

# **Nationalism, Militarism and Masculinity in Post-Conflict Cyprus**

**STRATIS ANDREAS EFTHYMIU**

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‘The origin of the world’ is a very popular painting produced in 1866 by Gustav Goubert, which attracts attention and conveys messages to this day. The painting pictures the body of a naked woman from the neck down, focusing on her genitalia, as she is lying halfway down with open legs. Taking its cues from this classic piece, a similar painting by Orlan in 2011 portrayed a male body, in a similar posture, with an erect penis. Its title is ‘The origins of the war’. While the first painting has a biological undertone, the second one is more explicit about gendered social life, which is masculinised to self-division. More specifically, human organisation is gendered in such a way that masculinity is tied to conflict, suffering, oppression, or other outcomes or facilitators of war. Masculinity then feeds into social ills and phenomena that arise in countries where national peace has been undermined. To the average progressive, these commonly include both nationalism and militarism. These phenomena are intertwined in Cyprus, since it resembles a case of conflict and post-conflict nationalism, bordering, otherness, and excessive military spending, where all aspects are gendered and hegemonically masculinised: conscription, high-level negotiations, heroes, and enemies.

This is why Stratis Andreas Efthymiou’s book about the relationship between masculinity, nationalism, and militarism in the post-conflict landscape Greek-Cypriots find themselves in, is long overdue. For decades, there has been widely circulating, albeit dispersed and disorganised, evidence, that all three of these concepts haunt our past and future. Efthymiou’s book is one of the first studies connecting them into a triadic interrelation, and applying them to Cyprus. In realising that gender has always been relevant to situations of conflict, militarised societies and ethnic antagonism, the triad must be disaggregated into its constituent components.

Then we would have to study how these interact and interpenetrate each other, or in the author's terms how they are 'co-constituted', as a political complexion, and a reproductive force sustaining power structures and undermining new beginnings. We would also need to look into how this co-constitution evolves, as each aspect of the triad is affected by social and political developments.

Effectively, this is what Efthymiou does with his book: he treats each concept individually, and then puts everything together to flesh out their co-constitution and how it evolves in a situation of open borders, or a post-conflict environment, which breeds a post-conflict form for each of the triad's parts. The chapters are accordingly structured. Chapter 2 is about the relationship between nationalism, militarism and masculinity after the Green Line and closed borders were established. Chapters 3, 4, and 5, deal with each of these concepts respectively after the opening of the border. Chapter 6 brings together these concepts in the post-conflict era and focuses especially on the 'radical far right'. It also provides several appendices, which facilitate the contextualisation of the study's main line of argumentation by illuminating in brief a number of relevant events, such as the Isaak-Solomou incidents, agreements on energy, defence, expenditure and cultural artifacts, among others. Chapter 7 analyses how the triad played out in the energy disputes about economic resources and exclusive economic zones in the Eastern Mediterranean during the 2010s. These chapters follow the introduction, which focuses on the anthropological significance of the issue at hand in the author's own life, a broad conceptual grid, the method, and a chapter outline. Then, the conclusions address the original concerns and include policy implications and a thoughtful finale on future research.

Efthymiou successfully accomplishes two tasks that are fundamental for any book of this kind but also harder for a book arriving at the top of tens of others on the Cyprus conflict. First, he pieces together a wealth of secondary sources that have already dealt with militarised borderlands, nationalist frenzy, and patriarchal traits of Greek Cypriot social and political culture. He then expands upon it to look at the aforementioned phenomena as a web-like, 'integral relation', filling gaps in a largely under-researched perspective and generating resonance across a number of social science fields and disciplines. To a considerable extent, and in its treatment of both empirical evidence and secondary literature, the book is a largely integrated view of how the Cyprus Problem is gendered and what the implications are. In fact, although the key concept is post-conflict masculinity, and the key contribution is herein, we learn a lot also about feminised aspects of the conflict, the connections

of womanhood as a subsidiary force to the ‘national struggle’, and feminisation as counter-hegemony. This enables further insights into the dialectics of gendered conflict.

Second, Efthymiou takes the discussion another step forward by tracing ‘the persistence of ideological positions sustained in the face of new realities’ (p.13) and explaining how the co-constitution of the triad adapts instead of disappearing when the border opens and de-solidifies each component separately and the three of them together. It is also discussed how social structures, such as the Cypriot family, or external forces, such as cultural developments in the EU, are intermediaries of adaptive responses by both elites and the public. The author additionally provides a very convincing analysis of how new processes of otherisation are born through a shift in focus from land to maritime borders; and how these produce new forms of nationalism (‘from victim to fighter’), militarism (‘from defensive to assertive’) and masculinity (‘from a protective to a [modern and well positioned] strategist force’) (p.16).

The problematic is not only impressive but also quite a challenge to disentangle. Indeed, one can identify some nuanced deficiencies given the exploratory scope of the book. There is the lack of a clear theorisation from the outset about the triad’s post-conflict adaptation. As the author writes, preliminary fieldwork leads him to reject his initial hypothesis and thus turn to an evolutionary perspective, formulating new questions. These questions are put together as exploratory in intention, essentially asking how ‘an analysis of the co-constitution of GC nationalism, militarism and masculinity contribute[s] to a better understanding of Cyprus after the opening of the borders’ (p.17). Providing answers for each of these topics could still benefit from a more systematic discussion either about the initially assumed plausibility or the sort of hypotheses that would replace it and, certainly, about where related literature stands on the subject (i.e. the temporal dimension of the triad or its individual components). In fairness, theoretical insights of this sort consistently intercept the narrative of the empirical chapters, but a more solid departure point might have been required for reaching more analytical conclusions on the adaptation of hegemonic narratives, the interaction between those taking the sides of hegemony and counter-hegemony, and a more schematic connection to what is already there on these matters.

By extension, while the book details how nationalism, militarism, and masculinity become domains of contestation and therefore adapt to changing circum-

stances, more insight might have been necessary for identifying the social sources and agents launching the contestation of hegemonic imaginaries and thus leading to adaptation. There is a relative lack of attention to the social drivers and actors in the political process, and, indeed, a largely bi-polar setting on questions of nationalism and militarism, as well as on economic issues. For example, we read very little about the emergent feminist movement, the actors sustaining the image of the cosmopolitan Euro-Cypriot woman, the social forces leading to more individualised teenagers or those springing out of their aggregated individualised perspectives, decreased military service, conscientious objection, the intellectuals of Cypriotism, or the protest movements, anti-nationalist parties and citizen initiatives that pushed for opening the borders. In these agential interactions one would be able to locate the ideological and social coordinates of contentious collective action that determines how and in which ways nationalism, militarism, and masculinity are undermined. Given 'hegemonic masculinity' features centrally in the book, the political sociology connecting it to post-conflict matters.

Moreover, although largely justified given the methodological approach of ethnographic observation, interviews and discourse analysis, certain claims are not sufficiently consolidated from a comparative historical perspective; for example, the argument that 'the strong emergence of radical far right political agendas in Cyprus should be understood as a discursive response to the weakening co-constitution of this threefold relationship' (p. 246). Efthymiou is careful in his phrasing but may still suggest causality that is not there or is more qualified than implied. Since right-wing extremism in Cyprus has reached into the centre-right space and has more or less commanded about 10 per cent of the vote diachronically, we needed to hear more about the overall response to open borders. Such as about how ELAM came about formulating a position of closed borders; or where else this position, was voiced, before and after the emergence of ELAM and the existing far right organisations under study. Hence, an opportunity goes missing here to delve into the historical association between right-wing extremism and masculinity, or to touch on how contemporary far-right groups in Cyprus involve women while reproducing the triad.

In retrospect, it might be the case that the right-wing extremism of any period and any form, within either the centre-right or the far-right space, would want to consolidate a strong link between nationalism, militarism, and masculinity. Yet, this does not necessarily 'explain' its emergence or climbing poll numbers, in the

sense that, ‘it is the changing post-conflict context that opened the space for the formation of radical far-right organisations’ (p.192). ‘Radical nationalism’, used across chapter titles, is never defined, and herein lies another underdeveloped point, which is that nationalism doesn’t only come in moderate and radical colours but involves shades, forms, and ideologies to which it attaches in ethnic, civic, egalitarian or nativist, left-wing or right-wing terms. These may be in turn, connected to conflict, masculinity, and militarism in distinct fashions. In other words, the small lacuna is located in the insufficient material about where radical nationalism stands in relation to militarism and masculinity but within the broader political terrain of Greek-Cypriot politics. It is thus not entirely clear why only the far radical right is incorporated as a distinct political space in the interview process, or why there are not at least a few references to the discursive responses of other spaces. After all, the author’s analysis itself already shows that the triad informs formal, institutional policy.

These are relatively minor points (and quite strict, given the book’s anthropological purview) in a thoroughly researched, eloquently written, and scientifically argued monograph, which shapes the path for exciting new work. In so far as it allows us to see how nationalism, militarism, and masculinity, albeit adaptable and adapted, can only be a breeding ground to conflict and ethnic hate, the book is also a type of political statement. A pro-peace, anti-patriarchal, and internationalist spirit seems to be holding the pen. It is good then that this book has come at a time when it is needed the most due to the trajectory towards partition that Cyprus is in, not least because of the interplay between nationalism, militarism, and masculinity. Efthymiou’s contribution is multi-faceted, the book’s method is coherent and careful, and the narrative is personalised and rich in entrenched echoes of the Greek Cypriot nationalist *geist* and the everyday experience of ethnic claims, discourses of heroism, the National Guard, and the politics of manliness. The book is likely (and hopefully) to be of interest to a wider audience than a strictly academic one. In any case, however, it makes a scientific advancement in the direction away from the origins of the war towards the origins of peace and reconciliation: a new world for Cypriots. Above all, Efthymiou shows with precision why such a transition and the political effort it requires are anything but unrelated to gender and masculinity.

**Giorgos Charalambous**