Cypriot Feminism: An Opportunity to Challenge Gender Inequalities and Promote Women's Rights and a Different Voice

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Abstract

The 1960s and the 1970s in Western Europe, America, Canada and elsewhere gave rise to women's liberation movements, peace movements and discussions on environmental issues. Feminists started questioning established norms and 'essentialisation' of women and men; they demanded changes in gender roles, the elimination of the separation of private and public spaces; questioned patriarchy and sexism, classism and racism as conditions leading to discrimination. In the 1980s and the 1990s to this day the feminist discussion has moved to issues of gender in international politics, sexualities (queer studies) post colonialism and post modernist questions about multiple subjectivities and women's experiences in conflict societies, third world feminisms, and trafficking of women in a global neo-liberal economy. In 1960 Cyprus was semi-decolonised (still 99 square miles are sovereign British territory) and gained a 'qualified' independence and its people – Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Maronites and Latins – had to adapt to a new nationality, the Cypriot (as opposed to being British subjects) and to new ways of relating. The women of Cyprus did not participate in the global women's movements 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 the armed struggle in the mid-1950s despite the fact that they were excluded from the centres where these decisions were taken or when the independence agreement was signed. Half a century later women of Cyprus have moved ahead especially in the education and employment sectors though they are still struggling to raise their voices on social and 'national issues'. In this paper we argue, among other things, that both patriarchy and the 'national problem', i.e. the Cyprus conflict, have dominated public debates and that one sustains the other to such an extent that social issues including women's issues and needs have been marginalised. The majority of Cypriot women's organisations have traditionally been part of the mainstream male-dominated political parties and did not have the opportunity to develop a different women's voice on women's rights. No independent feminist movement has been established, but now at the beginning of the twenty first century some attempts promote such a need. Women today are more empowered to challenge patriarchal structures, and draw connections between Cypriot women's oppression and nationalism, militarism and sexism which kept certain agendas marginalised while making others visible.

Keywords: patriarchy, militarism, Cyprus conflict, nationalism, gender roles, peace, feminism

Introduction – The Context

> 'Women have been totally "hidden" from Cypriot history and it is only through reading between the lines of textbooks by eminent male historians that even superficial information surfaces. Ironically there has not yet been any single academic publication on the Cypriot woman from a historical perspective- least of all from a feminist perspective' (Vassiliadou, 1997, p. 97).

The establishment of the 'reluctant' Republic of Cyprus (Xydis, 1973) was preceded by two competing ethnic nationalist movements that were conceived of, executed by and led by men – the EOKA (National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters) and the TMT (Turkish Resistance Organisation – Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı). Women were excluded from the centres where the decisions to launch an armed struggle or later to reach a peace agreement were taken. There was no common anti-colonial struggle launched by all Cypriots for independence from the British colonial rule. Ethnic nationalism led to competing visions *(enosis* or *taksim)* which were fully male-led, exclusive, and sexist operating on a patriarchal island in which women had to follow and become involved but only in the roles that men had assigned them which were subordinate and auxiliary. In fact, women were being used by men and gradually they, too, became absorbed by the national struggles that completely disregarded their own social position and interests as women in a sexist, traditional and agrarian society of the 1950s and early 1960s (Vassiliadou, 1997, 2002; Hadjipavlou, 2010). However, in the post-1974 period, Greek Cypriot women mobilised and voiced their concerns and needs in peaceful demonstrations and demanded that barbed wires and military lines be removed. Women refugees participated in the employment sector and as heads of households when the men went abroad to work (unemployment in 1974 reached 35% in the Greek Cypriot community).

The presence of three foreign armies – Greek, Turkish and British – marked the new State in 1960. In our view complete decolonisation of Cyprus has not taken place due to the kind of treaties attached to it (the presence of the two British sovereign bases is a constant reminder (Kyriakides, 1968). In addition, separatist provisions constructed separate national identities, citizenship as a common identity and unifying factor was not promoted. No particular attention was paid to gender equality issues or women's social rights in public life despite the fact that elsewhere in Europe feminist movements and women's issues were being promoted. Emphasis was put on the bicommunal nature of the Republic with the ethnic component being very strong. Due to this emphasis, strict bicommunality with the two dominant communities was defined by their language, cultural traditions and religion when in fact other minorities lived on the island such as Armenians, Maronites, and Latins, defined as religious groups, who had to choose which community they wanted to belong to. All three chose to belong to the Greek Cypriot community except the Roma who joined the Turkish Cypriot community. Thus, the male framers of the Cyprus constitution had adopted exclusionary, undemocratic (no mention of ethnic or national minorities) and hierarchical criteria. Both the agreements that established the 'independent'

republic in 1960 were a series of concessions that satisfied neither of the Cypriot parties, and were gendered documents in the drafting of the constitution which contributed very little to the independence of women. The women were given the right to vote (no suffragettes' movement in Cyprus) in 1960 but they were stereotyped as housewives to help the men who were the ones in control (Vassiliadou, 1997; Pyrgos, 1993).

A culture of honouring heroes and martyrs ensued in each community and a narrative of ethnic patriotism, stressing the Greekness and Turkishness led to rigidification of ethnic identities. A culture for inter-ethnic tolerance and respect for differences and a willingness to cooperate at the elite levels was not encouraged. Ethnic identities were further reinforced by two separate educational systems as was provided for by the constitution; something that established close cultural and educational links with the 'motherlands' — a factor that continues to this day.

Half a century later the irony is that the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Republic — which lasted only for three years — has been designed by Greek Cypriot male governing elites reminding us of the original profile of the 1960s. So what is being celebrated? Do the Greek Cypriots celebrate the three years of the partnership Republic plus the forty-seven years of the Greek Cypriot-run Republic which is recognised internationally and has been a member of the European Union since 2004? What is the relationship of the Turkish Cypriots to this Greek-Cypriot-run Cyprus Republic? What do they feel or think about this fiftieth birthday? What is the meaning of these celebrations in the context of the continuing inter-communal negotiations to establish a new state of affairs — a bicommunal, bizonal federation? Are women included in these new processes fifty years later? Why has the Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000 on 'Women, Peace and Security' which calls for the participation and inclusion of women in peace negotiations and all peacebuilding reconstruction, not been adhered to by the leaderships in both communities? What are the main obstacles to include women? These are, for us, legitimate questions.

For decades a conflict culture and ethnic polarisation has dominated the lives of Cypriots — Greeks and Turks as well as mistrust, fears and suspicion of the other. Between 1967 and 1974 the penetration of the Greek junta fascism into the Greek Cypriot community — National Guard, education (textbooks sent from Greece), and the EOKA B terrorist activities — led on 15 July 1974 to the coup d'état against the democratically-elected Makarios' government. Five days later the Turkish military invaded and split the island into north and south with subsequent ethnic separation. Women, as elsewhere in ethno-national conflicts have suffered the consequences of both the armed violence and all that this entails — militarism, masculinism, displacement, rape, unwanted pregnancies, abuse, domestic violence and fear for the future. Women, however, were not only victims but exhibited agency as we shall show later on in this article (Agathangelou, 2003; Cockburn, 2004; Hadjipavlou, 2006).

One of the main questions we discuss is whether the dominance of the 'national problem' has marginalised all other issues including women's equality issues and rights, minority rights, health

and environmental issues, and violence against women. In this respect we note how the structure of patriarchy becomes mediated with nationalist politics to keep particular agendas visible while marginalising others (Anthias, 1989; Vassiliadou, 1997; Agathangelou, 2003, 2004; Hadjipavlou, 2010). Consequently, public discussion and research on such issues has been scant and delayed compared to the plethora of books and articles produced on the 'Cyprus conflict' as well as about the international proposed plans to resolve it. Another observation is the predominance of male authority over the political scene in all institutions where decisions are being made affecting the whole of the population. We view such situations as omissions of democracy. These two observations lead to our third question regarding the absence of a feminist movement on the island in the 1960s and 1970s which could have networked with women's movements in the region and elsewhere to promote women's human rights. The reasons for this absence are historical, (colonialism, nationalism, and national problem), political, cultural and social (Hadjipavlou, 2010). The article is structured as follows: We first provide the context; a theoretical framework then follows in which we will locate our analysis; and in the third section we give a historical evolutionary overview of Cypriot women's social position through a comparative lens, highlighting similarities and differences in the two communities. Our own experiences and positionality impacts the writing of this article. We conclude with some general observations. Secondary sources are used as well as data from research on women that we each conducted in our respective communities and, of course, personal experiences and observations.

Theoretical Framework

As Vassiliadou reminded us, the history of the women of Cyprus has not yet been written. In every official history account produced on each side and written by male historians the women are missing as though they did not contribute to history-making. Historiography globally has silenced the experience of one half of humanity until feminists raised the issue (Hannam, 1997). 'It is not the lack of information and sources about women but the under-valuation of this information and the belief that women should not be of concern to History. This is the perception that needs to change' (Gasouka, 2010).

Within this context, Cypriot women's views, needs or concerns have had little space to be articulated in a dominant patriarchal, nationalist and militaristic environment. No feminist analysis of gender power relations as being a significant factor was discussed publicly by women's political party organisations, and neither was the fact that women's lives differ characteristically from those of men because of their different experiences (Anthias, 1989, 1992; Cockburn, 2004; Hadjipavlou, 2009). Instead, Cypriot women's pain and suffering have been instrumentalised and often exploited by the State to promote its own political project and its own form of masculinity and femininity (Anthias, 1992; Cockburn, 2004; Hadjipavlou, 2006). In conflict situations human pain and suffering are gendered and feminised and particular forms of masculinity are promoted whereby 'honour' and the 'ideal soldier who is brave to die' are a man's things. 'There is

much evidence that national and ethnic groups use women and gender relations to purse specific ethnic political strategies. For example women may be urged to have more children as part of a demographic race'. (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989), they may become symbolic of the purity of the group and promoted as 'mothers of the nation' or the 'mothers of patriots' (Anthias, 1992, p. 79). For instance, the grieving mothers of the missing persons in both Cypriot communities who demanded their right to know what happened to their beloveds for decades, has been politicised not only at home but in international forums. Thus many women had to serve both as mother and father to their children as if they were neutered individuals (Sant Cassia, 2005).

Human experience is gendered and this understanding is central to the radical implications of feminist theory which emerges from and responds to the lives of women in many countries. The recognition of the impact of gender and an insistence on the importance of the female existence has provided the vital common ground for feminist research and thought. Listening to the women's voices, studying women's writings and learning from women's experiences have been crucial to the feminist reconstruction of our understanding of the world. Women's personal narratives are, among other things, stories of how women negotiate their exceptional gender status as well as other identities both in their daily lives and over the course of a lifetime (The Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Belenky *et al.,* 1986; Hadjipavlou, 2009).

By 1974 while modernisation was spreading especially in the Greek Cypriot community – urbanisation, light industries, building construction, modernising agriculture, tourist industry, and rise in educational standards – this was interrupted when the island was *de facto* partitioned. Feminism and women's liberation movements did not reach the island. In traditional societies as Cyprus had been, both prior to and in the early 1960s, we note a sharp separation between the private and public spheres of life which meant a separation of gender roles, gender expectations, and opportunities for self development. There existed a separation of professions based on gender thus Cypriot women were either housewives whose labour was unpaid or nurses, secretaries, teachers or worked in agriculture and factories. Actualisation of gender desires was contingent upon biological differences. Feminists, whether liberal, radical or socialists, conversely challenged these socially constructed dichotomies and promoted the view that gender inequalities are part of historical, cultural and patriarchal structures and need to change both in the private sector, i.e. the family and the home, and in public life, i.e. male-dominated politics and the employment sectors (Bryson, 2003; Millett, 1985; Friedan, 1997). Some feminists have also called our attention to the historical, socio-economic and cultural conditions that give rise to gender separation and gender discriminations. Radical feminists also promoted the view that the 'personal is political' thus bringing issues into public debate that were social taboos such as wife beating and abuse, abortion, contraceptives, divorce, domestic violence, and prostitution. Feminists considered these issues as shared women's experiences and called for women's sisterhood and solidarity struggles demanding legal and cultural changes (Morgan, 1978, 1984). The debates over self actualisation and collective action, and the politics of difference and gender equality which dominated most feminist debates

in the 1970s and 1980s, were not discussable issues in Cyprus where the 'national issue' took precedence. Kağıtçıbaşı (1996, 2010) noted that traditional societies emphasise the collective self and undermine the value of the individual. As a consequence, the individual experiences of the women are subsumed in the collective, and often viewed as genderless. The same assumption is often made with regard to issues of war and conflict when we know that this is not the case. A trans-national feminist literature over the last twenty-five years has generated a sizeable volume of empirical findings and theories on the gendered nature of militarism, political conflict, war-making and peace processes world wide (for example Enloe, 2000; Giles and Hyndman, 2004; Moser and Clark, 2001; Cockburn and Zarkov, 2002; Cockburn, 2004, 2007; Hadjipavlou and Cockburn, 2006; Agathangelou, 2003; Sharoni, 1995; Killoran, 1998; Anthias, 1989; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Goldstein, 2006; Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009).

According to Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989), in national struggles and wars, women's involvement and participation take the following forms: biological reproducers of members of ethnic groups, and participating both in the ideological reproduction of the ethnic collectivity and transmission of its culture. For instance, in the case of Cyprus, the Turkish Cypriot leadership was urging women to give birth to many children to fight the 'enemy'. In their view the perceived enemy was the Greek Cypriots who schemed to destroy the Turkish community. Recently, the Greek Cypriot leadership has also been concerned with the low birth-rate, promoting programmes to give incentives to young couples so as to increase the number of children to serve the country but also out of fear of the increase of Turkish settlers who have large families. We find similar policies elsewhere, like in Israel and Palestine (Sharoni, 1995).

Cynthia Cockburn (1998) informs us about the gendered aspects of ethno national conflict whereby men are the soldiers and fighters while women undertake a primarily humanitarian role (securing food, shelter and health) as well as trying to heal themselves and others of psychological traumas and wounds. Different constructions of masculinity and femininity are being promoted. In Cyprus we have examples of these gendered roles whereby in between 1963 and 1974 Turkish Cypriot women who lived in enclaves and Greek Cypriot displaced women in post-1974 who lived in refugee camps took care of the children and the elderly and the family, as well as provided solidarity and helped them to recover psychologically. The role of men during the same period of displacements was different. The men were the soldiers who had to protect the women and children and after the fighting ceased the majority of the Turkish Cypriot men immigrated to Turkey or elsewhere seeking employment as did the Greek Cypriot men who went to the Arab and former Socialist countries.

Militarization and Daily Life

As an illustration of the gradual militarization of the island and its impact on daily life, we provide below our own personal experiences. One of the authors of this article, Biran, lived in the Turkish part of divided Nicosia/Lefkosha, across the Green Line (this was drawn on the city map by a

British commander using a green pen in the first inter-communal violence in December 1963). In order to cross to the other side Biran had to go through different military check points:

> 'After the primary school, in early 1970s I was attending St Joseph French School which was situated in the southern part of Nicosia where Greek Cypriots were living. While the civil war was continuing, I was living on the north side of town and I had to cross on my bike to the southern part. In order to do so, every day I had to go through three military barricades namely Mücahits (Turkish Cypriot soldiers), United Nations soldiers and Greek Cypriot soldiers. From [a] very early age we became accustomed to seeing soldiers and men in uniforms as part of our daily landscape. As a school girl there was a cultural imperative to protect myself from male strangers. This included the soldiers from all three groups. At the same time, however, I was living a contradiction. While I had to protect myself from all these uniformed men, I was also supposed to accept Mücahits – the soldiers from my in-group, as protectors. At that young age it was very difficult to make the distinction between men as protectors and men as predators/aggressors, especially due to the conflicting messages I received from society'.

The co-author of this article, Maria, came from the northern part of Cyprus but also had a house in one of the suburbs of southern Nicosia where her family lived. In 1963, she was a student in the Greek Gymnasium (secondary school) and she remembers:

> 'My father was a business man and had many Turkish Cypriot customers. Some of them were family friends and used to come to our house and bring us delicious deserts and cookies and sometimes they stayed to dinner. Suddenly they stopped coming and I asked my father why they did not visit us any more. He told me there was an "insurrection", *(antarsia)* that the Turks left the government and their leadership did not allow them to come to our side. I then asked my father to take us to visit them instead, and he told me we were not allowed to visit them either. This was very confusing to me but I knew something was really wrong. I was afraid and unhappy. At school they told us that the Turks will invade and attack us and we had to stay together. We lived close enough to Omorphita to hear gun shots and smoke in the sky but no one told me that Greeks killed Turkish Cypriots and that Greek Cypriots still wanted "enosis". Riding my bike along Ermou street and at the end of Ledra street I could see the barbed wires, sandbags and uniformed soldiers and the UN soldiers. Then the convoy began when we wanted to go to Kyrenia via Nicosia. I felt the men knew it all but not my mother or us, the four sisters. I was told the soldiers who wore blue berets came to protect us. From what, I asked. No one explained … '.

Such memories become part of a collective history and point to the issues of insecurity, male dominance and control, an atmosphere of hiding and blaming the 'other' and creating an environment of an imminent danger. As girls we were expected to be taken care of, protected and silenced. Father was the head of the family (as was the head of state) and his command and word were to be heeded. The men were in charge and women were subordinate and our questions remained unanswered. Militarization and gun shots were men's 'businesses'. In fact, this secrecy and *aphasia* or half truths became part of the historical and political landscape in each community

and grew in intensity after 1974 when the island was split into two parts (Mylona *et al.*, 1981; Hadjipavlou, 1987). Both a patriarchal and confrontational culture prevailed of 'us and them' whereby people had to choose their side for 'their own good' since ambiguities and complexities caused uneasiness and confusion. Barbed wires and militarism prohibited inter-ethnic contacts giving rise to increased fears, suspicions and stereotyping or simply ignorance. Gradually two separate realities were created through a male understanding of politics.

Let us now examine briefly the social position of women in both communities through a historical lens.

Historical Evolution of Cypriot Women's Social Position

According to research carried out by the Women's Organisation of United Democrats in 2006, during the British period there existed 'absolute male domination and oppression of women in both the private and public space' and one could add 'structural violence' (Manzura and McKay, 2001; GOED, 2006) in that the social organisation of society in Cyprus excluded women and girls from many opportunities. For instance in 1931, 54% of the people in Cyprus were illiterate – mostly women and working class men. Young people aged between 15 and 19 years old had not attended schooling, especially girls (48%) and boys but only 17.1%. Women were viewed as a means for men's sexual satisfaction and 'machines for reproduction' and as such were men's 'possession'.

Girls learned early on to set marriage as the paramount goal of their lives and the parents of girls had to provide a dowry. Men also reached manhood when they married (now they reach manhood when they go to the army!). In the power hierarchy of the family, men often felt they had the right to humiliate women or beat them up for trifle misconduct (Anthias, 1992).

Some of the male interviewees in the same research mentioned that even at table the men sat separate from women and the same was true in the church or mosque. Women were not allowed to wear pants or smoke and could not drive a car or tractor. The working class women engaged in agriculture in the fields but the money was controlled by the husband or father. Very few women had secondary school education and had no say in public affairs or the right to vote. Women were dependent on men (GOED, 2006; Cockburn, 2004). The social perception of women was closely linked in a traditional society with religion that demanded that a woman be moral, absolutely loyal and submissive to her husband ('ston kirio tis'/to her master/efendisine). This cultural understanding of the role of women influenced the girls' education in the Cypriot society and how much schooling they ought to have. There existed the perception that if girls attended schooling this would mean delaying their 'natural' 'destiny' which was marriage at a young age, thus parents did not invest in their daughters' education but in their sons' (Persianis, 1988).

Women began demanding their right to education in the mid-eighteenth century (Wollstonecraft, 1792) and, according to the United Nations, centuries later the global female illiteracy rate is 34%, i.e. 640 million women are illiterate. The liberal feminists regarding gender

inequalities promoted the women's right to vote and to education and stressed that the role of education was also for self-fulfilment irrespective of gender. It also urged women to work and encouraged girls to follow non traditional exclusively feminine professions. The Marxist-socialist feminists promoted the view that schooling reproduces class relations, gender stereotypes and capitalism; the radical feminists spoke about women's oppression due to patriarchal structures as the system that penetrates all levels of social activities including education. The school is not neutral but reproduces the patriarchal structures. In Cyprus, from the beginning of the century to the mid-1950s only well-to-do families could afford to educate their daughters and if there were also sons, then the latter were the priority and had the advantage of further education, good employment opportunities and travel abroad. Men and women had unequal opportunities. In both communities the socialisation and education of boys and girls were gendered and so were the school curricula. Class stratification also played a role in what women did and how much education they received or did not receive. For instance, women's roles in the cities were to be good wives (evgenis despines/hanım kız) and good mothers, support their husbands and if they were working prior to marriage they had to stop afterwards so that they could dedicate themselves to the role of wife and mother. In the rural areas women engaged in agricultural work and farming in addition to doing all the housework and caring for the family, thus they had a double work-load compared to that of male workers. The working class women played a crucial role in the family unit production and maintained the needs of the household. This imbalance in sexual division of labour was part of the socialist feminist critique in the 1960s and continues to this day. Women from the lower- middle-class worked as dressmakers, embroiderers, weavers or handicraft makers in their homes and earned some money which provided them with an air of 'controlled independence'. (Persianis, 1988; Kağıtçıbaşı, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, with the establishment of the Republic, women, according to the constitution, were given the right to vote. Hence, Cypriot women did not have to struggle to gain this right as women did elsewhere which meant engaging in a process of politicisation and raising gender consciousness awareness. Women started to find their voice in decisions concerning family affairs (GOED, 2006). With democratisation and modernisation which included urbanisation processes by the mid-1960s, primary education and secondary education up to the age of 15 gradually became compulsory for boys and girls in both communities. Moreover, by the mid-1960s democratisation of education spread little by little and schools became co-ed, nonetheless textbooks were promoting gender stereotypes and separate girls' and boys' activities. In 1960, according to statistical data, only 1% of the people, mainly men, in the Greek Cypriot community were university graduates. Today we have close to 70% attending tertiary university education with men and women almost equal in numbers in the Greek Cypriot community (The Statistical Portrait of Women in Cyprus, 2008). Also the recent establishment of universities in the Turkish Cypriot community has given more and more female students the chance to attend the universities and the proportion of male and female students is almost equal (Mertan, 2000).

During this modernisation period and the rise of capitalist economy girls received more

education than their mothers and grandmothers did and research informs us that women started to find 'a voice' in family affairs, especially in urban areas (GOED, 2006). Women began working in paid jobs outside of the house but although they gained some economic independence due to the capitalist market, the patriarchal ideology led them into 'double bind roles' with more duties and responsibilities than before. '... apart from traditional roles as wives, mothers and house-carers they are now required to be labour workers, stay attractive and sexy for men's satisfaction, and financial supporters of the families' (Stavrou, 1997). Women had no involvement in political and public life. For instance, in the Greek Cypriot community, Stella Soulioti, a lawyer from an upper-middle-class family of lawyers was the first woman appointed Minister of Justice by President Makarios in the early 1960s and later also appointed as Attorney General. Being a woman in a high position does not mean much in terms of promoting women's agenda and issues. In this case Soulioti became part of the prevailing male-dominated system which she reproduced. Research tells us that women in high positions should have a gender and feminist consciousness in order to promote women's issues and bring about social change (Hooks, 2000; Hadjipavlou, 2010). On the other hand an educator, Kadriye Hacıbulgur, in the Turkish Cypriot community, also from an upper-middle-class family, was appointed as a member of the Turkish Communal Chamber (1960). She graduated from, and worked for a while at Victoria School for Girls (Professional School for Moslem Girls). The school offered instruction in handicrafts, reading the Koran, writing and English language lessons with the aim of raising a generation of skilled women who would be ready to contribute to the family income. She was the principal of several primary schools in different towns; was also active in teachers' rights; served as a role model for other women especially in regard to further education, and she also challenged the gender traditional roles of women (Cahit, 2009).

The separation between the private and public realms of life which liberal feminists challenged was well adhered to in Cyprus. In the first parliament of the Cyprus Republic all the members were male – many of them ex-EOKA fighters or TMT-fighters. And there was no female member of parliament (MP) in the Greek Cypriot community until 1982 when Rina Katselli became the first woman MP from the Democratic Party. She was not a feminist and was promoted and supported by her influential family. Politics was still a man's domain. Women usually voted as their husbands instructed them to because it was men's opinion on politics that mattered – women were viewed as apolitical. Women's organisations were weak politically and were there to serve political party agendas; other organisations for women were philanthropic associations, helping the poor and the sick. The early women's magazines stressed female roles and hegemonic types of femininity (cooking, baking, sewing, knitting and childcare) and philanthropy, but there was no discussion on social or reproductive rights or gender equality rights. Thus, sex stereotypes and social prejudices were reproduced by women, too. These gender role separations limited both men's and women's full development and partnership connections. In the Turkish Cypriot Community, it was even later in 1990 when the first two women – one a medical

doctor, Ruhsan Tuğyan, and the other a dentist, Gülin Sayıner – were elected as MPs in the Turkish Cypriot parliament. Both women were members of the conservative National Unity Party (UBP) and as health professionals had direct contacts and relations with clients prior to being elected so they had formed their own clientele which was then converted into votes. None raised women's agenda. Even today the majority of members of Parliament in the Turkish Cypriot (TC) community are health professionals, including female members of parliament, and have strong nationalistic ideologies. However, the female ratio has never exceeded more than 8% of the MPs and 16.5% in the Greek Cypriot (GC) parliament.

The Politics of Separation and Partition

With the 'fall' of the bicommunal Republic in 1963 (Kyriakides, 1968) and the ensued inter-communal violence, the TCs had to abandon their villages and neighbourhoods which meant a break down of community life, family structures and relationships. What then became known as the 'Cyprus problem' began affecting people's lives. The GCs had similar experiences a decade later in 1974 when almost one-third of the population became displaced and thousands lived in tents before they were relocated to temporary housing. From 1964 to 1974 more than one-third of the TCs lived in enclaves mainly in the northern part of Nicosia. When these families left their homes they were not able to stay together but were scattered in different locations. While the women and children sought refuge in camps or the enclaves, the men were sent off to defend their community from 'the enemy' on the front lines. This meant the collapse of community life and traditional connections. These experiences had a tremendous impact on the roles of men and women in the Turkish Cypriot society. Traditionally, men had been the primary protectors and providers for their families while women had been the primary caretakers. During that period women were undertaking double-duty, assuming not only their traditional roles but also the roles usually filled by men. These women suffered many hardships as the primary caretakers, protectors, and providers for their families while at the same time they were also anxious for the male members of their families who were recruited as fighters as well as worrying about the community at large. In this way many TC women acted as psychological shock-absorbers in the conflict, providing some sense of stability for those left behind. Decades later, we can still see the psychological scars left by the trauma of the prolonged stress of the violence on some of the women who lived through this period.

During this decade TCs perceived themselves as abandoned by the rest of the world and they believed that no one was interested in their living conditions. This feeling of isolation had two outcomes. Firstly, some members of the Turkish Cypriot Community developed stronger ties with the 'motherland' Turkey, and for them Turkishness became their main identity (Vural and Rustemli, 2006). Secondly, because of the painful memories and the socio-economic and political instability, other members of the community decided to abandon their homeland and immigrated to other Commonwealth countries such as the UK, Canada, and Australia. In the absence of their

husbands the Turkish Cypriot women had to bring their families together, organise schooling for their children and create safe and comfortable homes (Bryant and Hatay, 2008). As mentioned above, the Cyprus Republic, run exclusively by Greek Cypriots and the presence of the UN peacekeeping force on the island – all males – is proof of the international recognition of the state. This year for the first time the UN chief of the mission in Cyprus is a woman who is also very gender conscious.

In the same period the GC community put much effort into economic development which raised their standard of living and opened up opportunities for both men and women in the employment sector while the TC community suffered under-development and increased dependency on Turkey. This rate of unequal development drew the two dominant communities further apart, a reality that persists to this day. Many Greek Cypriots experienced prosperity and modernisation and began to travel abroad. Educated women started to work outside of the home mainly in female jobs and consequently contributed to the State economy. We note that Greek Cypriot women's employment in the non-agricultural sector grew by 80%, one-third in trade, one-quarter in manufacturing and one-fifth in services (Stavrou, 1997). Though we witness an increase in the educational level (today there are six universities in the Republic of Cyprus and more are planned) and in economic development, this has not necessarily coincided with social change in terms of new attitudes, gender roles and a decreasing of the patriarchal and sexist mentality. For instance, the dowry custom continued and we find no women's organisations in either community to challenge this practice of objectifying and humiliating women or to protest women's subordinate role in the marriage contract. Hadjipavlou's research in 2004 indicates that many Cypriot women from all communities (the majority of TC educated women) still accept arranged marriages – a restriction on women's choices as well as social pressure (the dowry practice was abolished by law in the 1980s). Other social issues such as contraceptives, abortion and homosexuality are still social taboos in both communities. Abortion is illegal in both communities except in certain circumstances.

The Post-1974 Period

> 'In Pafos today (1975) where some 500 Turkish Cypriots were being transferred to the north, the main square resounded with the sobbing and wailing of elderly women abandoning their homes after a lifetime. Greek and Turkish Cypriots mingled easily with no apparent hostility toward each other. Many of the departing Turkish Cypriots handed over the keys of their homes to the Greek Cypriot refugees with apparent pleasure 'to look after them' as one said. Thus partition was gradually being consolidated' (Washington Post, 11 August 1975 quoted in Hadjipavlou, 1987 p. 196).

The 1974 war has impacted the lives of all the communities in Cyprus (see: Evdokas *et al.,* 1976; Loizos, 1981; Volkan, 1979; Papadakis, 2005; Hadjipavlou, 2004, 2006). Thirty-six years later there still exist two distinct ethnically separated parts with dividing lines everywhere being guarded by

men who are socialised within a masculine political and military culture. The stakes in the conflict have been posed in quite masculine terms: status, stature, sovereignty, revenge, heroism, honour, patriotism, (Cockburn, 2004; Hadjipavlou, 2010). The *Washington Post* extract is part of the unrecorded oral history and the pain and sorrow of women having been ordered to abandon unwillingly their homes for 'national security' reasons or for their 'own good'. Partition was not a 'natural' process but a political strategy which was imposed from above. It was a military orchestrated process to break up relationships and yet contrary to this 'strategic agenda' these elderly TC women in a mutinous gesture to defend their neighbourly relations handed over their house keys to their GC neighbours for safe-keeping until their return. During this period there were many such examples which exhibited both the weakness of the state to grant the necessary security but also the helplessness and fear of citizens to protest such imposition from above. The 'women's sobbing and wailing' became a female 'trademark' in Cypriot politics.

Additionally, in times of ethno-national conflict nationalism reinforces the power and privileges of patriarchal institutions (such as family, church, schools, political parties, etc) and it is achieved through psychological pressure on women to demonstrate their loyalty to these institutions and turn them into symbols of national collectivities (Hadjipavlou, 2006). A number of years ago various studies were carried out among the GC refugees and in the TC community (for a review of these studies see: Hadjipavlou, 1987, chapter 4). None of those studies examined women's experiences separately from those of men and no policies or support systems were enacted to address women's needs.

While before and during the conflict women are used as symbols and reproducers, after warfare women are called upon to reconstruct society, though as Harding (1986) and Hynes (2004) inform us, the victimisation of women does not cease after warfare. Widows and women heads of families are viewed as a threat to changing social traditions, which bolster male supremacy and promote women's subordination. The lives of GC displaced women and others, such as Maronites, Armenians and Latins as well as of Turkish Cypriot women changed drastically in that, apart from being called to undertake the rebuilding of broken communities, safeguard the family cohesion, and offer psychological support, they were also called to contribute to the economy of the country. Many women, especially from the rural areas, sought work in factories, in farming or later in the tourist industry, thus gradually acquiring a sense of economic independence and agency. This gave the women a moral authority over their victimhood. Women's involvement and participation, however, at decision-making levels was extremely limited. Women's organisations attached to political parties engaged mainly in material or social support and avoided discussing gender issues as these intersect with patriarchy, militarism, conflict and nationalism.

Women's Agency

There were, nevertheless, women's groups and organisations who became active for a while in making their voice heard regarding their desire for peace, demilitarisation and reconciliation.

Greek Cypriot women in the late 1970s and 1980s organised three *'Women Walk Home'* events in 1975, 1987 and 1989 in which thousands of local and foreign women participated. They walked along the military lines wanting to cross to the other side to invite Turkish Cypriot women to join in the struggle of 'going home'. It was a cross-section of women from different ideological backgrounds. Some women were arrested by the Turkish military in their effort to cross the lines. As is often the case such civil society initiatives were politicised and exploited as a propaganda tool by the state and some male politicians who demonised the 'evil other'. Still, women made their presence felt and received a great deal of international coverage at the time. It could have been more powerful had these events been organised jointly with TC women, but at the time this was impossible due to militarism, and an enforced communication embargo. This bicommunal networking would occur much later from the late 1980s and 1990s to the present, initially via the help of third parties. Today, inter-communal women's reconciliation efforts and collaboration have increased but not adequately enough to form a joint women's feminist movement yet.

Furthermore, research in recent years has shown that social stereotypes, prejudices and gender roles have not weakened and women still use the male model as their reference point regarding styles of thinking (i.e. she is so good, she thinks like a man!), and professional success, something that marginalises women's differences. Feminism does not want women to become men; this is far from gender equality. Moreover, due to higher university education more women have become gender conscious and aware of male dominance in our society recognising their responsibility to become change agents (GOED, 2006; Hadjipavlou, 2004, 2010; Cockburn, 2004; Mertan, 2000). Although Cypriot women from all communities (Greek, Turkish, Armenian, Maronite and Latin Cypriots) have multiple roles and social positions as Hadjipavlou's research has shown, women find themselves in a transitional phase between traditionalism and modernity as the patriarchal structures remain unchanged with many women still facing the dilemma of either 'career or family' (Hadjipavlou, 2004, 2010).

In one other research when Greek Cypriot women were asked to prioritise their interests they placed 'Family' first, then 'Home', then 'Work' and they placed 'participation in Public life' last, which shows that GC women still perceive their involvement in politics presents too high a price to pay and so they prefer to stay away. They do not realise that this attitude does a disservice to participatory democracy and to the exclusion of half of the population from the centres where decisions are taken to impact on their lives too (GOED, 2006). Biological differences are often used to justify this social exclusion and reproduce the gender stereotypes. Such (mis) perceptions exist in both communities.

Thus patriarchy which is fed by the conflict and *vice versa* is still prevalent in the Cypriot society and the male understanding of politics, development and security continues to dominate. The Cypriot media in both communities are not gender sensitive and this is apparent in the radio and television programmes on current political and financial affairs where the invited discussants are exclusively men. Also, the state is still reluctant to appoint women in important public positions (See Iacovou-Kapsali *et al.*, 2008)

There are very few women occupying the important roles of the State; in areas of economy and industry, as well as in leadership roles in trade unions and political parties. Women are under-represented in electoral structures (see: The Statistical Portrait of Women in Cyprus, 2008). The latest statistics inform us that we have only 16.3% of Greek Cypriot women in the legislature in the Republic of Cyprus – an increase from 5.1% in 1991. We have two female ministers out of eleven. Yet, there is some progress. We note an increase to 38% in women judges and an increase from 2.05% in 1990 to 26.8% in 2006 in senior civil servants. In the municipal councils – local government – out of 414 members only 84 were women in 2006. For the first time in the history of Nicosia (south) we have had a woman mayor. The wage gap is still the highest among European countries with 25% less for women. We are still a long way from achieving gender equality and gender equity. Many women from all communities had hoped that the entry to the European Union would have made a difference for women's lives especially on social issues but this has not been the case up till now and it needs to be studied further. Research has also shown that women across the Green Line share a number of common issues and challenges such as their desire for participation in public affairs and the peace process, gender equality at all levels of life, and visibility in local and national forums. They share concerns on issues of domestic violence, wage-gap, inequality in the labour market, sex trafficking, women's health issues, migration, and gender discrimination. These shared issues open up spaces for networking and joint women's solidarity campaigns.

The position of educated TC women in the northern part of Cyprus has improved in recent years due to the increasing number of recently established universities (Mertan, 2000). We detect the benefit of higher education opportunities not only in the number of female university graduates which doubled from 7% to 14.7% in a decade (DPÖ-State Planning Organisation Statistics, 2006) but also in the rate of female participation in the labour market which increased from 27% to 29.1%. That being said, these universities are mostly run by male professors and the senior executive members are men in the majority. In the local government we note the following: among the existing 28 municipalities none of the mayors are female. In local governments only 43 out of 234 members are women (18.37%). For the first time in 2009, Turkish Cypriots appointed the first female Head official for the Famagusta district. During Talat's term in office the position of Turkish Cypriot women improved for a while. For example, the rate of women in the higher decision-making bodies increased to 17%, a female MP became Speaker of the Legislative Assembly for the first time and a female Minister of Education was also appointed for the first time. Additionally, in the Supreme Court two of the eight judges were women (25%). It seems that for short periods we can observe women occupying high positions and having responsibilities in different professional and political organisations. These changes, however, do not reflect a more permanent change in the cultural and social attitudes towards women in the TC Community as is the case with the GC women. Both TC and GC women share the view that women's issues have been under-played in the political agenda due to the predominance of the 'national political problem' where the visible role of women has been missing (Cockburn, 2004; Hadjipavlou, 2010).

The 1990s and Beyond:
Cypriot Women in Solidarity for Peace and for UNSC Resolution 1325

In this section we briefly discuss the work of some pioneer independent bicommunal women's groups which have made interventions in the rapprochement, peacebuilding and reconciliation processes challenging the mainstream male discourses, the construction of the enemy culture, and militarism as an ideology and culture. We will discuss only the most recent of these women's groups: *Hands Across the Divide* (HAD), which is a registered non-governmental organisation; *Metamorphosis Cypriot Women's Group* (MCW), *the Gender Advisory Team* (GAT), and the newly found *Turkish Cypriot Feminist Movement.* All of these are independent of political parties and party agendas. Our discussion is informed by the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing Plan of Action in 1995, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000, and the European Parliament Resolution on 'Women and Peace and Security' of 2000. These documents, all of which the Cyprus Republic signed, recognise that women should participate in and have a significant role to play in the process of prevention, resolution of conflicts, in peace building and the peace negotiations. It is also acknowledged that women and girls experience conflict and war differently and need different policies and support systems.

Hands Across the Divide (HAD) is the first bicommunal, independent non-governmental organisation established in 2001 (for details see; Agathangelou, 2003; Cockburn, 2004; and Hadjipavlou, 2006, 2010). The underlying shared world view of HAD is that 'we believe in the values of participatory democracy, which for us means an open market of ideas, equal representation of women, equal access to resources and opportunities and we aspire to live in a reunited island'. HAD, organised many conflict resolution workshops addressing issues of peace, security, militarism and violence and how to deal with the past. HAD, stresses the fact that all forms of violence, whether domestic, social, institutional or inter-national are inter-connected. All violence stems from the imbalance of power and resources that prevail in a male-dominated world which suppresses women's participation and perspectives on the vital issues of peace making and peace negotiations. HAD members, were the only ones who analysed the latest UN peace Plan (the Annan Plan) from a gender lens and produced a document about how to integrate a gender perspective in the future agreements. Other activities included: a letter handed to the two Cypriot leaders, Mr D. Christofias and Mr M.A. Talat in 2008, reminding them of UNSC Resolution 1325. This is a resolution that directly concerns us here in Cyprus. It calls, among other issues, for the participation of women in peace negotiations, and in the post conflict reconstruction. It calls upon states to incorporate a gender perspective in the negotiations, and in all implementation mechanisms. Furthermore, it stresses that all actors should implement measures that ensure the human and social rights of women and girls as they relate to the constitution, the electoral system, the security and the judiciary. Despite having ratified it, Cyprus has not yet developed a national plan on the implementation of resolution 1325.

Other HAD projects include the 'Peace Bus' project whereby women visit mixed villages in the north and south to create networks of reunions of women who lived together before the conflict to share hopes and fears and develop new connections for reconciliation. To mark the tenth anniversary of the UNSC resolution 1325, HAD, in cooperation with the *Gender Advisory Team* (GAT) organised public events in September, one being a lecture by Martha Jean Baker on how Cypriot women can become mobilised to promote the implementation of the resolution and the other being the placement of bill boards at the end of Ledra Street in divided Nicosia inviting passers-by to write 'what does peace mean to me'. The response was overwhelming.

The *Gender Advisory Team* (GAT) consists of women from both sides of the divide, women activists and scholars who have been meeting since 2009 and have been in contact with the UN good offices in Cyprus and the UNDP-ACT personnel, the aim being to both identify ways in which gender considerations can be integrated into the Cyprus peace process in compliance with UNSC Resolution 1325. GAT believes that the issues under discussion between the two Cypriot leaders – governance, security, property and relations with the European Union – concern women as well and their needs and concerns should be heard. GAT has already submitted to Christofias and Talat a document with key recommendations and principles related to the governance issue. On his visit to Cyprus in February 2010 the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon made special mention and praised the efforts and work of GAT. In collaboration with two other partners, GAT has submitted a project proposal to carry out research among women across the divide and gather data on women's views and needs on the four main issues under discussion at the macro level. The purpose is to produce a comprehensive document on women's views and concerns and submit it to the leaders and their working teams to ascertain that gender equality provisions and women's social rights are incorporated in any future agreement. GAT will collaborate with women's party organisations and other influential women from both communities so as to mobilise from below and increase sensitivity on gender awareness.

Another women's group which is working on a different agenda is the *'Metamorphosis Cypriot Women's Group'* (MCWG) which was created in July 2000, when twenty Greek Cypriot and twenty Turkish Cypriot women received AMIDEAST scholarships to be trained on Domestic Violence and Business Leadership at George Washington University in the USA. The group was composed of professionals working mainly in education, psychology and business.

Women's solidarity and networking campaigns challenge the conflict culture and the dychotomies of 'us' and 'them' so the MCWG, like HAD, offered several bicommunal seminars and workshops in Cyprus and abroad. The meetings organised by MCWG encouraged Cypriot women to share common goals, mutual understanding and respect for each other and to bond with one another across ethnic, class and age differences. Moreover, as a result of this mutual sharing, they were motivated to undertake a project on 'Successful Cypriot Women'. In November 2002 they obtained a year's funding from the EU Civil Society Programme in Cyprus and run workshops about what a 'successful woman' is from a feminist perspective. The group produced a 66-minute documentary on 'Successful Cypriot Women' in three languages – Greek, Turkish and

English. It was conceived by women, and produced by a bicommunal team of film directors and crew. The documentary features three TC and three GC women of different generations who tell their personal life stories, struggles, hopes, dreams and aspirations, and also the obstacles and difficulties they faced in a conservative patriarchal society. Each one of them had made a significant social intervention within the context of their reality on gender stereotypes and social taboo issues. They contested patriarchal structures and social prejudices. The documentary has been shown at both bicommunal events, conferences (Iacovou-Kapsali and Mertan, 2004) and in the respective communities and abroad (Mertan, 2003, 2004; Mertan and Iacovou-Kapsali, 2004; Iacovou-Kapsali *et al.,* 2008). In each screening of the film, the audiences have strong emotional responses and many women connect with the experiences of women in the documentary and feel empowered to struggle for social change.

A newly-found group in the TC community is the *'feminist movement group'* which was established in May 2010 and comprises mainly young educated women of whom some took gender studies and call themselves feminists. Their first activity was a public protest against militarization and for demilitarization of the whole island. They connect militarization to patriarchy and nationalism. The group 'thinks globally but acts locally' as they explained in interviews. They link social women's issues with feminism and regional and global women's issues. They believe that women in their community choose compromise instead of asserting their rights as women which informs us about women's oppression. The group is open to cooperate with GC women and promote co-existence and reconciliation.

It seems to us that all these independent women's groups provide the foundation and resource for a future feminist Cypriot movement for gender equality and a different voice in the Cypriot society. The Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies (MIGS), the Observatory for Equality, (Paratiritirio Isotitas) the UNESCO Chair for gender equality and women's empowerment at the University of Cyprus, the 'Washing-Up Ladies' women artists' project (Lia Lapithi and Marianna Kafaridou), and the Cyprus Federation of Business and Professional women (BPW) which carried out a number of research projects on gender stereotypes and treatment of women in the employment sector. In the north the Women's Studies Centre in the Eastern Mediterranean University organised a number of seminars and conferences on gender issues, and their Journal 'Kadın 2000' publishes articles on gender and feminist issues. The Turkish Cypriot Association of University Women has also engaged in research and has introduced public debates on gender issues thus broadening the political agenda and challenges the predominance of the 'national problem' agenda.

Concluding Remarks

We have tried to show that the social position of the Cypriot women over the last fifty years has been closely connected to the political upheavals whereby the 'national' problem dominated public discourse and the structure of patriarchy becomes mediated with nationalist politics to 'keep'

certain agendas visible while marginalising others. As we have shown in this article, Cypriot society has been male dominated, and patriarchal structures gave rise to social stereotypes, gender prejudices, and sexual division of labour. Nevertheless, we have noted a number of changes in women's lives over the last fifty years such as in education, travels abroad, professional development, economic independence and a contribution to peace building and reconciliation efforts. Despite the fact that their participation in public life and politics is still low, women are becoming more aware of the lack of social support systems to empower them to enter political life and be active in struggles for social change. Though women's solidarity networks across the divide have weakened since 2004, there are indications today that new women's groups have started recognising shared issues that need to be addressed such as gender roles, inequalities, limitations of their rights, domestic violence, sex trafficking, and their desire for peace and human security. These groups should come out of the margins. There exists a need to form women's alliances across ideologies, class and ethnicities so as to strengthen democratic procedures and together co-create the much needed Cypriot feminist movement on the island. Such a movement will benefit the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society as a whole because it will connect people across ethnicities, gender, age, class, race, sexual orientation, language, disabilities, and religious affiliations. In the last thirty years the demographics have changed drastically in both communities and this must be addressed with new policies of integration and inclusion of women. For this to happen, men and women need to develop a gender consciousness and recognise that social change means to include women's talents and abilities in the construction of a new Cypriot imaginary. This is a fundamental principle of participatory democracy and social justice. The challenge which lies ahead is how to create partnerships and convince men that patriarchy works to their detriment too as they are deprived of the full enjoyment of human experiences. Men and women ought to question the power structures which keep them both in restrictive roles. It is important to recognise that women suffer in times of conflict and wars in particular ways and they need to be given a voice to allow their skills to be used for peacemaking.

The many universities in Cyprus should encourage the establishment of graduate programmes on gender studies, and women's research centres to produce the long overdue history of Cypriot women's contribution to the civilization and creativity on the island; their achievements and struggles over the centuries and bring visibility to the unknown women's stories and experiences. Such research and knowledge should be incorporated in the school curricula. We believe that today there is a growing desire by women for a Cypriot feminist movement which would be inclusive of and responsive to the needs of all women and men who live on the island. The challenge for such a Cypriot feminism would be to question the power systems such as the economic, the ethno-national and the sex/gender power – all three intersect and promote inequality and are sustained by coercion and violence. A Cypriot Feminist movement could question such phenomena and mobilise social and cultural change which is as important as solving the 'Cyprus conflict'.

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