

Decolonising the Cypriot Woman: Moving Beyond the Rhetoric of the Cyprus Problem

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Abstract

The long-term consequence of the Cyprus conflict referred to by the international community as the 'Cyprus problem' rests on the bodies of Cypriot women. Cypriot women's diverse experiences and roles in resistance of war and mobilisation of peace impacts post-conflict conditions. The issues relevant to Cypriot women in post-conflict who have experienced trauma and violence due to war, requires a practice and theory that goes beyond Western universal applicability. This study challenges capitalist heteronormative patriarchy and European models of civil society building that have kept Cypriot women on the margins. An investigation of Cypriot women's voices cross war zones in the documentary film entitled Women of Cyprus (Katrivanou and Azzouz, 2009) bring to light the impact of ethno-nationalism and ethnic divisions and the complexities of women's positionality in conflict. A transnational feminist perspective is used to advance theories of gender and serves as a critique for reconciliation in Cyprus.

Keywords: Decolonization, Cypriot women, conflict, transnational feminism, feminist epistemology, oral history, identity, nationalism, militarism, heteronormative patriarchy

ἰκοίμαν ποτί Κύπρον,
νᾶσον τᾶς Ἀφροδίτας,
ἴν' οἱ θελξιφρονες νέμον-
ται θνατοῖσιν Ἔρωτες,
Πάφον θ' ἄν ἐκατόστομοι
βαρβάρου ποταμοῦ ῥοαί
καρπίζουσιν ἄνομβροι. - Εὐριπίδης, Βάκχες (400 BCE)

would I might go to Cyprus,
island of Aphrodite,
where the Erotes,
bewitching goddesses of love,
soothe the hearts of humankind,
or to Paphos, rich and fertile,
not with rain, but with the water of a hundred
flowing mouths of a strange and foreign river – Euripides, Bacchae (400 BCE)

Introduction

The long-term consequence of the Cyprus conflict referred to by the international community as the 'Cyprus problem' rests on the bodies of Cypriot women.¹ The Cyprus problem is based 'on the assumption that a Eurocentric heteronormative heterosexual "order" is an underpinning for creating the nation' (Riley *et al.*, 2008, p. 3). In the case of women in Cyprus, the multi-level perspectives of power relations that include race, gender, ethnicity or religion, for example, are engaged within a critical analysis of the issues surrounding women and war. Cypriot women have been left out of the historical narrative based on the patriarchal assumptions of war (Turpin, 1998). This paper will explore Cypriot women's voices cross war zones in the documentary film entitled *Women of Cyprus* (Katrivanou and Azzouz, 2009). Transnational feminist theory is used to address the multi-level perspectives of power relations and as a lens to observe 'the different threads that bind women together – the sense of home, the love of place, the need for personal safety, the emotional and political price of war, and the personal tolls exacted by occupation, partition and atrocities. Although the authority or right to re-tell these women's experiences does not seem proper, oral history is critically engaged through this paper as a way of decolonising the Cypriot woman in order to make room for her to speak and to make her visible in both Western and transnational feminist writings in decolonial processes. The process of decolonisation can be defined as an attempt of the previously colonised to reflectively work out a historical relation with the former coloniser, culturally, politically, and economically (Chen, 2010). Fanon (1999) suggests that the colonial world is a world cut into two; on the one hand it consists of the Western/European and on the other the native quarters. He further illustrates that the 'colonial world, its ordering and its geographical lay-out will allow us to mark out the lines on which a decolonized society will be reorganized' (Fanon, 1999, p. 26). For Fanon, the process of decolonisation as a response to colonialism is part of the struggle that the colonised face to become free. He advocates that 'Decolonization unifies that people by the radical decision to remove from [it] heterogeneity, and by unifying it on a national, sometimes a racial bias' (*ibid.*, p. 30). Three major themes are apparent in the decolonisation process that we can observe in the geocolonial historical Cypriot narrative (Chen, 2010). These include: nationalism, brought forward during anti-colonialist movements; nativism or revitalisation of culture within the categories created by the colonisers; and civilisationism or the struggle for political/cultural justice (*ibid.*). Decolonisation brings with it the rise of nationalism, which can rally anti-colonial movements and solidify cultural identity and in doing so it excludes other groups. In the case of Cyprus, a Greek national identity missed out those who identified themselves as Turkish or as other minorities

1 The category Cypriot woman includes women from Greek, Turkish, Armenian, Maronite, and Latin communities living on the island of Cyprus (Hadjipavlou, 2010) as well as Roma and migrant workers. This by no means suggests that each ethnicity is homogenous: the multiple subjects at play are recognised here.

living within the two major ethnic groups. The making and re-making of Cypriot culture and national identity occurred during foreign rule and throughout most of the island's history. This concept is an important one in addressing the complexities of nationalism. Here, the use of nationalism is informed by Jusdanis' (2001) research on nationalism to define it as a process. Jusdanis is useful here in understanding nationalism as a form of expression. In this work he writes, 'Nationalism works through people's hearts, nerves, and gut. It is an expression of culture through the body' (p. 31). It is necessary to address the island's long road from imperialism to colonialism and the conditions at play that have kept women on the margins.

During the course of the island's history the female body became the site of discovery, rape, and conquest (Loomba, 2005). The Cypriot woman's body is a physical and symbolic space, where the creation of the nation is justified and defended. In her work on women and war, Giles (2003) argues:

'The public/private distinctions between battlefield and home, soldier and civilian, state security and human security have broken down. Feminist analyses of conflict elucidate the intimate connections between war, political economy, nationalism, and human displacement and their various impacts across scale. The body, household, nation state, and economy all represent the site at which violence can be invoked against people in highly gendered ways' (p. 3).

The role of Cypriot women² as reproducers of the nation in the form of mothers and wives is central in the maintenance of the colonial project.³ Women became signifiers for ethnic, national, or religious difference and symbols of nation-hood. Social structures, like the state, family, law and education regulate women through social markers that are gender specific. Cypriot women face multiple layers of oppressions by a superior (men) and foreign, or white and Western (Vassiliadou, 2002). Hadjipavlou (2010) observes that 'No woman, from any of the communities in Cyprus, has ever been appointed to the high-level negotiating team that discusses the future of the island' (p. 10). Colonial practices and the rhetoric of war construct Cypriot women's inadequacy and inferiority that precluded women's invisibility at the negotiating table.⁴

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 states that women can and should be involved in peacemaking (2000). In response to the latter, Meintjes *et al.*, (2001) address a key issue

2 The term 'women' is used to refer to those who are female-identified, but it is recognised that they are not a homogenous group.

3 It is also argued that the maintenance of Cypriot women's roles was central to anti-colonial movements and nationalist struggle starting from the Ottoman Empire to British rule in 1878–1974. In present day Cyprus, women are the symbols of home and nation-hood, and continue to be producers to maintain the population of the two main ethnic groups (Greek and Turkish).

4 The negotiating table is known as the official peace negotiations and policy created by the United Nations, Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus.

that is missing from the way women are understood (in both war and peace). It is important to recognise that women are involved in a variety of ways in 'peacemaking', whether it is on the front line as soldiers or as part of anti-nationalist movements or bicommunal organisations. The international community cannot assume women the role of 'peacemaker' as this in itself is problematic and keeps women 'in the single dimension of her sex' (*ibid.*). Indeed, Cypriot women have yet to be employed as part of elevated team discussions regarding the future of the island. As a consequence, the pomposity of war diction creates a subservience which has excluded women from any negotiating table in the post-conflict period.

The issues relevant to Cypriot women in post-conflict who have experienced trauma and violence due to war, requires a practice and theory that goes beyond Western universal applicability. Hadjipavlou (2010) notes that women from a divided island, 'need their own space in which to listen to each other and to affirm that knowledge is also produced through reflecting on our own experiences' (p. 8). Such an approach requires an examination of historical records and case studies of women's groups from Cyprus that have brought alternative approaches to the traditional Western concepts of women, violence, and war. Meintjes *et al.*, (2001) assert that women's diverse experiences of war, such as displacement, loss of home and family, as well as gender-based violence does not end once the conflict has ended. In fact, women become more vulnerable in post-conflict conditions. In the case of Cyprus, patriarchal gender relations remain deeply embedded in the fabric of the society. In that moment from conflict to peacetime 'the rhetoric of equality and equal rights tends to mask the reconstruction of patriarchal power despite recent emphasis on women's human rights' (*ibid.*, p. 4).

The film *Women of Cyprus* provides a case from where women activists across the island stand by addressing the complexities of women's experiences in war and in post-war conditions. In featuring a sample of Cypriot 'her-stories' the film aims at developing an understanding of collective differences in terms of agency and responsibility so that it is possible to build solidarities across borders and boundaries of nationalism and the nation state. This film follows a Greek Cypriot professor Maria and Zehra a Turkish Cypriot teacher as they cross the green line in the spring of 2004. These women have not seen their homes that they lost since the war of 1974 that resulted in the division of the island.

The film provides a historical account by considering the political, social, and historical circumstances that made the partition of the island possible. In historical scholarly texts on Cyprus, inter-ethnic conflict, the activities of Greek nationalist extremists and intolerance of the 'other' are blamed for the ethnic divide that led up to the Turkish invasion of 1974 and are referred to as the Cyprus problem (Hadjipavlou 2010; Cockburn, 2004; Morgan, 2011; Vassiliadou 2002). It is argued in the film that these events can neither be observed in isolation nor can they be brushed off as 'Turks and Greeks' unable to get along. The film's historical analysis is essential to explore the various structures at play that have kept Cyprus in a state of tension. Women in the film share oral histories that are accompanied with narratives of Turkish and Greek as well as Latin, Maronite,

and Armenian women living on both sides of the island. These women came from various socio-economic backgrounds and were from the ages of 25–63. The film weaves each woman's personal journey of pain and their search for reconciliation and peacemaking. The group discussions provided a safe place where women from the various ethnic backgrounds can share their buried stories of war and their experiences of working together to bridge the divide between their communities. This film was created over a four-year period following the women; some were members of an NGO women's group called Hands across the Divide working towards a bicomunal co-existence. The women in the film are struggling with the past, and with their own feelings of anger and loss. Regardless, as they struggle they are deeply invested in reconciliation and inclusive peacemaking. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000 stated that women can and should be involved in peacemaking; however women in Cyprus have not been allowed at the negotiating table. Practices of reconciliation and peacemaking are being done on the ground as these women address fears, distrust and hopes through weekly meetings and when they visit their homes lost in the war.

The film's historical account attempts to capture the complex history of the island. An understanding of colonialism, anti-colonial nationalism, and the cultural politics of nation building is necessary as part of the historical narrative. According to Loomba (2005) colonialism is defined as the conquest and control of other people's land and resources. Anti-colonial nationalism, 'is a struggle to represent, create, recover a culture and a selfhood that has been repressed and eroded during colonial rule' (*ibid.*, p. 182). Nationalism can both enable and constrain as Jusdanis (2001) writes, 'it has inspired people over the past two centuries to fight against the illegitimacy of foreign occupation' (p. 4). Simultaneously nationalism has been responsible for ethnic cleansing and the fight for a dominant cultural identity.⁵ With the surge of Eurocentricism, 'capitalism, colonialism, and new means of communication and transportation brought people closer together and mixed populations, endangering thereby their cultural existence' (Jusdanis, 2001, p. 5). Nationalism arose through the need to become modern and the newly independent nation-states were in search of a national culture. Though modernity was a Western concept, the formally colonised wanted to preserve their traditional identities within a new national culture (Jusdanis, 2001). To recount some points made earlier, national identity can empower some groups but marginalise others. In the case of Cyprus, a Greek national identity disregarded those who identified themselves as Turkish or as other minorities living within the two major ethnic groups. Nationalism can rally anti-colonial movements and solidify cultural identity and in doing so excludes other groups. The making and re-making of Cyprus culture and national identity occurred during foreign rule and throughout most of the island's history.

5 Brubaker's in Cooper's text, *Colonialism in Question: Theory Knowledge, History* is used to define the use of identity in this text as being 'Understood as a specifically collective phenomenon, identity denotes a fundamental and consequential sameness among members of a group or category' (Brubaker, 2005, p. 65).

In 1400 BC the Mycenaean rule over the island had the most profound influence largely because Hellenism was introduced.⁶ The migration of Mycenaean populations established a Greek culture, language, art, and religion from mainland Greece (Markides, 1977). By the fifth century, when the Byzantine Empire took hold of the island, a Hellenic way of life had been sealed. It was during this period that the Cypriot church (following the Orthodox Christian religion) was granted autonomy and its archbishop given special rights and privileges, which united Cyprus and Greece in a cultural union (*ibid.*). The age of Hellenism did not diminish while the Europeans (Franks and Venetians) occupied the island and patriarchal structures remained secure. However, European nobles reduced the native population to serfs or slaves and imposed Roman Catholicism until the sudden invasion and colonisation of the Ottomans (*ibid.*). Cyprus fell to the invading forces of Lala Mustafa Pasha and the island came under Ottoman rule in 1571. Cockburn (2004) expresses that 'the Ottoman heritage that some Turkish Cypriots might wish to give more legitimacy as an element within "Cypriot" identity was an extreme case of a militarized imperialist, and polygamous, male power system' (p. 43).

In 1878 the Ottomans leased Cyprus to Britain in an exchange for protection against Russia (Markides, 1977). The new colonial power implemented new laws, institutions, and practices in order to secularise and 'civilise' the island and its people. The British found the geography, archaeological, and linguistic connections to Hellenism familiar (an extension of home), while eroticising and orientalisng the unknown on the other (Morgan, 2011). The most significant characteristic of British rule on the island was the complete eradication of the Orthodox Church from politics. Under British rule, Greek and Turkish Cypriots⁷ lived together for a number of years, and several villages were co-habitated. But the British policy of divide and rule provoked mistrust between the Greek and Turkish communities while at the same time isolating minority groups (Katrivanou and Azzouz, 2009). Despite the fact that Greek Cypriots were excluded, Turkish Cypriots were employed by British administrators. And, during colonial life, women's experiences were limited to the home and to tending the fields. Although elites of Turkish, Greek, Latin, Maronite, and Armenian decent were educated, the majority of the colonised population lived in poverty. Hadjipavlou (2010) points out that some Turkish Cypriot women were actually sold to Arabs from mainland Turkey, and both Turkish and Greek Cypriot women were left out of discussions on politics and economics; such dialogue would occur in the coffee shop culture, exclusive to men only (*ibid.*).

6 Hellenic identity was imagined as a national identity for Greeks who, in order to revolt against the Ottoman Empire, created collective symbols to unify Greek peoples through culture, language, history, and geography (Jusdanis, 2001).

7 In the eyes of the British administration the colonised were neither Greek nor Turkish as one colonist, W. Hepworth Dixon (1887) asserts, 'an indolent, careless mimetic people, but without a spark of Turkish fire, without a touch of Grecian taste. With neither beauty of body nor sense of beauty in mind – with neither personal restlessness nor pride of origin' (Cockburn, 2004, p. 51).

The 1950s struggle for independence from Britain stoked further ethnic unrest which Katrivanou and Azzouz (2009) assert was responsible for the rise of anti-colonialist nationalism⁸ struggle and interethnic conflict. The 'enosis' movement to unite Cyprus with Greece, the dream from the Byzantine period, re-surfaced in the 1950s and it became a political campaign under the EOKA organisation. Headed by the Greek Orthodox Church, Greek Cypriot youth, men, and a few women, rising to a political arm of the anti-colonial struggle, rallied together against British rule. In response the Turkish minority created the Turkish resistance organisation (TMT) which promoted 'taksim', union of the island with Turkey. In the organisations of both TMT and EOKA, women were banned from taking on leadership positions. Female EOKA and TMT supporters participated in street demonstrations, hiding fighters in their homes from the British soldiers, sewing their uniforms, distributing nationalist pamphlets, and boycotting British made products (Hadjipavlou, 2010), but minorities and other ethnic groups on the island were excluded from these movements. As the British colonies around the world successfully fought for independence in the 1950s and 1960s, Britain, Greece, and Turkey guaranteed the independence and territorial integrity of the island in 1960 (Katrivanou and Azzouz, 2009) – both Greek and Turkish Cypriots were named as the two official ethnic groups. After independence in 1963, inter-ethnic conflict broke out inflamed by mistrust, fear and political as well as ethnic differences. Chen (2010) affirms that 'After the colonial era, the strong connection between the inside and outside makes the distinction difficult to sustain. The national bourgeois continues to govern by exercising colonial tactics, dividing and ruling for example, by exploiting ethnic differences' (p. 84). The removal of British street names, bringing down colonial buildings, and installing a Cypriot president (Morgan, 2011) did little to decolonise the country's people but rather intensified 'anxiety of cultural loss' (Loomba, 2005) and the need to preserve ethnic heritage. Shortly after independence, inter-ethnic conflict fuelled by mistrust erupted leading to the retreat of Turkish-Cypriots into restricted enclaves (Katrivanou and Azzouz, 2009). The intervention of Greece and Turkey led to the 1974 war and the *de facto* partition of the island into a northern Turkish Cypriot side and a southern Greek Cypriot side. Greek Cypriots numbering 200,000 along with 43,000 Turkish Cypriots found themselves on the wrong side of the island and became refugees in their own country (*ibid.*). Turkish Cypriots fled north while Greek Cypriots went south of the island. In 1983 Turkey declared the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' as an independent state and new generations of Cypriots were subsequently brought up on each side of a divided island.

Negotiations and talks between the two sides would continue to keep the island divided until April 2003. With pressure from the European Union and United Nations⁹, the Greek and

8 Post-colonial subjects now sought to be set free but in the case of Greece the desire to modernise the society went hand in hand with the creation of a distinct nationalised culture that would distinguish them from their colonial rulers (Jusdanis, 2001).

9 Turkey's desire to enter the EU, together with the southern part of the island's application already accepted pending the partition line, was the deciding factor in the opening of the 'Green Line'.

Turkish governments agreed to open the partition line that had kept people apart for over thirty years. The following year, the UN secretary, Kofi Annan, with committees and leaders from both sides of the island proposed a plan, known as the Annan Plan, to reunify the island within a federal framework (*ibid.*). Ultimately, the plan would be rejected in a referendum where the Greek Cypriot majority would out vote the Turkish minority who were hoping that the island would be united.¹⁰ Northern Cyprus was now occupied with Turkish settlers as well as Turkish Cypriots, living as a colony under the auspices of mainland Turkey. Conversely, those that identified as Turkish Cypriots living in the southern part of the island were unable to vote in the referendum. Cypriots, primarily peace activists would meet with Turkish Cypriots or Greek Cypriots living on the other side of the divide.

The history of the island needs a transnational feminist lens to take into account the lost, forgotten, marginal and unspoken voices. It is these voices that end up representing the nation, but it is the nation that ends up marginalising such voices. The struggle against colonial rule and for independence in Cyprus, 'was created by men, ordered by men, and carried out by men. It was a patriarchal struggle on [a] patriarchal island which most women followed and became involved ... in fact they were used by men to promote their interests' (Vassiliadou, 2002, p. 459). It should be added that this is not the first instance in Cyprus' history when women's voices have been shut out. Women have been left out of most of the island's historical narrative; but then again, human rights have not always included women (Papastavrou, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

This section will provide the foundation of situating Western European feminist works and transnational feminist theory in the field of colonial/postcolonial and subaltern studies. The feminist movements that came out of Western Europe, Canada, and the USA had a privileged white voice in establishing women's agenda. The movement was designed, 'to represent the needs of all women' (Lee and Shaw, 2010, p. 8). Further, the priorities of white middle class feminists from the Global North would dominate the feminist struggles in the 1970s and 1980s (Lee and Shaw, 2010). Global North countries that were currently neither colonised nor at war had set the stage for social change within a mainstream feminist movement. In the case of Cyprus, 'the women of Cyprus did not participate in the global women's movement of the 1960s onwards but instead experienced ethnic nationalism, militarism, and sexism both prior and after independence [...] Cypriot women had to deal with the consequences of armed struggle' (Hadjipavlou, 2010, p. 247). In addressing the hegemonic male-centred conception and practice of politics that has marginalised groups in Cyprus, Hadjipavlou (2010) observes that the national struggle sharpened

10 The island is made up of 80% (ethnically identified) Greek, 18% Turkish, and 2% Armenian, Maronite, Latin, and Roma.

gender and cultural roles thus preventing Cypriot women from launching a feminist movement due to the war. For Cypriot women the armed struggle during the conflict allowed their participation in different ways (Giles, 2003), and although viewed by women from the Global North as constrained, the Cypriot women's participation and experiences were far more complex. For example, women living in refugee camps post-1974 took care of the children and elderly as well as working in solidarity with other women in keeping the family together. The role of men during displacement moved from that of soldier on the front line to migrants seeking employment in Arab countries to support their families (Hadjipavlou and Mertan, 2010). The challenges within Western feminist methodology have been in recognising privilege, agency, and positionality while Western feminist narratives continue to speak for those who cannot. In order to develop political solidarity between feminists, transnational feminists emphasise that women cannot bond on terms set by the dominant ideology of Western culture.

Transnational feminist theory offers a framework in understanding conflict areas that have been framed by histories of colonialism and imperialism and have maintained economic, cultural and military practices. Transnational feminism considers the complex intersections of race, sex, ethnicity, class, and sexuality in the lives of women of colour, 'third-world' women, and women in conflict/post conflict areas. Mohanty's (1997) influential essay, *Under Western Eyes* is used to address the notions of ethnocentrism within Western feminist epistemology by drawing attention to inclusive visions of feminism that suggest a way of understanding race, class, gender, nation sexuality, and colonialism in terms of social, spatial, and symbolic distance (*ibid.*). Cypriot women become bodies that need to be saved by White women, although 'saving' happens differently on each side of the divided island.

In *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak (1994) writes that the abolition of the Hindu practice of immolation by widows (*sati*) in India by the British was a case of 'white men saving brown women from brown men'. Using Spivak's theoretical framework, in the case of Cyprus, Greek Cypriot women as subaltern subjects are being saved by Greek Cypriot men from both Turkish Cypriot and white (British) men. Additionally, Turkish and Turkish Cypriot men are saving Turkish Cypriot women from Greek Cypriot men and white (British) men. Spivak (1988) suggests that, 'the subaltern subject's identity is difference, and that there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know itself; the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation' (p. 80). She seeks to go beyond the coloniser and colonised binary by using the subject third-world woman¹¹ to illustrate additional social hierarchies of power. The third-world woman is colonised by both (see Loomba, 2005) and as such experiences multiple oppressions. Who is the 'third-world' woman? According to Mohanty (2003), she is limited by her gender (feminine and sexually constrained) and her *being* of the third-world (ignorant, poor, uneducated,

11 The term 'third world' is derived from a Western capitalist notion of the 'haves' and 'have-nots', essentially 'the West and the rest'.

tradition-bound, domestic, family oriented and victimised) oppression that deems her unable to speak for herself. This lies in contrast to the Western woman who is educated, modern, free to make her own decisions, and has control over her body and sexuality (*ibid.*, p. 40). By examining the term 'third-world woman', there is a continuous layering of political and social categories that are deeply embedded in colonial legacy. In situating Cypriot women within the context of Western feminist literature, Vassiliadou (2002) asserts that 'women remain marginalized in nationalist discourses because they themselves are constituted by the binaries of modernity' (p. 473). The challenges within a Western paradigm for example are the understanding of collective differences through their writings; recognising privilege, agency, and positionality. Spivak (1994) suggests that we must be cautious here to acknowledge patriarchy and Western intellectual thought as playing a role in silencing the subaltern voice. Who speaks for whom, and under what conditions?

The gendered nature of war in transnational feminist literature, examines the way in which women confront war, the impact that war has on women due to their gender and the diverse ways that women respond. Who is the Cypriot woman? The Cypriot woman neither fits into Western European feminist concepts of gender due to her multiple experiences of 'colonial and anti-colonial struggle, living under conflict and post-conflict conditions, and Mediterranean historical experiences of sexualities and moralities' (Vassiliadou, 2002, p. 474) nor does she fit into the third-world narrative reflected in transnational feminist works. Vassiliadou (2002) states that in the third-world narrative, 'issues of female circumcision, the veil, famine, religious "fundamentalism", succession in terms of (male) royalty' (p. 474) do not apply to women of Cyprus. The Cypriot woman lies on the cusp of Orientalism; she is the subject in which Europeans experience two worlds at the same time.

Anti-colonial movements organised by the island's elites, most of whom were educated in the West, drew on the colonisers established rules to challenge control but through the lens of a nationalised (indigenous) culture. For the Cypriot woman living in the in-between, she has had her ethnic identity constructed and maintained from the outside (Greece, Turkey, and Britain). In the exotic Orient and 'civilized world' of Hellenism the Western coloniser rules and lives in the comforts of home (Cypriot woman) with the benefits of being located conveniently between East and West. The Cypriot woman's body must negotiate between Europeanness and Non-Europeanness, positions of belonging and being excluded at the same time. In the case study we observe how Cypriot women begin the process of decolonisation through recognising similarity and difference to the West and their multiple identities. Mohanty (2003), remarks that 'The best theory makes personal experience and individual stories communicable. I think this kind of theoretical, analytical thinking allows us to mediate between different histories and understandings of the personal' (p. 191). The film *Women of Cyprus* as the case study not only provides an example of the complexity and diversity of women's experiences and issues in Cyprus but also observes the interconnectedness to women's struggles across war zones.

The Female Account of Cypriot History

Oral history is utilised to provide a historically-based approach in research methods. According to Shopes (2011), oral history as a method involves collecting and interpreting human memories in order to foster knowledge and human integrity. Oral history is distinguished from other kinds of interviews because of its open-ended, subjective, as well as historically-based approach in research methods. The research on Cypriot women's narratives in conflict and post-conflict conditions can be understood as an act of memory based upon past experiences. As outlined earlier, the film, *Women of Cyprus*, follows Maria and Zehra as they go across the 'Green Line' in the spring of 2004. They have not seen the homes they had to leave 30 years ago when war divided their island in 1974. Maria and Zehra share oral histories which are supplemented with accounts from Turkish, Greek, Latin, Maronite and Armenian women between the ages of 25 and 63 years who hail from different socio-economic backgrounds and live on both sides of the island. Personal stories of each woman's passage and suffering are intertwined in the film which documents their search for reconciliation and peacemaking over a four-year period. The group discussions provided a safe haven where these women from various ethnic backgrounds – some of them members of an NGO group called Hands across the Divide – can share their suppressed experiences of warfare and describe their endeavours to heal the rift in their communities together. As the women wrestle with their past and their private emotions, antagonism and loss, they continue to struggle because they are passionate about the reconciliation and large-scale peacemaking effort which has been entrusted to them. In spite of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000 which states that women can and should be involved in peacemaking, the women in Cyprus have not been invited to the negotiating table yet. As these women confront their fears, doubts and optimism through weekly gatherings, reconciliation practices and peacemaking are being carried out on the ground in addition to the visits to their homes lost in the war.

Zehra and a Greek Cypriot woman named Lefki (who occupies Zehra's home on the southern side of the island) use the ritual of making coffee and having their cups read, to express remorse, share common pain, offer forgiveness, develop friendships, and create future plans. The women joke that in the northern part of Cyprus the same coffee they share is known as Turkish but in the southern part it is Greek. They also agree that Cypriots seem to need coffee to help them to feel better. During the discussion, groups sharing their stories of fear and loss discover that they are similar to one another despite their ethnic differences. This is a key point in how they reach their humanness and are able to open their hearts and empathise with one another. Embedded in their experiences of conflict is the commonality as well as the differences they share as women and the challenges they have faced in being silenced by their respective communities. The women are not concerned with retribution or revenge or even getting their homes back, but they rather focus on the need to rethink who they are as women, as mothers, as daughters, and their multiple identities that bring them together, in addition to observing the Cyprus problem as a narrative from both sides. In the process of reconciliation building amongst the women interviewed in the

film, forgiveness is conveyed through their actions of visiting their homes and making peace; even developing friendships with the people who occupy their homes. The women also approach healing by reconnecting with other women, sharing their memories of the war and allowing their hearts to mend.

The women in this film come from working and middle class backgrounds and for many women who experienced the war the discussion groups represented a safe space where their voices, which had been silenced for so many years, were heard. Turkish Cypriot women expressed their fears towards both Greek Cypriots and the Turkish army since Cyprus remains a militarised state. This kind of trauma and violence has remained hidden on the bodies of the women. These are scars that do not leave easily, and some die and take their wounds with them. The pain and violence of the island has been inflicted on the bodies of all ethnicities. Is 'Cypriot' gendered? Is there room for women in this Cypriot identity? There is a need for the construction of a new Cypriot imaginary so that women and men from across ethnicities, gender, age, class, race, sexuality, abilities, language and religion can challenge colonial and patriarchal structures that have left women and minority groups on the margins (Hadjipavlou and Mertan, 2010). Since 2004, women's solidarity groups continue to work at the grassroots level, creating partnerships to work on integration and inclusion of women. Towards the end of the film, Lefki explains that it is 'Only when you sit at the table with the other person to share your concerns, the bitterness, and the happiness ... to laugh with her ... only then can real unity happen' (Katrivanou and Azzouz, 2009).

Conclusion

'Never comfort yourself with the thought that because the worst things imaginable are happening to those other people they cannot happen to you' (Allen, 1996)

The documentary film provides an example of who the Cypriot woman possibly is. Though it is not assumed that Cypriot women are a homogenous group, it is necessary to be mindful of the multiple layers of ethnic identities and how these categories both enable and constrain the Cypriot woman. Sandra Harding (1987) argues against the idea of a distinctive feminist method of research by simply 'adding women'. She states that 'the best feminist analysis goes beyond subject matter in a crucial way: it insists that the inquirer or him/herself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results ...' (p. 9). Transnational feminist theory has shown us a way of understanding women and gender by complicating the notion of unity among women and addressing the effects of colonialism, war, and militarism on women's lives.

This paper has challenged capitalist heteronormative patriarchy and European models of civil society building that have kept Cypriot women on the margins. The *Women of Cyprus*

documentary is a narrative of how women's dialogue is questioning 'the power systems of the economic, the ethno-national, and the sex/gender power – all three intersect and promote inequality and are sustained by coercion and violence' (Hadjipavlou and Mertan, 2010, p. 265). Women across these borders of nation state begin to dismantle socio-political discourses through alternative spaces. In working through the process of decolonisation by way of their oral history women of Cyprus have strived to decolonise themselves. To decolonise the Cypriot woman, as Chen (2010) suggests, is 'to free colonizing and colonized subjects from the limits imposed by colonial history' (p. 113) and in doing so brings visibility to the untold and unknown stories of women whose voices have been silenced.

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