

CRETAN VENDETTAS: HISTORY OF THE CRETAN VENDETTA THE BLOODIEST VENDETTAS

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Abstract

“Vendetta is a customary enacted form of taking the law into one’s hand, which does not conform with the contemporary form of serving justice as the sole prerogative of the state, however, there is an almost unconditional acceptance from the society in the mountainous communities of the three western prefectures of Crete (Chania, Rethymno, Heraklion), where the phenomenon is still met.”

The phenomenon of the vendetta is not at all a novelty. Since ancient times it is met in the very first human communities, for reasons though that can be characterized as momentous.

In fact, the law of retribution is considered to be a great form of justice served.

The vendetta is a kind of tradition which never ends. It passes down from generation to generation in order to ensure its perpetuation. The parent or the teacher passes on facts of the tradition to the next generation, which himself acquired from previous generations. This is what tradition is all about, passing on recorded or unwritten manners and customs to the next generations. Cretan vendetta constitutes a form of unwritten tradition. In a manner almost pious, the cause of hatred and revenge passes down from generation to generation. It is a fact that the victims of a bloodthirsty vendetta do not necessarily get involved directly in the cycle of the homicides. It is enough for somebody just to be a relative or an acquaintance of the warring sides for his victimization in the murder cycle of the vendetta. So, a vendetta can begin between two families and extend the origin of its victims in more than the two original families.

Key words: *Cretan Vendettas, History of Cretan Vendetta, The Bloodiest Vendettas.*

History of the Cretan Vendetta - The beginning of “the law of the blood”

The word vendetta, carrying the known legal content, comes from the Italian verb “vendico”, which means take revenge. In the places where we meet this phenomenon the usual word that goes with it, is family. This specific word attributes more exactly the double content of Cretan revenge which is a strictly family affair and emanates from the duty the Cretans feel, to protect the family honor. In Cretan literature also, and particularly in Erotokritos, we meet the term “gdikiomos” (revenge). Vendetta however, is not only Cretan or even a Greek phenomenon. In the wider area of Mani we meet a similar phenomenon to the Cretan vendetta. The two states have been in close contact and what they have in common in their local cultures are many.

The Cretan vendetta however, constitutes a significant case and is met more often within the Greek society. Vendettas have been mainly recorded in the western prefectures of Crete, Heraklion, Rethymno and Chania. Lasithi is the place where those who try to avoid the retribution of their action, become self-exiled. So, when a member of a family is murdered, their battling force decreases, their honor is at stake and there has to be retaliation to balance the situation. The prevailing thought is: I murder a member of the other family, even if he is innocent, for the sole purpose to maintain the balance of horror between the opposing families. Many times these kinds of crimes are incited from deep rooted convictions that God himself approves this balance of human loss of all included in the vendetta. Aside from the transcendental approach of this phenomenon, in Crete we meet, for the first time ever, vendetta as statutory of the state. The author D.A.Xiritakis refers to the latter reference about vendetta as a statutory:

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In the customary common law of Crete it is recorded for the first time in Minoan state. Aristotle also mentions in “Nicomachean Ethics” as the advocate of “The law of Retribution” Radamanthis, brother of Minoas. According to the legal provision, the person committing a crime “must get what he deserves, so it will be fair”. In fact, the law of retribution is considered to be a great form of justice served.

Later during the Ottoman occupation of Crete, there was the basic principle of equal penalty. Specifically, according to this principle the penalty that has to be imposed in case of murder is an equal penalty, that is, the sentence of the perpetrator to death, or the “redemption of blood”, which means that the perpetrator must compensate financially the family of the victim. The vendetta may seem to be something obsolete from the distant past, an ancient form of justice served in communities where the Mosaic Law rules “an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth”. This feeling derives from the need for revenge which usually the relatives of the murdered victim seek from the perpetrator and his family. This notion which should be noted as the first one in the history of criminal law level of fair serving of Justice is lost in the depths of time and can be traced in almost all legal systems of the civilizations developed around the eastern Mediterranean basin in the second millennium BC. In these civilizations the enactment of the fundamental legal principle of Retribution, or “Tautopathia” or “Andipeponthos”(in Greek), to use all the synonyms of the relative legal jargon, is expressed as a religious command and acquires validity and obligation for the participants of the law, only because the gods command it. In Crete, however, for the first time in the history of the law, this form of justice served appears as the product of human Will and as statutory, exactly as it is stated. Archaeologists haven’t discovered so far any written signs concerning this penal provision. (www.kritikamonopatia.gr/?page_id=17886).

Since then, the retribution will be the base of the criminal law in Crete, up until its liberation from the Turks and the continuation of its application will not be shaken at all until the foundation of the Cretan State, which was formed following the model of the European Enlightenment, and the publication of its first Criminal Law, which bears the signature of Eleftherios Venizelos, as minister of Justice. The magnanimous and wonderful objection of Socrates, that we must not take revenge or abuse any man, whatever we have suffered from him, which (objection) constitutes the first reference of the retribution law, around four centuries before Jesus Christ preaches “Whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Mathew E, 39), was heard in the ancient world as a voice in the wilderness. (www.kretanos.wordpress.com/page/26/)

Even one of his most prominent students and writer of the dialogue "Kriton", where the above objection is raised, Plato, a deep researcher and admirer of the Cretan just government, adopts with no hesitation the Cretan retribution. In his last and most interesting work "Laws", which he wrote during the last decade of his life, so that they be used as legislation for the foundation of a Cretan colony, in Magnesia, and especially in his ninth and twelfth books, where he puts forward his proposals concerning the applied criminal law, Plato repeatedly suggests on the one hand, the obligation of the State to punish with death the perpetrator of a premeditated homicide and on the other, enacts in favor of the close relatives the – succoring the state – authority to pursue self-reliantly the application of the law by putting to death the perpetrator or by assisting to his arrest and handing him over to the legal authorities.

All the vendetta cases end up in court. Hatred between the families of the accused triggers more expressive forms of anger. Anger is expressed by gestures of indignation and predispositions of lynching from both parties. Hatred becomes obvious by the wild cries of ready for war people. It's worth mentioning the relative tolerance on the judges' part during vendetta trials. They usually acknowledge the extenuating circumstances that derive from the alien vendetta code of honor. (www.kretanos.wordpress.com/page/26/)

Many times the place chosen by the relatives for committing the avenged murder is the courthouse itself, while the perpetrator is tried and especially during the hearing or the reading of the verdict. This option is anything but random, as the courthouse is a symbolic place and the "avengers" in this way make their statement of justice served. The story, however, does not end with the revenge of the victim's family. On the contrary, this is the beginning of a perpetual cycle of reprisals between the "opposing" families, resulting in hundreds of innocent victims and dozens of families wiped out.

There are vendettas that lasted for 70 whole years with more than 60 victims, like the one between the Sartzetakis and the Pendaris families, which was one of the largest vendettas that shook up Crete. This case finally "closed" after many years in the same way that vendettas are usually resolved. With the mediation of people of authority that were held in high esteem by both warring families, marriages were contracted among members of the two families. In this way, the two families became relatives and the passion for revenge gradually died out. Sometimes successive marriages were needed in order for the provocations to stop. Another way for a vendetta to stop was the fleeing of the potential perpetrators or victims to other cities. (www.kritesegaleo.gr/kretike-benteta)

At this point there has to be a reference to the social and cultural components of the phenomenon of the vendetta. The Courthouse in Heraklion was built in 1833 to house the armed Turkish guard of the city. The building was then called "kiskas", which means barracks. After the liberation of Crete from the Turkish conquerors in 1898, the Cretan state used the barracks as a courthouse. In the post-occupation period and for as long as it was necessary, the courthouse was used for the trials of the collaborators, which were conducted in extremely emotional ambience. The attendance was big. Among these people there were relatives of the victims who were killed because of the betrayal and murdering acts of the accused. The collaborators were mainly people who worked with the German conquerors. The Cretans usually avenged the collaborators, fellow countrymen, whose relatives afterwards defected to the German authorities and used their German connections to take revenge. The main role of the Germans in the area made the reprisals towards the Cretan patriots of mass slaughtering proportions. (www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=315817).

In most cases somebody who gets involved in a post-occupational vendetta against collaborators does not act solely based on his personal feeling of justice. It is usually his personal suffering that instigates him in the specific vendetta practices. In his suffering as a Cretan patriot

there are myriad voices jostling, of his companions for collective justice. To all intents and purposes, they are about legally justified taking the law into one's hands. The unredeemed memory of the collaborators' victims is redeemed whether inside the court or outside. (www.enet.gr).

Despite the fact that in recent years the phenomenon is in remission, there is evidence according to which, there are "pockets" open, mainly in western Crete and the mountainous areas. In the mountainous villages the communities remain closed and personal honor is highly valued by its residents.

On the other hand, in areas where the local population has come in contact with other cultures, the younger generation goes to universities and has a proper education and the living standards have improved, the "custom" of the vendetta has weakened. Besides, many Cretans claim that "even in the shadow, the preservation of the vendetta is defamatory for the place".

Throughout the years the phenomenon has degenerated and reached extreme proportions, like the case of somebody walking past Venizelio Hospital and killing an employee for the sole reason that a distant relative of the victim had killed in the past a distant relative of his.

Such cases only cause indignation and repulsion. Today along with the vendetta there is also the crime of gun trafficking. You can murder somebody from a distance and nobody will ever find out. The murders are not committed with a knife, but with a rifle and ambush from a distance. Committing a crime which will clear your name in society becomes easier and you may even get away with it because nobody saw you. In a Cretan's conscience the vendetta is not always considered as a barbarian act. The person who takes the revenge in some cases is highly respected. (www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=291649).

Vendetta is a phenomenon which frightens and troubles people, it brings primitive situations to memory. The unquenchable passion for revenge as well as anarchy rule, laws and logic do not prevail. The vendetta which has been characterized as "the law of blood" has been in remission in recent years, however, there are certain cases where it stays alive, despite the fact that modern countries have accepted the principles of European Enlightenment, according to which the punishment of a crime is the sole prerogative of the state.

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Vendetta-revenge could not but be a part in Cretan music. There is a well-known song that characteristically roughs out this situation; it's called "Πότε θα κάμει ξαστεριά"(in greek): "When it will be clear skies":

*Πότε θα κάμει ξαστεριά
Πότε θα κάμει ξαστεριά,
πότε θα φλεβαρίσει,
να πάρω το ντουφέκι μου,
την όμορφη πατρόνα,
να κατεβώ στον Ομαλό,
στη στράτα του Μουσούρου,
να κάμω μάνες δίχως γιους,
γυναίκες δίχως άντρες,*

να κάμω και μωρά παιδιά,
να κλαιν' δίχως μανάδες,
να κλαιν' τη νύχτα για νερό,
και την αυγή για γάλα,
και τ' αποδιαφωτίσματα
τη δόλια τους τη μάνα...(in greek)

*When will it be clear skies,
When will it be clear skies?
When will the February rains come?
To take my rifle
The beautiful mistress of the house
To go down to Omalos
To Mousouri street
To make mothers without sons
Wives without husbands
To make babies cry without mothers
To cry at night for water
And at dawn for milk
And at daybreak their poor mother...*

This song describes the vendetta between two families, the motive and the outcome of this revenge. Many centuries ago, in a place called Sfakia in the prefecture of Chania, there was a family called Skordili and in the Omalos plateau a family called Mousouri, they even had a street called after them "Mousouri street".

There was a clash between these two families with devastating results for both sides. So, this "rizitiko" song (the word "rizitiko" means rooted and refers to the villages rooted in the mountains where these songs come from), gives a very accurate description of what happens in a vendetta. What the person holding the gun feels in order to defend his honor. Apparently, in the song the person talking is somebody from the Skordili family. (www.apodimoi-krites.gr/index.php/afieromata/item/208-o-nomos-tis-ventetas?tmpl=component&print=1).

It is very easy for a vendetta to start, as well as organized. It reminds us of the way the partisans in Crete were organized. Honor in Crete is an integral part of a Cretan's existence. Nobody can live without honor. This is how they have learnt to live their lives and it is passed down from generation to generation. Honor – for a Cretan its value is in his name and his last name, his birthplace generally. He honors all his ancestors that have ever lived. The matter of marriage, relationship, friendship, they are all unswerving values in Cretan life. Even financial matters can be a cause for a vendetta, or the way you clink glasses when you drink with someone may prove important. This is especially a good reason to cause a misunderstanding concerning shame of honor. Another parameter causing a vendetta is cattle-stealing and economic dominance over a place.

Many times the leader of a vendetta is called "Captain" and there is a whole hierarchy following him like a tree with its branches. Every branch has its sector. There are those who stalk the victims, those who are on the look-out, the ones carrying messages, the mediators with the opposite side, the executioners, the guards, the ones who organize the schemes for revenge and so forth, depending on the circumstances. They are all armed with the sole purpose to take revenge. This is how a family can be transformed when the honor is at stake.

At this point it is best for some of the rules to be referred. (It always depends on the place and the circumstances. There are cases when there are no rules at all.) In the beginning, it has to be said that a vendetta does not start secretly or without warning. One family's members carry the

message of revenge to the other family. There are cases, however, where a vendetta starts from the offended using the ambush tactic. The avengers have all the time they need to find out about the specific routes taken by the offenders or their house addresses. In certain extreme cases politicians or people of prestige who are widely accepted, have been involved in a vendetta either as victims or as victimizers. Women, frail groups (the sick, the elderly) as well as children are not involved in a vendetta. As a consequence, the burden rests on the shoulders of the adult male members of the family who are considered the strongest and bravest. During periods of truce (because of agricultural engagements), the vendetta simply “freezes” until the end of these engagements. In certain cases the vendetta code allowed a temporary pause, called “treva” during ploughing, sowing-time, harvesting, threshing and when they picked olives. The warring parties worked in neighboring fields in dead silence and when night fell down they stocked the towers with food and ammunition. The fight started again as soon as the harvest was over. A limited truce was in order sometimes when one of the members from the opposing family had a marriage or a christening or something similar.

The most usual way in which a vendetta ended was when one of the parties was wiped out completely, as a consequence their remnants dispersed in other villages, leaving their towers and fields to the victors, who remained the unquestionable dominators until another family was able to gather or create enough power to challenge them.

The defeated party could stay in the village if they wanted to, only if they apologized to their victors through a specific ritual. Things were simpler in cases of murders without any further consequences, where after a specific simpler process, the repented murderer became the special protector and benefactor of the family he had done wrong. All these matters were taken care of by a local council. A fact that could also settle the warring parties was the Turkish threat.

The longest truce in the history was the general treva Mavromichalis asked just before the Independence war began. One of the most important rules also is the law of silence. Specifically, nobody exchanges information with anyone other than his family. Even those who are not involved in the vendetta, the other villagers speak ever, even if they have witnessed something. Revenge takes place by every mean available. According to the circumstances the rules may be complemented or decreased. The Cretan vendetta, however, reminds us of the disease-curse, cancer which while “dormant” is fine, but when it “wakes up” – even after many years – destroys everything in its wake and its repercussions are devastating. There can also be a war within the same family.

The bloodiest vendettas in history

Murders in the courthouse

- Symbolic use in the courthouse

There are times when the place chosen from the relatives, in order to execute the revengeful murder in Cretan vendettas is the courthouse itself, while the perpetrator is tried and especially during the hearing or the reading of the verdict.

The number of these murders is not big apparently because of the great practical difficulties the perpetrator (the avenger) has to deal with in such a scheme. The difficulties concern the strict police measures taken when the case in trial has to do with a felony (murder, attempted murder, rape and seduction). Among these measures there is a thorough body search on everyone entering the courthouse so that guns cannot be carried inside, as well as a strong police force present at all times to prevent any act of violence against the accused. It is not rare, however, for the Supreme Court, according to the Criminal Penal Code (article 136), to refer for public safety reasons, the trial of the appeals in very emotional cases out of the geographical borders of Crete and more

specifically to the Court of Appeal in Piraeus. Such references to the Court of Appeal in Piraeus have been made very recently for the cases of the Bonataki brothers who were charged for the murder of Koukoula, the Strilligados, the Tsapakis and the Foundoulakis.

- The case of Ioannis Papadosifos – Murder of I. Venierakis

The case of Ioannis Papadosifos, who killed the murderer of his son, I. Venierakis on December 20, 1988 inside the courthouse of Piraeus, is one of the most well-known stories in the recent history of the Cretan vendetta. Its peculiarity lies in the ingenuity of the father who passed inside the courthouse the revenge weapon, a "Parabellum", hiding it under his long beard. In fact, he fixed it tight with his thick undershirt under his shirt.

Papadosifos was not carrying a gun when he first entered the courthouse. He had left it loaded and with the safety off in the glove compartment of a friend's car. At some point he got out of the courtroom to have a coffee. He came back pretending to be weak when the guards did a body search on him.

An hour later he repeated his exit and noticed that the guards did not do a body search on him. Just before 12 o'clock he exited the courthouse for the last time, took the gun, hid it under his beard and went back into the courthouse to conclude his mission. Papadosifos's son and the accused were just acquaintances. The accused "got angry when he was informed by a woman he was seeing at the time, that Manolis had advised her to be careful in her relationship with Venierakis". When Venierakis asked him to meet, he fired two shots at young Papadosifos leaving him dead at the spot.

- The end of a bloodthirsty traitor – Revenge of George Vrentzos murdering Nikos Magiasis.

Equally characteristic are two more murder cases, which were committed right after the post-occupational years in the courthouse of Heraklion, where the Special Court for the collaborators was in session. The first one was about Nikos Magiasis, who was stabbed to death (April 30, 1947) at the docket of the accused by Giorgos Vrentzos taking revenge in this "biblical" way for the death of his brother Michalis, and the second one was about the slaughtering of the siblings Kostas, Stavros, Maria, and Hariklia Somaraki along with their mother Eleni by the relatives of their victims, right after the reading of the verdict (October 30, 1945).

Another murder that can be included in the same category happened in the courtroom of the Police-Court of Perama in 1969 with Damianos Parasiris resident of Zoniana as the perpetrator and Ioannis Vrentzos, also known as "Lodrogiannis", from Anogia as the victim. Damianos Parasiris slaughtered with a knife Ioannis Vrentzos in the courthouse, while there was one other trial in session that had nothing to do with those two, taking revenge for the death of his brother Giorgos, known with the nickname "the lawyer", whom Vrentzos had killed in 1945 in a place called "Dio Aorakia" in Heraklion for cattle-raising differences. Damianos Parasiris was sentenced to 20 years and 2 months imprisonment (Docket number 95/6-11-1970). Not long after his release, an "unknown man" tried to kill him with a hunting rifle in his coffee shop in Zoniana. He got injured on his neck but didn't die. His side blames a close relative of Lodrogiannis but no evidence was found. Anyway the memory of this vendetta remains fresh and poisons the relations between the two villages, Zoniana and Anogia as it was obvious a few years ago with the implement of the "Kapodistria" plan. One of the reasons the people in Anogia rejected the plan of their administrative connection with Zoniana was this vendetta.

"The right will prevail"

- Sartzetakis – Pendaris: 45 years of murdering reprisals

Spyros Vomvolakis was found dead in Keratsini. He was considered to be the instigator for three murders and the injury of a young boy, for whom his brother Vassilis was convicted in 1984. There is no doubt that the bullets that killed the 60 year old Spyros Vomvolakis in Keratsini were bullets of revenge, 23 years after his sentence to four times life imprisonment for accessory to three murders and the injury of a 9-year-old boy. His brother Vassilis was the perpetrator of the above, convicted with the same sentence.

The cause of the murders was probably political as politics in the early 1980s were intense and there was no sign then, during the trial in Heraklion, that it had anything to do with the bloody vendetta of the Sartzetakis-Pendaris which started in the 1940s, counted at least 60 dead and closed in 1985 when Vangelis Pendaris MP for PASOK and minor victimizer, voted for the President of the Democracy, Christos Sartzetakis. V. Pendaris had killed Eftihis Sartzetakis, the so called "Kanaris", head of the family, to avenge the death of his 14-year-old brother Andreas. The murders of the Vomvolakis brothers in 1982 shocked the country because of their brutality fearing that a new bloody cycle would start again.

The history of the vendetta Sartzetakis – Pendaris:

Who was Spyros Vomvolakis who fell down dead while he was walking in a street in Keratsini, having eight bullets from a 45 pistol on his body?

In March 1981 he is sentenced in 13 years imprisonment for attempted murder against I.G.Sartzetakis and is taken to the prison of Agia from where he escapes a while later. After he escapes from prison, his brother Vassilis, 43 years old at the time, from the village Vafe Apokoronas, goes out on a killing spree and starts killing members of the Sartzetakis family at the village square. First he shoots and kills Efstratios Sartzetakis, the president of the community. Afterwards, he kills Giorgos S. who tried to help his relative and then his wife Eleni who ran towards her husband.

In fact, as it is mentioned in the bill of indictment, when she came out of her house he went after her and executed her. Then, he goes back where the body of Efstratios lies and gives him the coup de grace. Efstratios' wife and two kids arrive at the square and as soon as Vomvolakis sees her he raises his gun. The one and only bullet finds nine-year-old Giorgos on the chest and injures him severely. "Have pity on the kids at least" the mother implored him when she saw her husband lying in a pool of blood. According to the indictment Vassilis Vomvolakis stopped shooting "because he ran out of bullets".

The perpetrator, in his plea, mentioned that he committed the murders after his brother's instigation, who was later arrested. They were both tried in Heraklion in January 1984. V. Vomvolakis said in court that he killed Efstratios S. because he had been previously shot by him on the leg, he even showed a scar, but the Public Prosecutor G. Zorbas disproved it saying that he shot himself to have extenuation.

In a reporting of "P" it said that "When he was asked why he did not only kill Efstratios, he answered that he hated the Sartzetakis family and shot whoever was in front of him. He said in the end that there was a dispute between them because they belonged in different political parties." S. Vomvolakis refused the indictment claiming that he was not present at Vafe during that period. In fact, when he heard the verdict sentencing him to four times life imprisonment for the instigation to the murders he exclaimed "Tomorrow morning you should have a verdict of my execution". The same sentence was imposed on the perpetrator his brother, while three members of the court proposed that he be sentenced with the death penalty!

Spyros Vomvolakis had served part of his sentence in the prison of Halicarnassus, and people who knew him often met him in Heraklion where he spent days of his leave. After his release from prison he moved to Keratsini where he was executed. The criminal lawyer Dimitris Xiritakis who studies the phenomenon of the Cretan vendetta, says that S. Vomvolakis' murder is

an act of retribution but in no way can it be a revival of the big vendetta between the Pendaris family and the Sartzetakis family. "I think this case has finally closed and this incident is purely symptomatic" he emphasized.

- Patima Apokoronas Chania

The last episode of the long-lasting search of the notorious fugitive, Vangelis Selianakis was written two years ago on January 4, 2011 in the village of Selianakis, Arhondiki Rethymnos. Policemen from The Special Task Force were found this morning in Arhondiki, as they were informed that Selianakis was there. The 55-year-old fugitive saw the policemen and tried to escape. There was gunfire resulting in the death of the, for 15 years, fugitive from the prison of Halicarnassus.

On August 16, 1994 Vangelis Selianakis killed the 24-year-old Kostas Mouzourakis in Patima Apokoronas because of a dispute over some land. He tried to escape to Canada but was captured and arrested in February 1995 at the airport and a year later he was sentenced to life imprisonment. However, in July the same year he escaped from the prison of Halicarnassus and has been wanted ever since.

It all began in 1994 in the village Patima Apokoronas Chania, when the 53-year-old Fotoula Mouzourakis was found raped and strangled. Michalis Dikonimakis and his friend Nikos Pollakis were arrested for the murder and sentenced to life imprisonment, however the deadly cycle of the vendetta was just beginning. On August 16, 1994 in a mountainous area of Kournas Apokoronas, 24-year-old Kostas Mouzourakis, son of Fotoula Mouzourakis was found dead. He had been shot twice from close range. In November 1994 Giannis Mouzourakis 26 years old at the time, along with two other people murdered Manolis Dikonimakis, 54 years old. Dikonimakis was the father of Michalis Dikonimakis who had been convicted and sentenced for the murder of Fotoula Mouzourakis. On December 13, 1994 an unknown man hit Sifis Dikonimakis 28 years old, with his car.

The accident happened in Mitilini. The young man was riding on a motorbike and was carrying along a rifle which was fired and killed him. He was the son of Manolis Dikonimakis and Michalis' brother. On September 23, 1995 Vangelis Selianakis was murdered with a hunting rifle in an ambush by unknown people on the country road in Argyroupoli Rethymno Episkopi. He was the nephew of the 37-year-old then and dead today Evangelos Seliniakis who was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of Kostas Mouzourakis. He escaped though, from the prison of Halicarnassus on July 21, 1996 and was considered as number one suspect for that murder. Giannis Mouzourakis was murdered in 1999 in Peristeri, Athens.

They found a gun on him, the one he has always been carrying for five years as a fugitive from the Police. He suddenly took a round of bullets. He did not have time to react or even reach for his gun. He fell on the ground and crept for a few meters.

On January 13, in the courthouse of Heraklion the trial for the murder of Giannis Selianakis will begin, father of three, from Arhondiki Rethymnos, who fell down dead in January 2007 from the gun of the 43-year-old H.A from Episkopi, Rethymno. The hearing of the case is of great concern for the police, as the victim was the nephew of the man-ghost, Vangelis Selianakis. According to the newspaper "Patris", it was he who has blood on his hands from the revenge he took for the murder of his first nephew, the brother of Giannis Selianakis, and many believe that Vangelis Selianakis, who had been arrested in February 1995 and sentenced to life imprisonment, would strike again. In July 1996, however, escaped from the prison of Halicarnassus and three years later he was accused for the murder of Giannis Mouzourakis (the brother of Kostas Mouzourakis), whom he held responsible for the murder of his nephew.

- The bloody cycle of Striligas

The special characteristic of this vendetta, which differentiates it noticeably from the other cases, lies in the fact that it does not take place among members of opposing families, like it usually happens in Crete, but among members of the same family, the family of Striligas. The Striligas is a big, strong and historical family that lives mainly in a mountainous large village of Psiloritis, Livadia, and they are involved in cattle-raising.

The Striligas vendetta, which will be our main focus, is recent and concerns two branches of the same family. One is the family of Charidimos Ioannis Striligas and the other of his cousin Charidimos Emmanuel Striligas. The first one had the nickname "Zarfides" and the second one had the nickname "Georgalides". It is about, that is, a domestic vendetta, something rare in Crete where family bonds are very strong even among members that are not connected together by blood, only by synonymy. Within the big Cretan families there is a hierarchy and accepted procedures by all, which counteract the differences among the members.

In this particular vendetta it is without precedent the big number of reprisals that were exchanged among them within a very short period from 1987 when it started with the death of Manolis Striligas until 1995 when Charidimos Emmanuel Striligas was murdered. Another indication of the horrible hatred between them is the following incident which was recorded in their last trial in the courthouse of Lasithi in October 1996 from the witness E. Sinolakis, husband of Charidimos I. Striligas' sister. This witness testified that Charidimos E. Striligas, father of the murdered 15-year-old Manolis in 18/5/1987, had given the order to erase the name (Emmanuel Striligas) from his son's gravestone and in its place to write the name Emmanuel Georgales. This act shows that his generation was deadly poisoned by hatred and deserves a new beginning with a brand new name.

Until May 1987 when Manolis Striligas was found dead, the relationship between the two families was very good. Hatred and discord set in between them when the father of the deceased Charidimos, after the persistent urging from his wife Anna, started to suspect that his son did not shoot himself accidentally playing with his father's gun like they thought in the beginning, but his cousin George, ordered by his father Charidimos Ioannis Striligas killed him. Despite the explanations given, Charidimos Striligas will remain with his suspicions and will do something of great importance; he will take his family and move to Perama, capital of the province. From there he will continue acting against his cousin and his nephew.

The Public Prosecutor's office in Rethymno will start proceedings against them for premeditated murder, against George Striligas as the perpetrator and Charidimos as the instigator. Much later in the Magistrate's Court in Rethymnos they will be both acquitted from the charges.

On August 16, 1989 Charidimos Striligas will meet the nephew of Giannis Striligas and will shoot him with a gun injuring him severely on his nape. The Court of Appeal in Chania accepted the fact that the accused acted in a fit of anger. In the end, Charidimos will only serve four and a half years and after his release will move to his wife's village Parigoria, Chania, following the relative ancient custom that wants the perpetrator moving along with the members of his family away from the scene of the crime. On 25/06/1990 Agapi Striligas, wife of Charidimos, will be found dead by a bullet in her house. Prime suspect for this revengeful murder was Charidimos E. Striligas who had just been released. The cases of the two deaths will never go to court and as a result they will make the relationship worse even more among the Zarfides and the Georgalides who have their own ideas about the whole story.

The severe injury of Giannis Striligas left him a paraplegic, so his family had every reason to remember the cause of this evil. The way in which Charidimos E. Striligas was executed in 21/8/1995 shows that the perpetrators knew well how to carry out the Cretan vendetta, as it has been formed in the last 20 years. The perpetrators followed the "recipe" of the Cretan vendetta which is summed up in two words: ambush & long barrel gun. Charidimos was hit with 12 bullets fired in

three rounds in front of Anna, his wife's eyes. The perpetrators, despite the accusations against Nikos and Manolis Striligas, were never found.

Criticism

Vendettas constitute an integral part of the Cretan tradition, it is a custom which passed and still passes on from generation to generation in certain villages of Crete. Although this phenomenon still exists until today the locals are afraid to speak to the local authorities about these incidents and as a result the perpetrators remain unknown, unpunished and the phenomenon continues to constitute a strong source of "fire" that burns whole communities.

Cretans continue to carry arms freely up until today and with the slightest provocation they get involved in fights with tragic consequences in most cases. All these have as a direct consequence the island to be "stigmatized", the involved parties apart from ruining their lives by going to jail and are called "murderers" they lose their fortune and go away from their loved ones, family and friends and end up alienated from every form of social life and action.

The paradox is that all these coexist in the 21st century as these people "step with one foot on the technological world and with the other on the preservation of such a bloody custom". Since the Police Authorities and the local authorities "are incapable" after a certain point to put out these burning fires, the citizens should cease to support such "legal practices" and should adopt the enacted laws of the State, solving their differences through the dialogue.

The desocialization of the Cretans involved in the vendettas should concern the State, because due to them people are marginalized unable to continue their life in a normal pace and also entire villages are on the verge of extinction.

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