

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Name
2016		84	Greece	Sheila Lecoecur

Announcement

Sign the petition for British historian Sheila Lecoecur who is on trial for defamation. Click this link: https://secure.avaaz.org/en/petition/Greek_Justice_History_on_Trial

BACKGROUND

In [October] 2016, British historian Sheila Lecoecur, lecturer in Italian at the Imperial College, London, and her Greek publisher Alexandria Publications were sued for defamation in Athens by the family of the late Vayias Vaitsis. In the original English edition and the 2013 Greek translation of her book *Mussolini's Greek Island: Fascism and the Italian Occupation of Syros in World War II* (2009), Lecoecur had mentioned that in 1944 Vaitsis had accepted the post of acting prefect of Syros, capital of the Cyclades archipelago, under the quisling government of Prime Minister Ioannis Rallis (1878–1946) and the German occupation force (October 1943–November 1944). She also wrote that “a continuing controversy surround[ed] his name.” (pages 182–183 of the 2009 edition). The family demanded 300,000 euros in damages as they claimed that Vaitsis’s reputation was tarnished and many inhabitants of the island now considered him to be a traitor and Nazi collaborator. The trial was planned for 27 October 2016. [Sources: “[Petition for Sheila Lecoecur: Greek version](#)” (19 October 2016); “[Petition for Sheila Lecoecur: English version](#)” (24 October 2016); many thanks to Damian Mac Con Uladh].

ADDRESS OF PETITION IN ENGLISH

https://secure.avaaz.org/en/petition/Greek_Justice_History_on_Trial

ADDRESS OF PETITION IN GREEK

https://secure.avaaz.org/el/petition/Elliniki_dikaiosyni_I_Istoria_sto_edolio_Syllogi_ypograf_on_enantia_sti_fimosi_tis_akadimaikis/

TEXT OF PETITION IN ENGLISH:

History on Trial

On the 27th of October 2016, a trial will be held in Athens, calling into question the discipline of history. An historian, Sheila Lecoecur; her book, an historical study first published in 2009 as

Mussolini's Greek Island: Fascism and the Italian Occupation of Syros in World War II (I.B. Tauris); and the publisher of its 2013 Greek edition, Alexandria Publications, all stand accused by the heirs of the late Vayias Vaitsis, a former acting prefect of Syros, who personally chose to accept the appointment in 1944 under the quisling government of Ioannis Rallis and the German occupation force. The object of this law suit is the few lines in the book reporting the fact that, in view of this appointment, part of the society of Syros considered Vayias Vaitsis acceptance of the post to be controversial. (Especially when he belatedly applied to be recognized as a member of the Resistance and this was officially refused.) The litigants claim that the author called him a collaborator which was not her intention.

The whole affair would be insignificant, if it was not dangerous. Even without the various judgments put forward, it is obvious that the facts speak for themselves: the quisling government established by the successive Italian and German occupation forces appointed Vayias Vaitsis to the post of acting Prefect of Syros, an event that, given the circumstances of the time, was bound to produce conflicting reactions and evaluations in the island society.

Historical research has an obligation to record the facts. This is precisely what Sheila Lecoecur did. Conversely, omitting such facts in a study of the experience of occupation in a local society would amount to illicit concealment or to negligence and self-censoring on the part of the scholar. It should be noted that the writer remains neutral and refrains from providing her own evaluation of the work of the appointed Prefect of Syros. She does refer nevertheless to the judgments of part of the island's population. Imposing the law of silence on this issue, which seems to be the aim of the plaintiffs, would constitute a blatant violation of the freedom of research and an impermissible intervention in the ethics and proceedings of academic work.

If such an attempt to settle historical or other scientific questions by recourse to the courts is unwarranted with regard to any study, irrespective of its merits, it becomes deplorable in the present case, as it is directed against an original work of thorough archival and field-based research as well as academic excellence, that has been praised by authoritative figures of international historiography. To state only one example, Mark Mazower has commented that "Sheila Lecoecur has written a path-breaking and moving study (...) a real addition to the scholarly literature on occupation and fascism".

This extraordinary attack on the book constitutes a real provocation both to the academic world, which upholds the right to carry out its work unimpeded by the long-discredited practices of intimidation and repression, and to every informed and interested citizen who would expect the resolution of historical problems and the approval or disapproval of persons and practices to derive from free, well-documented public dialogue rather than from the proceedings of the courtroom.