

# **Women's Organizations for Peace: Moving Beyond the Rhetoric of the Cyprus Problem**

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Writing on gender is not static; it is a fluctuating process, just like gender. Writing on gender is writing on everyday life through the perspective of gender. Everyday life in Cyprus involves dealing with the Cyprus Problem as an everyday reality. Over the years, much ink has been spilled on the Cyprus Problem, but there have been very few writing attempts to shed light on the inner workings within the Cypriot society, let alone the visibility and role of women in this context. All that, until *Women's Organizations for Peace: Moving Beyond the Rhetoric of the Cyprus Problem* by Sophia Papastavrou was published.

It is the first time the Cyprus Problem and gender are correlated in a book. This book offers an insight into the feminist struggles of Cypriot women's organisations in the patriarchal heterosexual framework of the Cyprus Problem and the Cypriot society. It unveils the misogynous discrimination against those whose lives are immaterial because of the normalisation of violence through military occupation, while exposing the role of nationalism, in times of war, in relation to gender roles. Nationalism has reduced women to specific roles, which serve its workings. The role of women as national actors is the role of a woman as a mother, a daughter, a wife, a reproductive object, and a symbol. Papastavrou exposes those workings by emphasising the unsaid history of womanhood in Cyprus through its undoubted absence in the Cyprus Problem negotiations and in general.

Women's voices, despite UN and EU efforts, are still not heard, and this reality is reflected in the peace negotiations of the Cyprus Problem. This is a primary and ongoing argument in this book. In fact, throughout its exploration, several themes emerge, such as the complexity of activism on the island between the two (Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot) communities, the challenges of talking about sexism and gender — as this act involves intervention within the family structure in both communities— as well as the impact of race, ethnicity, religion, and gender in a pause-war period in relation to the issues surrounding women and war. In Cyprus, the hegemonic male

discourse erases every effort made by women's voice. Issues of women's space and women's history or, rather, their absence are intertwined in this book, as women in Cyprus, through nationalist functions, are reduced into reproductive machinery or used as symbols of the nation State.

The same symbolic function of the female body is used by men as an excuse for gendered violence; men from either side, men in conflict, or even men of the UN forces in some areas of the world commit acts of rape and male aggression. This experience traumatises women's bodies causing wounds that are difficult to heal or forget. Using that problematisation and context, Papastavrou focuses specifically on three Cypriot women organisations (HAD, GAT and MIGS) to indicate their purpose, principles, and mission and underline the importance of their efforts and the semiology of their existence: the groups include only women from both the Greek and Turkish-Cypriot community that work to address a gender-friendly solution to the Cyprus Problem to disrupt the ongoing narrative of finding a solution first and then deal with gender, as well as talk about women's trafficking and immigrant women and raise awareness of violence against women.

This book unveils the efforts of these three organisations towards women's rights and reunification, the consistency of their activism, their changes, their successes, and their limitations and failures in chronological order. The negative impact of the failure of the Annan plan referendum in 2004 and of the creation of the Gender Equality Technical Committee (GETC) in 2015 on these organisations is indicative.

By the end of this book, the reader inevitably realises the need for the development of a different, more intersectional, inclusive, and ongoing approach to women's activism that will contribute to the peace discourse and move beyond the male-perpetuated rhetoric of the Cyprus Problem. Therefore, *Women's Organizations for Peace: Moving Beyond the Rhetoric of the Cyprus Problem* is highly recommended for its ability to tackle the complexities of the issues it investigates, stay relevant and do justice to female history, discourse, and struggles in Cyprus.

**Ekaterini Symeou**