literary work, that is, the potentiality that every literary work can be studied as a medium reflecting the memory narratives that prevail in the community where it is written at around the time of its writing.<sup>12</sup> When penning such texts, the authors combine their own first-hand memories (if they have any), their post-memories (again, as and when they have any) as well as those that circulate in their wider communities, including cultural artefacts produced by others.<sup>13</sup> Any literary depiction of the famine is inherently selective as no book or other cultural artefact could ever contain all the diverse experiences of a famine.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, it is well understood that each cultural object, a book or a short story in the case of this article, may not accurately represent the collective memory of that community. Rather, at times the author may choose to put forward an 'idiosyncratic understanding of that past', one that does not reflect the dominant or even secondary memory narratives at the time of writing.<sup>15</sup> As Bartolini emphasises, the chosen narratives of a specific author can be 'partial and fallacious'.<sup>16</sup>

ErlI perceptively asserted that literature is a memory-reflective 'storage medium' and memory-productive 'circulation medium'.<sup>17</sup> Only some literary texts become canonical texts or, as Assmann calls them, 'cultural texts'.<sup>18</sup> These are ultimately perceived by the community as imparting a 'timeless truth'.<sup>19</sup> None of the existing literary works that engage with the Greek famine can be classed as a 'cultural text', and therefore a literary canon of the famine does not exist. Thus, this article will engage with the majority of literary fictional works that deal with the famine rather extensively and that were written for an adult readership.<sup>20</sup> In addressing the question of whether the fiction literature endorses and reflects that official collective memory, this article uses the literary works as a 'public archive', reflecting Ofelia Ferrán's use of literary narratives as 'meta-memory' texts.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the article investigates how fiction deals with themes that are not included in the official collective memory (such as the black market) or even in the collective memory (such as prostitution). Accordingly, I will treat these fiction works as 'memory storages' that will be surveyed for traces of the main elements of the official collective memory and the two chosen themes that are not included in it.<sup>22</sup>

There are no scholarly works exploring the links between famine fiction and collective memory.<sup>23</sup> The year of 1950 was chosen as the starting point of this study because by then the official famine

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*Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Bartolini, *Italian*, 33.

<sup>13</sup> The birth year of each famine fiction author is provided, whenever known, indicating whether the author experienced the famine or not.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 448; Bartolini, *Italian*, 34.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 35–36.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>17</sup> ErlI, *Memory*, 160.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 163, citing Aleida Assmann, 'Was sind kulturelle Texte?', in *Literaturkanon – Medienereignis – kultureller Text. Formen interkultureller Kommunikation und Übersetzung*, ed. Andreas Poltermann (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1995), 234.

<sup>19</sup> ErlI, *Memory*, 163, citing Assmann, 'Was sind kulturelle Texte?', 242.

<sup>20</sup> The article does not include children's literature or literature that engages too briefly with the famine. There are only a handful of literary books that deal exclusively with the famine.

<sup>21</sup> Ofelia Ferrán, *Working Through Memory: Writing and Remembrance in Contemporary Spanish Narrative* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 14; Bartolini, *Italian*, 34. See also ErlI, *Memory*, 51–52 for a discussion on the concept of 'archive' in memory studies.

<sup>22</sup> That literary works and cultural products in general operate as repositories of information that can be later retrieved and influence the collective memory is an idea discussed by ErlI, *Memory*, 160–63. Here I chose to use each of these same literary works 'as [a] storage of information' to be mined, as an archive would.

<sup>23</sup> Only Nikolaidou in her MA dissertation explored through fiction the famine collective trauma and how the famine led some to 'revolutionary' reactions and others to 'collaborationist' ones (translated from the Greek abstract that differs from the English one). She utilises works written before 1984. Demetra Nikolaidou, 'The Occupation Famine in Modern Greek Literature: From the '30s Generation to the Post-War Ones' ('Η πείνα της Κατοχής στη νεοελληνική πεζογραφία. Από τη γενιά του '30 στις μεταπολεμικές γενιές)', MA thesis, Greek Open University, 2020, <https://apothesis.eap.gr/handle/repo/45589> (last visited 14 Aug. 2023). The fiction literature of many other famines has been researched. See for example

narrative had been shaped.<sup>24</sup> As the closing year, 2019 was chosen, as this includes the first, most traumatic, decade of the economic crisis. Here, I use the term ‘famine’ in the wider sense, that is, a period of extreme food scarcity that also contains a period of significant increase in mortality. As such, the whole occupation period is considered as one of famine, simply because securing food throughout this period was people’s main preoccupation.<sup>25</sup>

This article examines novels and collections of short stories; unlike memoirs and diaries, these have never been used to explore the remembering of the famine. While the majority of fictional works that dealt with the famine to a significant extent are examined here, it cannot be claimed that the coverage of such works is exhaustive. Published works of fiction by well-known and lesser-known writers have been included. Only a small number of published fiction works is focused almost exclusively on the famine. These are Hrestos Pырpasos’s collection of short stories, *Resistance to ... Hunger!* (1978), and Panagiotēs Demetriou’s novel, *The Great Famine* (2001).<sup>26</sup> A few others, such as the novels by Pavlos Matesis (*The Daughter*, 1990), Elisavet Hronopoulou (*The Other Enemy*, 2017) and Thanasis Stamoulis (*The Shadow on the Tree*, 2017) do deal with the famine and hunger extensively while those by Frantzis Fratzeskakis (*Remember and Forget Not: Reading Suitable for Secret Schools*, 1997), Kostas Kalatzes (*The Silverstone*, 1982), Giorgos Theotokas (*The Sick and the Walkers*, 1964) and Kostas Tahtsis (*The Third Wedding Wreath*, 1962) do so to a lesser extent. All the above-mentioned fiction works will be the ones I will focus on mostly but not exclusively. Of the works that focus extensively on the famine, only that of Pырpasos was published prior to 1990.<sup>27</sup> In the rest of the works, the famine or ‘hunger’, as it is often described, constitutes part of the background to the occupation story – a shocking but nevertheless a secondary one in the story – that is the prelude to the most ‘important’ parts that follow.<sup>28</sup> The next section examines how the main elements of the official collective memory are presented and discussed in famine literature works.

### Official Collective Memory in Fiction: Time and Place of the Famine, Athens 1941–2

The overwhelming majority of the examined works focuses exclusively on the capital Athens/Piraeus. The only exceptions are those authored by Matesis and Kalatzes, who situate their stories in an anonymous mainland provincial town and on the island of Samos, respectively. Five works are situated mostly in the capital and partly in the countryside, as their characters move between places.<sup>29</sup> These are Dionysis Haritopoulos’s *Helidona’s Children* (1983), Zermain Mamalaki’s *Occupation Resistance*

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Christopher Morash, *Writing the Irish Famine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); Melissa Fegan, *Literature and the Irish Famine 1845–1919* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002); Melissa Fegan, ‘The Great Famine in Fiction, 1901–2015,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Fiction*, ed. Liam Harte (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 407–23; Marguérite Corporaal, *Relocated Memory: The Great Famine in Irish and Diaspora Fiction, 1846–1870* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2017); Babli Sinha, ‘Trauma and Referentiality in Bhabani Bhattacharya’s Famine Novels,’ *Cultural Dynamics* 32, no. 1–2 (2020): 68–81.

<sup>24</sup> Hionidou, ‘It’s Good,’ 294–99. Works that were written in the 1940s but published much later are not considered in this article.

<sup>25</sup> The concept of famine is well established by now. For definitions see Cormac Ó Gráda, *Famine: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 4–7; Hionidou, *Famine*, 3, 33. It would be impossible to use the stricter definition of famine here, that is, defining famine solely as an event marked by significant increases in mortality.

<sup>26</sup> Hrestos Pырpasos (b.1914), *Resistance to ... Hunger! (Αντίσταση στην ... Πείνα!)* (Athens: N. Papanikolaou, 1978); Panagiotēs Demetriou, *The Great Famine (Ο Μεγάλος Λιμός)* (Athens: Ellenika Grammata, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> For other works touching on the famine see Nikolaidou, ‘Occupation.’ The only fiction text used both in this article and in Nikolaidou’s dissertation is Kostas Tahtsis (b.1927), *The Third Wedding Wreath (Το Τρίτο Στεφάνι)* (Athens: Gavrielides, 2009), 1st edn 1962.

<sup>28</sup> Such cases are: Kostas I. Kalatzes (b.1908), *The Silverstone (Η Ασημόπετρα)* (Athens: Pitsilos, 2002), 1st edn 1982; Asimakis Panselinos (b.1903), *When We Were Living (Τότε που Ζούσαμε)* (Athens: Kedros, 1997), 1st edn 1974; Tahtsis, *Third*.

<sup>29</sup> Dionysis Haritopoulos (b.1947), *Helidona’s Children (Τα Παιδιά της Χελιδόνας)* (Athens: Topos, 2015), 85th edn, 1st edn 1983; Pырpasos, *Resistance*; Zermain Mamalaki, *Occupation Resistance (κατοχή αντίσταση)* (Athens: Estia, 1976); Demetriou, *Great Famine*; Thanasis D. Stamoulis (b.1978), *The Shadow on the Tree (Η Σκιά στο Δέντρο)* (Athens: Potamos, 2017).

(1976), Pyrpassos's *Resistance to ... Hunger!* (1978), Demetriou's *The Great Famine* (2001) and Stamouli's *The Shadow on the Tree* (2017). For the rest, Athens is the place where famine and death take place: 'Athens languished. The hunger and the poverty had decimated the people', comments Mamalaki's protagonist.<sup>30</sup> Theotokas's writing provides some harrowing detail:

Athens has become a place of horror. Skeletal figures, upright corpses with sucked up faces, yellow, with the eyes blackened, walked slowly, silently, aimlessly, in the sun, in front of the white facades of the buildings, and suddenly they collapsed unconsciously in the most central parts of the capital, in Stadiou Street, in Constitution Square.<sup>31</sup>

Hronopoulou's stories too unfold in Athens, though in most cases she refers to streets or landscape markers in order to situate her stories: 'That is where it happened. At the side of the [National] Museum, just before we reach Patesion [avenue]', she indicates before she continues describing the iconic scene of the municipal rubbish truck that collected those who collapsed and died on the streets.<sup>32</sup> One of her characters explicitly states that 'much has been written and said about the occupation famine and of its severe consequences on the Athenian population', squarely linking the famine to Athens.<sup>33</sup> However, even some of those authors who focus on the capital also include glimpses of the rural situation, if anything because Athenians had to travel to villages to obtain foodstuffs there, or some of them would move to a village, if that was possible. Rural Greece is often presented as a place gorged with food, as in the stories of Pyrpassos. Or it is depicted as having a surplus of food that is exchanged with the visiting Athenians who bring trousseaus.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, Haritopoulos has his narrators acknowledge the difficulties that existed in provincial Greece too. Within a year of arriving they leave the village where they sought refuge from Piraeus's hunger in 1941, 'because there was not enough bread'.<sup>35</sup> Other authors, in fleeting comments, emphasise the lesser suffering of the provinces: 'in the large cities the hunger and the avitaminosis kill and now even the provinces start to be hungry', while Giona Paidouse, in the *Red Epitaph*, claims that in her village of origin 'no one died of hunger'.<sup>36</sup> Even the two novels that do not deal with Athens depict countryside populations as significantly better off and certainly having food to eat, in comparison to the nearby towns where their protagonists are based.<sup>37</sup>

The tacit understanding in the Athens-focused works is that the worst of the famine was in the winter of 1941–2, while in the last two years of the occupation the characters were much more preoccupied with the political conflicts that led to the civil war: 'The killer winter of '41–'42 had gone', and 'Kyriakos's sister, Fani, died in the famine winter'.<sup>38</sup> Two authors note that Athens in subsequent years was well supplied with food: 'People did not die as they did in 1941', comments Tahtsis's protagonist, referring to the winter of 1942–3.<sup>39</sup> More candidly, Fratzeskakis's narrator explains that by September 1943, while many foods were still unavailable, 'our insides were well oiled'.<sup>40</sup> In the

<sup>30</sup> Mamalaki, *Occupation Resistance*, 88.

<sup>31</sup> Giorgos Theotokas (b.1906), *The Sick and the Walkers (Ασθενείς και Οδοιπόροι)* (Athens: Estia, 2005), 1st edn 1964, 361.

<sup>32</sup> Elisavet Hronopoulou (b.1961), *The Other Enemy (Ο Έτερος Εχθρός)* (Athens: Polis, 2017), 41–42.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>34</sup> Pyrpassos, *Resistance*, 39–40, 52–53; A. Giannakos-Antoniades, *Chronicle of an Epoch (Χρονικό μιας εποχής)* (Athens: n.p., 1970), 43–44. Also see Demetriou, *Great Famine*, 52, 63–67, 89, 228–29, 386, 444; Mamalaki, *Occupation Resistance*, 80; N. Panagiotopoulos (b.1937), 'The Hunger's Occupation Affairs' and Other Short Stories ('Της Πείνας τα Κατοχικά και άλλα Διηγήματα') (Athens: T. Georgiades, 1984), 23; Stamouli, *Shadow*, 275, 344; Hronopoulou, *Other Enemy*, 115.

<sup>35</sup> Haritopoulos, *Helidona's Children*, 52.

<sup>36</sup> Mamalaki, *Occupation Resistance*, 80; see also Panagiotopoulos, *The Hunger's*, 23. Giona Mike Paidouse, *Red Epitaph (Κόκκινος Επιτάφιος)* (Athens: Vivliorama, 2008), 14.

<sup>37</sup> Kalatzes, *Silverstone*, 134, 190; Matesis, *Daughter*, 21, 73.

<sup>38</sup> Paidouse, *Red*, 13; Mamalaki, *Occupation Resistance*, 92; Panagiotopoulos, *The Hunger's*; Panselinos, *When We*; Theotokas, *The Sick*, 261.

<sup>39</sup> Tahtsis, *Third*, 261.

<sup>40</sup> Frantzis K. Fratzeskakis, *Remember and Forget Not: Reading Suitable for Secret Schools (Ενθύμου και μη λησιμόνει. Ανάγνωσμα κατάλληλο για κρυφά σχολειά)* (Athens: Kastaniotes, 1997), 486–87.

black market of Sofokleous Street in the centre of Athens ‘piles of canned food’ were available for purchase, a sight that would not have been seen since the autumn of 1941. These two authors’ observations of relative food abundance in Athens in 1943 are reflective of what was in fact happening at the time.<sup>41</sup> It is the three most recent works, those of Demetriou, Hronopoulou and Stamoulis, that move away from the usual time framing of the famine, focusing instead on the whole of the occupation period as one where extensive hunger was present.<sup>42</sup> None of them delineates a time frame for the famine, nor do they separate the period of high mortality from the times of hunger.

### Official Collective Memory in Fiction: Famine Responsibility

In all the pre-2000 works, sometimes explicitly, the occupiers are presented as responsible for the famine, their presence in Greece being sufficient evidence: ‘All that is happening in Athens are extraordinary events. They are consequences of the war, of the occupation’.<sup>43</sup> Pyrpasos refers to the ‘foreign occupation’ in the opening paragraph of two of his stories; for him and for the reader this implicitly signposts that the occupiers were responsible for the famine.<sup>44</sup> Some authors do not differentiate between the occupiers when it comes to the question of responsibility. Mamalaki, for example, refers to the ‘occupiers’, who ‘requisitioned whatever they found in store-rooms’.<sup>45</sup> Fratzeskakis explicitly blames the Germans, adding that ‘no one had a different opinion’.<sup>46</sup> Tahtsis’s protagonist’s assessment of the German soldiers, after seeing the ‘skeletal children that roamed in the streets like packs of hungry wolves, [and] the corpses in the municipal carts’, was that of ‘beasts hiding behind angelic, cold faces’.<sup>47</sup> The Italians in contrast are occasionally presented as looters of foodstuffs from households and pursuers of Greek women but never accused as responsible for the famine.<sup>48</sup> Among the pre-crisis works both Germans and Italians are present as occupiers, even if neither is blamed directly for the famine. However, the references to the Germans are more frequent. Haritopoulos’s novel is rather exceptional in presenting them on almost equal footing, both burning houses and undertaking deadly reprisals.<sup>49</sup> Unusually, Matesis’s 1990 novel presents almost a caricature of the two occupiers: the gentle, helpful ever-smiling Italians versus the brutal, cold, ‘bullheaded’ Germans, who requisitioned, tortured, terrorised and killed the civilians of the provincial mainland town.<sup>50</sup> Rather than taking food away from the population, the Italians were helping them out: ‘they laughed, teased the women in the street and sometimes threw bread to the kids’.<sup>51</sup> Demetriou’s book presents a similar outlook to Matesis’s, though in a more realistic representation. Germans appear in the text almost as often as the Italians and are depicted as always preoccupied with negative pursuits (hanging or killing Greeks, blowing up a boat full of Italians) while the Italians are engaged in friendly relationships with Greeks: ‘Anyway, the Italians are not like the Germans, they are compassionate, like we are’.<sup>52</sup> Only Kalatzes’s *Asemopetra* explicitly attributes responsibility for the famine on Samos to the Italians, the only occupiers present on the island when the famine occurred there: ‘The [Italian] Commissariato, coldly and organised, started to strangulate the island. [...] The stocks were all seized.

<sup>41</sup> Hionidou, *Famine and Death*, 92; Hrestos Hrestides, *Years of Occupation, 1941–1944. Diary Testimonies (Χρόνια κατοχής, 1941–1944. Μαρτυρίες ημερολογίου)* (Athens: n.p., 1971), 340–41.

<sup>42</sup> Demetriou, *Great Famine*; Hronopoulou, *Other Enemy*; Stamoulis, *Shadow*.

<sup>43</sup> Theotokas, *The Sick*, 362.

<sup>44</sup> Pyrpasos, *Resistance*, 22, 32.

<sup>45</sup> Mamalaki, *Occupation Resistance*, 80.

<sup>46</sup> Fratzeskakis, *Remember*, 407, 435, 494.

<sup>47</sup> Tahtsis, *Third*, 243.

<sup>48</sup> Haritopoulos, *Helidona’s Children*, 53; Paidouse, *Red*, 84. Tahtsis, *Third*, 252.

<sup>49</sup> Haritopoulos, *Helidona’s Children*, 48, 82, 54, 57. This may be because Haritopoulos, born in 1947, drew much of his knowledge of the early 1940s from newspapers. Virtually all other authors cited in this article – except for Hronopoulou and Stamoulis – were born before 1940.

<sup>50</sup> Matesis, *Daughter*, 47.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 51, 6.

<sup>52</sup> Demetriou, *Great Famine*, 114, 170, 456.

Methodically and systematically’.<sup>53</sup> However, Kalatzes’s work stops at the moment when the Germans occupied the island, leaving out a judgement against them. Kalatzes’s exceptional attribution of responsibility to the Italians does not challenge the official narrative but rather situates it in parallel.

It is the two crisis books, those by Hronopoulou and Stamoulis, that differ from the earlier narratives, with the Italians not featuring at all.<sup>54</sup> The occupation now is called just a German one, as the note of an elderly man to the young student who wants to learn his family history clearly states: ‘nothing noteworthy occurred to our family during the period of the German occupation’.<sup>55</sup> While Stamoulis does not refer eponymously to the Germans, he is using the symbolism of the ‘Dictator in Black’ and his soldiers with the ‘flattened cross’ who occupy the country. The ‘Dictator in Black’ brought with him the ‘hunger rodents’ that in the book represent hunger.<sup>56</sup> The ‘flattened cross’ is a thief, declares the narrator, and his soldiers consume the food of the country, thus attributing responsibility for the famine to the German occupation and soldiers.<sup>57</sup> The Germans are certainly present in Hronopoulou’s short stories.<sup>58</sup> They humiliate a Greek man on the bus or they search and arrest another young man, who ultimately is betrayed by his best friend. Rather than focusing on the German soldiers themselves, Hronopoulou focuses on their violence and the fear that it induces, what she calls the ‘other enemy’.<sup>59</sup> However, her stories are also focused on yet another ‘enemy’, the enemy within – the Greeks themselves. The German occupiers but also the internal politics remain in the background with the author’s gaze staying firmly on the Greeks and their actions. This does not mean a lack of attribution of responsibility to the Germans. Rather, it suggests that she fully accepts that the Germans – and certainly not the vanished Italians – were responsible for the hunger in Greece. As she takes this as given, she focuses on the effects that the famine had on Greeks and their actions against each other that are largely consequences of the famine. Rather unusually and in contrast to the majority of earlier works, both Hronopoulou and Stamoulis do gaze briefly at the plural identities and vulnerabilities of the German soldiers: ‘They are children, youths, adults, murderers and victims at the same time’, and ‘He is only a child’ states a mother who is obliged to provide accommodation to a German soldier.<sup>60</sup>

All the examined fiction works adhere to the apportioning of responsibility to the German occupiers.<sup>61</sup> In contrast, the Italians were gradually depicted as more malevolent, disappearing completely in the two crisis books. Again, it is the most recent three books that do not adhere to the time reference of 1941–2 but rather treat the whole occupation period as one when hunger prevailed and, importantly, the effects of hunger on people’s lives remained central. Athens has been the focus of virtually all those who wrote fiction about the famine, even if some had their characters move to or from another location. Only one novel that focused on a provincial island, Kalatzes’s *Asemopetra*, provided a fully anti-official narrative. Another one that focused on a mainland provincial town, Matesis’s *The Daughter*, simply discussed the hunger of its citizens. Neither of these two challenge the official collective memory; they just add a parallel dimension to it. The extreme focus and engagement with the Athenian experience and the German occupation fully mirrors the official collective memory that the overwhelming majority of authors internalised and churned out in their creations.

The rather uncomplicated official collective narrative hides much more than it reveals. In the following sections, the focus is on the black market and famine prostitution, two aspects of the famine that are not included in the official collective memory but have been addressed in the fiction works.

<sup>53</sup> Kalatzes, *Silverstone*, 133, 132–38.

<sup>54</sup> While there is a passing allegoric reference to Mussolini, there are no references to the Italians (Stamoulis, *Shadow*, 84).

<sup>55</sup> Hronopoulou, *Other Enemy*, 37.

<sup>56</sup> Stamoulis, *Shadow*, 99.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 281, 168.

<sup>58</sup> Hronopoulou, *Other Enemy*, 56, 59–67, 113, 81.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 84; Stamoulis, *Shadow*, 158–59.

<sup>61</sup> Kalatzes’s *Asemopetra* is an exception since Samos was occupied only by Italians during the famine. The book finishes as the Germans are about to arrive on the island.

## The Black Market

Historians have paid ample attention to the black market and research on it continues to take place, though this did not start until 1980.<sup>62</sup> The black market was the only operating market in occupied Greece.<sup>63</sup> Outside Athens and the cities, bartering became the dominant mode of transaction quite quickly once the famine started. Gold sovereigns were widely used too, partly due to the hyperinflation. In the summer of 1942, relief mechanisms were established by the Swedish-Swiss Red Cross Commission providing a significant ration to all inhabitants of the capital, something that gradually and to varying degree expanded to other cities and towns.<sup>64</sup> However, the black market continued to operate to the end of the occupation and for some years after it. Strong public rhetoric prevailed throughout those years, accusing the black marketeers of hoarding and profiteering at the expense of the ‘people’. Newspapers (expressing the views of the occupiers and the Greek occupation government) as well as the National Liberation Front (Εθνικό Απελευθερωτικό Μέτωπο; EAM, the communist-leftist resistance group) were constantly writing against the black marketeers.<sup>65</sup> EAM particularly focused on the ‘big’ black marketeers as those responsible for the situation.<sup>66</sup> Many historians adopted this stance, blaming the ‘big’ black marketeers – at least partly – for the famine and asserting that a small group of black marketeers enriched themselves at the expense of the population.<sup>67</sup> However, Mazower in 1993, without explicitly challenging the idea of the ‘big’ black marketeer, presented a different picture where virtually all, irrespective of background, were engaged in the black market. In 2006, Hionidou, with the use of oral histories, challenged the historiography. She argued that involvement with the black market was inevitable for all, poor and rich, men or women, young and old, and that it was not an affair of the shameless few.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, some leftist historians continue to argue, in line with the EAM position, that a small number of Greeks were responsible for most of the black market operations.<sup>69</sup>

The black market had strong, negative connotations in the collective memory, partly because of the accusatory rhetoric surrounding it during and after the occupation years.<sup>70</sup> Ever since the liberation, the media engaged and reflected on the role and features of the black market, firmly embedding the word *mavragoritis* (black marketeer) into the modern vocabulary with strong negative connotations. This was clear in the oral histories conducted by Hionidou in 1999–2000 where the informants only exceptionally named their own dealings during the occupation as engaging in the black market.<sup>71</sup> They consistently defined as black marketeers the ‘other’, either in terms of profession, residence or social standing. Their own dealings, as described by them, could only be characterised as black market

<sup>62</sup> Stavros Thomadakis, ‘Black Markets, Inflation, and Force in the Economy of Occupied Greece,’ in *Greece in the 1940s: A Nation in Crisis*, J.O. Iatrides, ed. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1981), 61–80.

<sup>63</sup> Hionidou, *Famine*, chapter 6.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 131–46.

<sup>65</sup> Nikos Potamianos, ‘Do Shopkeepers Have their Own Moral Economy? Profiteering, Unfair Competition and the Black Market in Greece, 1916–1945,’ *Social History* 47, no. 1 (2022): 35–59.

<sup>66</sup> Mark Mazower, *Inside Hitler’s Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941–44* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); Hionidou, *Famine*, 103; Potamianos, ‘Shopkeepers,’ 50.

<sup>67</sup> Thomadakis, ‘Black Markets,’ 73. Thomadakis saw the black market as ‘a mechanism of concentration of tangible property in the hands of procurers.’ Recent research does not support this, at least not for Volos: Dimitris Skaltses, ‘The Real Estate Sales during the Occupation in Volos’ (‘Οι αγοραπωλησίες ακινήτων την περίοδο της Κατοχής στον Βόλο’), MA thesis, University of Thessaly, 2017, 141, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/157700668.pdf> (last visited 14 Aug. 2023).

<sup>68</sup> Mazower, *Inside*, chapter 4, 56; Hionidou, *Famine*, chapter 6, especially 101–4.

<sup>69</sup> Such historians are: Menelaos Haralampidis, *The Experience of Occupation and Resistance in Athens (Η Εμπειρία της Κατοχής και της Αντίστασης στην Αθήνα)* (Athens: Alexandria, 2012), 73–7; Giorgos Margarites, ‘Giorgos Margaritis’s talk in the Conference at Koropi’ (‘Ομιλία του κ. Γιώργου Μαργαρίτη στην Ημερίδα στο Κορωπί’), *Mesogianews.gr* 26 Oct. 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-rQJjSPKV0> (last visited 14 Aug. 2023); and, Tasos Kostopoulos, ‘The Ghost of the Black Marketeer’ (‘Το φάντασμα του μαυραγορίτη’), *efsyn.gr* 23 Oct. 2016, [https://www.efsyn.gr/arheio/fantasma-tis-istorias/87233\\_fantasma-toy-mayragoriti](https://www.efsyn.gr/arheio/fantasma-tis-istorias/87233_fantasma-toy-mayragoriti) (last visited 14 Aug. 2023); Hionidou, ‘We Went Through.’

<sup>70</sup> See Potamianos ‘Shopkeepers,’ 35–59.

<sup>71</sup> Hionidou, *Greek Famine*, chapter 4.



transactions.<sup>72</sup> However, some changes in public perceptions regarding the black market have also been taking place in the last two decades – quietly but decisively towards an understanding of the black market as something that all people engaged with through sheer necessity, in the absence of a legitimate market.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, public disagreements between academics and lay audiences as to who was and was not a black marketeer have also taken place recently and broadcasted on media, indicating that there are diverse historiographies and equally diverse group memories.<sup>74</sup> In short, there are still diverse memory narratives concerning the black market, narratives that have not yet converged into one collective memory, if they ever will.

### The Black Market in Fiction

The black market is ever present in virtually all fiction stories, though to varying degrees.<sup>75</sup> In all cases it is a replacement for the ‘disintegrated traditional commerce’ and thus part of the characters’ everyday life: ‘They used to find flour, Italian, full of worms. My husband kneaded it, we baked it and their young son [...] sold it black market [illegally] in the [local] street market in Kokkinia’.<sup>76</sup> The existence of make-shift, illegal, market stalls is frequently mentioned.<sup>77</sup> Only occasionally do authors use pejorative terms to describe black marketeers, such as ‘predatory crows’, but even this is followed by ‘they proved [...] our true saviours’.<sup>78</sup> As most fictional characters participate in the black market as part of their daily life, its necessity is clearly accepted, even by authors such as Mamalaki, who presents a crowd shouting at the men on board a truck who were heading for the countryside ‘black marketeers [...] traitors’, wishing that they would be hung ‘in Constitution Square [...] scallywags’.<sup>79</sup> In the next few pages she gives the travelling black marketeers a voice where they present their own views. While she does not necessarily agree with them, Mamalaki has already shown one of her protagonists as having made the same journey to the countryside to obtain foodstuff for his family, thus blurring the lines between the home providers and the black marketeers.<sup>80</sup> The same author notes early on that ‘everyone engaged in something illegal [...] people had to react [somehow]’.<sup>81</sup>

However, explicitly accusatory voices are also present in many of the fiction works. Matesis refers to wives of black marketeers or peasants who purchased town houses with their profits or to the greedy shop owner who called in the Germans to protect him so that he would not have to sell to the people at market price.<sup>82</sup> Fratzeskakis and Demetriou refer to the peasant black marketeers who enriched

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Hionidou, ‘We Went Through.’

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. Also N. Maravegias, ‘How the Black Marketeers Dominated during the Occupation’ (‘Πως κυριάρχησαν οι μαυραγορίτες στην κατοχή’), *To Vema* (24 Nov. 2008), <https://www.tovima.gr/2008/11/24/opinions/pws-kyriarxisan-oi-mayragorites-stin-katoxi/> (last visited 14 Aug. 2023); Anon., ‘The General Development Framework of the Black Market during the Occupation’ (‘Το γενικό πλαίσιο ανάπτυξης της μύρης αγοράς στην κατοχική Ελλάδα’), *Πολυχνιάτικος Λόγος* <https://www.polihniatikoslogos.gr/node/121> (last visited 14 Aug. 2023).

<sup>75</sup> Pырpasos’s stories have multiple references to black marketeers and their preoccupations (Pырpasos, *Resistance*, 171, 175, 383). One of Demetriou’s characters sells condoms that he obtained through the looting of a British Army depot (Demetriou, *Great Famine*, 171, 175, 383; see also 163 for villagers-turned-black-marketeers). Matesis, *Daughter*, 33, 39, 50–51, 75. Tahtsis, *Third*, 261, 265, 299.

<sup>76</sup> Fratzeskakis, *Remember*, 412; Haritopoulos, *Helidona’s Children*, 68. References to the black market are to be found in Tahtsis, *Third*, 253, 261, 299; Mamalaki, *Occupation Resistance*, 161; Pырpasos, *Resistance*, 22, 32, 33; Panagiotopoulos, *The Hunger’s*, 23; Fratzeskakis, *Remember*, 411, 415, 418, 486–87; Matesis, *Daughter*, 33, 39, 50.

<sup>77</sup> Matesis, *Daughter*, 75; Fratzeskakis, *Remember*, 416. The existence of such illegal street markets is well documented: Violetta Hionidou, ‘Experiencing the Famine in Occupied Greece’ (‘Βιώνοντας το λιμό στην κατοχική Ελλάδα’), newspaper *Kathimerini*, *Ελλάδα 20<sup>ος</sup> αιώνας 1940–1950*, vol. 2 (Dec. 2017), 35–41, <https://www.kathimerini.gr/k/100yk/1019660/o-varys-cheimonas-toy-1941-1942/> (last accessed 5 Apr. 2021); Hionidou, *Famine*, 97.

<sup>78</sup> Pырpasos, *Resistance*, 10, 32.

<sup>79</sup> Mamalaki, *Occupation Resistance*, 153.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 106. Similarly, Pырpasos considers his brother a small-scale black marketeer while others who undertake very similar activities are ‘ruthless’ black marketeers (Pырpasos, *Resistance*, 23, 26–7).

<sup>81</sup> Mamalaki, *Occupation Resistance*, 149.

<sup>82</sup> Matesis, *Daughter*, 33, 39, 50–51.

themselves, acquiring houses, ‘sewing machines, gramophones, [...] furniture, dinnerware sets and pianos’.<sup>83</sup> Demetriou, however, rarely comments negatively on the Athenian black market in which his characters engage fully while Fratzeskakis eloquently describes the experience of ‘shopping’ from a black market stall where the sellers hold the power.<sup>84</sup> A good number of Hronopoulou’s characters either sold or bought houses, the latter certainly with money earned through the black market.<sup>85</sup> One of her protagonists recounts that as a young child his father’s shop continued to be full of supplies, when all other shops around had everything confiscated by the Germans: ‘I remembered that at home they talked about some big orders, while frequently my mother and I used to go to the shop because father had to go to his “business”’.<sup>86</sup> While the author does not make it explicit, the abundance of food that the family enjoyed at the time is a clear indication that his father was engaged in black market dealings and most probably in collaboration activities too. For Stamoulis the black marketeer Vlassis is probably the most important character of the novel, after the narrator. Vlassis – and his parents – represent those self-absorbed Greeks who see the occupation and the hunger that was ‘brought’ by the occupiers as an opportunity: he develops into a collaborator and a black marketeer, gradually sucking the wealth of all, pushing his fiancée’s family to starvation and allowing his mother-in-law to die of hunger. Vlassis is apportioned full responsibility for what happens in occupied Greece. The peasants who ultimately supply Vlassis are presented as humane and kind. Thus, for Stamoulis the main culprit for escalating the famine is the black marketeer Vlassis. Hronopoulou presents a more nuanced picture of the black marketeers. Two of them, while enriching themselves at the expense of others, care and look after their own nuclear families, though not their own siblings.<sup>87</sup>

The black market, despite its absence from the official collective memory, is certainly present in fiction throughout the examined period. The public rhetoric that presented the black market in strong negative terms during and after the occupation is present in most pre-crisis works. At the same time, its role in people’s everyday life is also shown in matter-of-fact neutral colours in the same works, most probably representing the authors’ personal experiences. In the crisis fiction, the black market becomes explicitly and constantly negative, while the black marketeer characters assume central positions. Even if not named as such, some black marketeers are identified and perceived as working against the ‘people’, essentially seen as ‘big’ black marketeers. They are explicitly linked to the occupiers, thus also becoming collaborators. Their activities become central to the stories, unlike those in the earlier works, and much more in line with the leftist point of view of the black market. Throughout the period, it remains impossible to identify a unique section of the population that is presented as having consistently operated as black marketeers. Rather, different fiction works present different groups or professions as engaging in black market activities: peasants for Demetriou, shopkeepers for Hronopoulou and Stamoulis, manual workers for Hronopoulou, travellers for Mamalaki. In the pre-crisis fiction, the ‘big’ black marketeers are mostly faceless, anonymous men whose sole goal is profiteering. In the crisis fiction they are fully conscious, eponymous and either central characters themselves or a beloved father of a central character, their gains having benefited their children and grandchildren.

### Prostitution

In contrast to the black market, prostitution is rarely mentioned in the historiography and, if mentioned at all, mostly in passing, hardly ever having been investigated in any depth.<sup>88</sup> Lecoecur stresses

<sup>83</sup> Fratzeskakis, *Remember*, 417–18; Demetriou, *Great Famine*, 51–52, 89, 228, 229, 242, 352, 419.

<sup>84</sup> Demetriou, *Great Famine*, 51–52, 89, 228, 229, 242, 352, 419; Fratzeskakis, *Remember*, 415–17.

<sup>85</sup> Hronopoulou, *Other Enemy*, 32, 51–53, 91–107, 109–19.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 91–107, 109–19.

<sup>88</sup> Passing references in Hionidou, *Famine*, 237; Sheila Lecoecur, *Mussolini’s Greek Island: Fascism and the Italian Occupation of Syros in World War II (Το νησί του Μουσολίνι. Φασισμός και Ιταλική κατοχή στη Σύρο)* (Athens: Alexandria, 2013), chapter 8; Hionidou, *Greek Famine*, chapter 11; Violetta Hionidou, ‘“The Italians Wanted Beautiful Girls”: Remembering the Italian Occupation and Famine in Greece,’ in *Greece and Italy after World War II:*

that many of the Syros women ended up marrying their Italian lovers.<sup>89</sup> Syros's nineteen-fold increase of illegitimacy in 1943–4 in comparison to the pre-war years points to a wider issue, namely the widespread increase of extra-marital liaisons.<sup>90</sup> Famine-related prostitution has never been discussed openly, at least not from 1950 onwards. Evidence of famine-related prostitution does not appear to be abundant, almost certainly because it has not been researched. However, the 1942 proclamation of the left resistance group EAM explicitly and in detail refers to 'the prostitution of women' that had reached 'astonishing and unexpected' levels with 'foreign soldiers' strolling around 'arm-in-arm with our wives, our daughters, our sisters'.<sup>91</sup> The proclamation equates these women with traitors and makes it clear that they will be punished upon liberation.<sup>92</sup> Whether this occurred, we simply do not know.<sup>93</sup> It is primarily oral histories with famine survivors that discuss, albeit reluctantly, prostitution.<sup>94</sup> Here an explanation is necessary as to why the term prostitution is used. Exchanging sex for food is a common practice in famines.<sup>95</sup> These women have no choice but to sell their body either for their own survival, their children's, or their parental family's survival. They do not undertake such activity regularly or to enrich themselves, but for sheer survival and only while the famine lasts. That some of these women ended up marrying those men does not change the fact that the overwhelming majority of these relationships were caused by the lack of food.

### Prostitution in Fiction

Fiction presents Greek women engaging in prostitution with Italians, Germans and Greeks. Involvement with Italian soldiers is the most common and benevolent, whereas involvement with Germans is rare, and treated as treason. With Greeks, involvement is usually reserved for recently enriched black marketeers, which is also rare. Among earlier publications, up to 1990, references to prostitution are scarce, veiled and brief.<sup>96</sup> Panselinos, in a slightly longer passage, describes a scene that unfolds in Omonoia, a central location in Athens, where a 'young girl negotiates with an Italian who holds a loaf of bread under his arm'.<sup>97</sup> The author adds that he had seen 'many young girls in the hands of foreigners'.<sup>98</sup> In a different instance, a 'girl 12 years old' calls out to a passing German. When he realises what she wants, he moves on and ignores her.<sup>99</sup> Involvement with Germans was seen as the most disturbing, as they were the ultimate enemy, and such involvements were characterised as treason. In the two novels where a character is involved in sexual relations with a German, in Theotokas and in Demetriou, food is not the main reason for their engagement with the enemy. Therefore, this cannot be considered famine prostitution.<sup>100</sup>

In sharp contrast to engagements with Germans, women who involved themselves with Italians were squarely focused on accessing food. Fratzeskakis's narrator explains how the problem of

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*History, Perceptions, Memory*, eds. Filippo Focardi and Despoina Konstantinidou (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2025), forthcoming.

<sup>89</sup> Lecoeur, *Mussolini's*, 266–70.

<sup>90</sup> On Syros, the illegitimacy rate was six per 1,000 live births in 1939, 58 in 1942, 112 in 1943 and 115 in 1944. On Chios, that experienced only German occupation, it started from around 8.8 per 1,000 live births in 1936–9, declined to 5.8 in the period 1941–3 and increased to 41.1 in 1945 (Hionidou, *Famine*, 188).

<sup>91</sup> Dimitris Glinos, 'What is the National Liberation Front [EAM] and What Does it Want?,' in *Greece 1940–1949: A Documentary History*, ed. Richard Clogg (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 81.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 87, 96.

<sup>93</sup> Sparse evidence from oral histories suggests that indeed it happened (see for example the case of a hairdresser on Chios who was involved with Germans: Informant no. 54, female, born in 1932 on Vrontados Chios, interviewed in her home in Vrontados in 2019).

<sup>94</sup> Hionidou, *Greek Famine*, chapter 11; Hionidou, 'Italians'; informant no. 54, Chios; Lecoeur, *Mussolini's*, chapter 6.

<sup>95</sup> Ó Gráda, *Famine*, 54–61.

<sup>96</sup> Tahtsis, *Third*, 252; Mamalaki, *Occupation Resistance*, 96; Giannakos-Antoniades, *Chronicle*, 37–39.

<sup>97</sup> Panselinos, *When We*, 325.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 341. Panselinos's reference to prostitution amounts to 14 lines in a book of 397 pages.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 341. The reference to 12-year-old girls prostituting themselves appears also in Glinos's EAM proclamation (Glinos, 'What,' 81).

<sup>100</sup> Theotokas, *The Sick*, 308–26, 429; Demetriou, *Great Famine*, 290–91.

prostitution with Italian soldiers was increasing in parallel with the severity of the famine: ‘At the beginning, the bait to seduce the girls was a chocolate bar. Then it became a packet of biscuits and waffles. Later on pieces of rusk. And when the hunger established itself, [it was] any sort of leftover food, hot, warm or cold’.<sup>101</sup> Of all the published fiction, it is Matesis’s novel that is focused primarily on the narrator’s mother’s prostitution. The dire employment situation, the disappearance of her husband and her children’s starvation led the mother to the desperate decision to accept the regular visits of the Italian Alfio, whose arrival in the family home signalled the end of extreme hunger: ‘From that day on we were never hungry again’.<sup>102</sup> When Alfio was relocated, he brought ‘his replacement’ home to introduce him to Mother.<sup>103</sup> Such an engagement meant the family were called collaborators. The mother was labelled a whore by all, including her own son, and when liberation arrived the resistance men shaved her head and paraded her through the town, along with other women who had turned to prostitution for food.<sup>104</sup> Mother’s conduct – but most importantly the punishment imposed by the resistance – led to the full destruction of the family, from which they never recovered. Mother had articulated in writing her gratitude to the Italian soldier who helped her rescue her ‘children from death by starvation’ but also had allowed her to experience sexual ‘satisfaction’.<sup>105</sup> While this poor and famished mother was punished for her moral transgression, the narrator repeatedly mentions that the better-off women who engaged with Italian officers avoided punishment.<sup>106</sup> No other fiction work focuses on famine prostitution in so much detail. Demetriou too engages with prostitution, especially with Italians. Brothers would bring home possible Italian suitors for their sisters to choose from while fathers too were open to the idea.<sup>107</sup> Rather shockingly for Greek sensibilities, Demetriou presents two very young female characters, one of them a virgin, going out in search of Italians, desperate to exchange sex for food.<sup>108</sup>

Again, exceptionally, Demetriou includes a couple of instances where Greek men try to entice young girls with a slice of bread.<sup>109</sup> It is the latest two novels that focus squarely on Greek men. In Hronopoulou’s opening story, the narrator recounts how, as a sixteen-year-old, in the little room of the tavern where she worked, ‘one [male visitor would offer her an] olive, another a comb, another nothing’, adding that she did not consider it as ‘payment’.<sup>110</sup> Her most precious ‘present’ was a gold ring, offered to her by a Greek who, according to others, was ‘worse than the Germans’. The narrator reveals her then innocence when she adds that, ‘I was sleeping with all of them in the little room. Now I know how that looks, now is different, all these now look different, even I see it differently sometimes, because since then, much life has passed and one forgets’.<sup>111</sup> For her, life and its rules were different at the time, different from the 2017 present but also from the pre-war past: ‘I was 16 years old and all that I had known about life had been burned [during the occupation]’.<sup>112</sup> It is the same break with the moral rules of the pre-occupation past that Stamoulis’s narrator is emphasising. While the occupiers ‘brought the hunger’, it is the Greeks that intensified it, took advantage of other Greeks, and ultimately turned it into a famine. Vlassis and his parents represent those Greeks: he regularly extorted sexual favours from women and men in exchange for food. Vlassis himself is apportioned full responsibility for the prostitution of women; their ‘loose morals’ are not to blame. Catharsis comes at the end of the occupation when one of the female victims ends up killing him and his parents.<sup>113</sup> As the

<sup>101</sup> Fratzeskakis, *Remember*, 410.

<sup>102</sup> Matesis, *Daughter*, 3, 12–13, 18.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 29–30.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 118, 128, 135.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 26–27, 23, 104, 129, 147–49.

<sup>107</sup> Demetriou, *Great Famine*, 337, 23, 67, 92, 159, 253, 469.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 97–125.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>110</sup> Hronopoulou, *Other Enemy*, 8.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>113</sup> Stamoulis, *Shadow*, 338.

author does not discuss women's prostitution with foreign soldiers, the moral judgement of what happened is much easier to make in the novel than in reality.<sup>114</sup> Stamoulis also engages with the necessity of post-famine silence for a topic as thorny as prostitution. 'The past is in the rubbish', says the returned husband of the woman who prostituted herself in his absence.<sup>115</sup> 'Sometimes it is not good to tell the truth', articulates the narrator.<sup>116</sup> He never revealed that he saw one of the secondary characters in the novel engaging in famine prostitution, his silence saving her marriage.

Prostitution occurred much more widely than Greek historiography has dared to discuss. Because this is a traumatic and painful topic to recall, let alone discuss, there has been no public discourse on the topic since 1950. The theme has never been part of the collective memory, though individuals who experienced the famine have memories of it and have referred to it.<sup>117</sup> In contrast to the absence of public discourse, fiction does offer occasional and short references to its occurrence among the earlier works, whose authors had first-hand experiences of the events. The rich Italian literary and film production on this topic from the 1950s onwards presented the members of the Italian occupation army as particularly focused on, and successful in, seducing local women and having sexual relationships with them, leading to the creation of the myth of the *Sagapo* army.<sup>118</sup> This Italian collective memory, which also concerned Greek women, must have influenced Greek fiction authors, especially Matesis – and possibly Demetriou – who both refer to Italian soldiers and their dealings with Greek women in mostly positive terms. The crisis changed how famine prostitution is presented. The authors' gaze turns to the actions of Greek men, since the Italians were removed altogether from these novels. Overall, it seems that the lack of a home-grown collective memory and public discourse on this topic allowed these same authors to dare to move into traumatic and painful representations that are usually 'out of bounds' for Greek society's sensibilities.

## Discussion and Conclusions

This article has examined the famine fiction in its reflective capacity of the collective memories. Fiction works mirrored the official collective memory that apportioned responsibility to the German occupation and focused on the suffering of Athens in the winter of 1941–2.<sup>119</sup> This unifying, self-absolving and victimised view of the Greeks has persisted in the texts for exactly those reasons. The Greek economic crisis and Germany's involvement in it had a visible effect in bringing the occupation and famine to the fore in Greek society. The crisis fiction works fully reflect this. The Italians not only are not apportioned any responsibility but also vanish, leaving the Germans as the only actors in occupied Athens. These same works implicitly extend the period of suffering throughout the occupation, making the suffering much more extensive, as in Demetriou's novel of 2001. Therefore, fiction reflects well the changes in collective memory, in this case stressing, during the crisis years, the German occupation actions.

The theme of the black market, a theme that is absent from the official collective memory but present in the collective memory, is stark in famine fiction. If we were to assume that the oral histories collected in 1999–2000 loosely represent some of the collective memory narratives of the time, it would be safe to say that the fictive depictions of the pre-crisis era mirror the collective memory of the time, mixing the negative depiction of the black marketeers with neutral ones of the black market's necessity and presence in everyday life. In contrast, the crisis fiction presents a much more negative image of the black marketeers and the role they played. Thus, while all Greeks appeared to be involved in the black market in the

<sup>114</sup> Matesis, *Daughter*, 18, 22, 31.

<sup>115</sup> Stamoulis, *Shadow*, 310–13, 325.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 325, 338.

<sup>117</sup> Hionidou, *Greek Famine*, chapter 11; Hionidou, 'Italians.'

<sup>118</sup> 'Sagapo' is Greek for 'I love you.' For a fascinating account of the Italian fiction representation of the sexual encounters between Greek women and Italian soldiers see Bartolini, *Italian*, 64–71.

<sup>119</sup> This narrative was produced by the right in the late 1940s and was sustained by the governing right until the 1970s. Significantly, it has never been disputed by the left.

pre-crisis works, in the crisis narratives there are only few black marketeers – they are treated as collaborators who only care for their own (and their family’s) survival and enrichment. It is difficult to ascertain whether this is reflective of the crisis period collective memory. However, the fiction does reflect the volatility and multiplicity of memories concerning the black market.

The theme of prostitution is occasionally present in the fiction works but absent from the public discourse and collective memory. Therefore, we cannot talk about the ‘reflective capacity’ of fiction. However, fiction does deal with a topic that neither historiography nor collective memory have dared to deal with, except fleetingly. Therefore, fiction could not have acted as a medium that reflected the memory narratives that prevailed in that community at around the time when it was written. Neither did it act as a ‘vessel’ of memory. The existing references of the earlier writings lack depth and only rarely reflect the EAM rhetoric. These references must have been sourced through personal recollections and the writings of the 1940s while some, later in the period, also reflect transnational influences. In contrast, the crisis fiction focuses exclusively on Greek men. Such flexibility and variability in dealing with the issue of prostitution certainly reflects the lack of a collective memory and the freedom that such lack allows the authors to explore the subject.

Famine fiction reflects accurately the enhancement of the official collective memory during the crisis. The crisis novels eliminate the Italians, presenting the Germans as the only occupiers in Athens, fully reflecting the contemporary public discourse. These novels, as well as that by Demetriou, deal with the whole of the occupation period and not just 1941–2, thus including the wider social implications of the famine and not only those of mortality. They both distance themselves from the all-consuming civil war discourse in the preceding decades and politics. Much more importantly, they turn their gaze on the Greeks themselves, explicitly accusing many among them for reprehensible – but not political – actions. While both endorse and reflect the contemporary political discourse by apportioning full blame to Germans, at the same time they significantly diverge from it, by focusing on the wrongdoings of Greeks.

This article has examined fiction works engaging with the famine that were published between 1950 and 2019. The article has introduced the use of literary texts as a ‘public archive’, to conclude that these works adhere to and mirror the official collective memory at the time of the writing. They also reflect the multiplicity of memories regarding the black market, a theme that is not included in the official collective memory but is part of the collective memory nonetheless. As Astrid Erll has stressed, fiction is privileged in its conceptualisation of the past.<sup>120</sup> It is free, unlike history, to reimagine events, create narratives and counter-narratives making the past relevant to the present.<sup>121</sup> Crisis famine fiction did that by removing the Italians altogether from occupied Athens. In dealing with prostitution, fiction has dealt with a theme that Greek society has refused to engage with. In presenting Greek men as those taking advantage of the famished, the post-2019 fiction has further challenged the foreign-focused famine memory narratives. Simply put, fiction has engaged with the famine’s unpleasant, gory and divisive aspects significantly better than either historiography or collective memory. At the same time, it has closely adhered to the official collective memory.

<sup>120</sup> Erll, *Memory*, 150.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*