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UK



International Feminist Journal of Politics

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfjp20>

'What Was My War Like?'

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Published online: 29 Oct 2013.

To cite this article: Umut Özkaleli & Ömür Yılmaz (2013): 'What Was My War Like?', International Feminist Journal of Politics, DOI: [10.1080/14616742.2013.833700](https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2013.833700)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2013.833700>

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'What Was My War Like?'

MISSING PAGES FROM THE GENDERED HISTORY OF WAR IN CYPRUS

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Abstract

This paper aims to uncover Turkish Cypriot women's war experiences and integrate that knowledge into the public discourse. We argue that the omission of women's war experiences thus far has served to sustain the mutually reinforcing alliance between patriarchy and nationalism, which we call patriarchal nationalism. Building on feminist standpoint theory, deconstruction of the official and hegemonic 'his'tory of war poses challenges to the stronghold of patriarchy and ethnic nationalism in society by engaging women in the re-construction of history. Narratives of twenty women from different regions and backgrounds revealed common experiences that have been systematically silenced, memories that have been socially forgotten but could not be erased despite the dominant discourse that has denied their existence for decades. These experiences defy images of the ethno-national Glorious Self, protected by heroic and righteous men, and the Villainous Other. They also identify types of insecurity and victimization that have been excluded from traditional, gendered definitions of security. As these narratives contest fundamental tenets of patriarchy and nationalism, their contributions to the reconstruction of 'reality' and history carry prospects for the transformation of both gender and ethnic relations.

Keywords

gender, memory, war history, Cyprus, women's narratives, security

He was living with *his child and wife* when *Rum*¹ soldiers attacked his house. *Rums* first shattered the entire door with guns and attempted to enter the house. The first *Rum* soldier was killed by him with a shotgun. But *Rum* soldiers managed to enter the house with the help of a hand grenade that they threw at the door, and they riddled this heroic man's entire body with machine guns (Serter 2001: 132; emphasis ours).

This is an excerpt from the *Cyprus History* textbook used by the public education system in Turkish Cypriot middle and high schools from the early 1970s to early 2000s. The story begins and ends with the man. What happened to the child and the woman? If they were killed, why was this not mentioned? If they survived, what would be their accounts of that day if asked? Why was their story not told? Their stories are certainly not the only ones left out of official history. Through a chance meeting, we learned that all women, children and elderly people in the Akdeniz village were held prisoners by Greek Cypriots for 28 days in 1974, which is nowhere to be found in recorded history. What were their war experiences like? Why have we not heard or read about this before? Are there some stories or certain groups whose experiences have been systematically silenced? Whose interests does this silencing serve? Women's war accounts provide important insights into these questions. They show that the systemic omission of women from the history of war serves to reinforce patriarchy, ethnic nationalism and a strong alliance between the two, which we call patriarchal nationalism. This type of nationbuilding reproduces at the community level the mechanisms of essentialist exclusion, hierarchy and denial of individual agency enforced by patriarchy in the family. Nationalism in turn feeds patriarchy by further justifying the subjugation of women with its glorification of group unity and loyalty at the expense of individual rights and autonomy, which is clearly reflected in the nationalist definitions and practices of security. Women's accounts pose a direct challenge to patriarchal nationalism by surfacing contradictions and tensions between patriarchy and nationalism within this alliance.

Annick Wibben states that 'the framing of events in a particular narrative always has implications for action because it includes and excludes options and actors, while also limiting what can be thought or said, thus eventually imposing silences' (2011: 3). The story of Akdeniz became an important point of departure for us to investigate through women's narratives how 'reality' and history of war have been constructed in the Turkish Cypriot community by privileging the experiences of some men while rendering the experiences of others invisible and non-existent. Women's 'situated knowledges' (Haraway 2004) led us to uncover the existence of alternative representations of reality (Jaggar 2004). This 'counterhistory' not only sheds light on women's war experiences that have been 'cast into the darkness' (Foucault 2003: 70) but can also change how we make sense of the present and envision the future since 'what we know about the past, and thus our understanding of the present, is shaped by the voices that speak to us out of history' (Hirsch and Smith 2002: 12).

Chris Coulter argues 'that to analyze women's position in and experience of a war-torn society provides new perspectives, new angles and produces new knowledge in an area that heretofore has been characterized by its male bias' (2009: 4). She also argues, and we concur, that 'one must go beyond the universalistic narrative of *women's* experience of war' (Coulter 2009: 5). However, although the women we talked to came from different geographic

areas, demographic and socio-economic conditions, some common themes emerged in all of the narratives that contradicted the official, hegemonic accounts of war. Women revealed experiences that were systematically silenced, memories that were socially forgotten but could not be erased in spite of a dominant discourse that has denied their existence for decades.

By exploring some of the common themes that emerged from women's narratives, the socially forgotten memories, we show how the political projects of nationalism and patriarchy shaped the social processes of remembering and forgetting in the Turkish Cypriot community about the war (McGranahan 2010).² Perpetuation of nationalist identity and the patriarchal order went hand-in-hand. The images of the Glorious Self, led and protected by heroic men, and the Villainous Other were created and reinforced by silencing women and burying their experiences of war into the darkness. While the official discourse excluded and suppressed women's accounts, women also made conscious choices to remain silent in many cases to protect themselves, their families and other women within the prevailing patriarchal system. Hence, women's silence cannot be correctly interpreted within strict boundaries of victimization or agency.

By drawing attention to women's narratives of war, we are challenging the writing of history, which has traditionally been a gendered enterprise. Wars and war 'his'tories become tools for perpetuating patriarchal and nationalist values, supporting what feminist scholars have identified as gendered projects of nationalism.³ Instead of showing that women, men and children all face war together, the dominant discourse on wars separates men and women into strict roles and into discrete areas of battlefield and 'safe' homes. Women are ascribed roles as 'supporting actors whose roles reflect masculinist notions of femininity and of women's proper "place"' (Nagel 1998: 243). This creates and promotes the dichotomy of man/protector/fighter vs. woman/protected/victim (Lee-Koo 2002). Similarly, the 'beautiful souls' narrative constructs women as naive, innocent, in need of male protection and absent from war (Sjoberg 2010), while the hegemonic masculinity image of men identifies them as heroes who save and protect women and children from ill faith by fighting and dying for them.⁴

Feminist scholars have examined how this patriarchal dichotomy informs definitions and practices of security (Stiehm 1982; Hansen 2000; Young 2005). This scholarship 'not only broaden[s] what is meant by security but also who merits security' (Sjoberg 2010: 4). Although wars are traditionally depicted as being fought to defend vulnerable populations such as women, children and the elderly, narrow definitions of national security ignore various security threats these groups face at times of war and even directly create 'self-perpetuating politics of producing danger in the name of security' (Stern 2005: 4; Wibben 2011). The protector alone gets to define threats to security and decide how to respond to them (Stern 2005; Wadley 2010; Wibben 2011). Security threats are recognized only if they come from the

Other; insecurities coming from the Self are silenced in the name of national security and unity (Hansen 2000).

We build on feminist standpoint theory⁵ to critically examine the power dynamics behind the production of knowledge and incorporate diverse experiences of women as an alternative source of knowledge that makes history. Our goal is to start 'insurrecting subjugated knowledges' which have so far been dismissed as 'naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity' (Foucault 2003: 9). These are knowledges based on experiences and memories that have been silenced and omitted in order to reinforce certain 'functional coherences', such as those embodied in patriarchal and nationalist ideologies (Foucault 2003: 7). This is also a political practice aimed at disrupting the disconnect 'between the upper echelons of power, where policies are formed, and the people on the ground, particularly women' (Noma 2007: 10), thereby challenging the hegemony of the guardians of nationalism and patriarchy in discourse, memory and history production.

THE CONTEXT AND 'FANTASIES'

The emergence of ethno-nationalism as a dominant ideology on the island of Cyprus is commonly traced back to the early twentieth century, with Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians adopting Greek national identity inspired by Greek Hellenism as a reaction to the British colonial rule and Turkish-speaking Muslims embracing Turkish national identity in response to the Greek mobilization for *Enosis*, uniting the island with Greece (Kızılyürek 2002; Anastasiou 2008; Bryant and Papadakis 2012). The island was immersed in communal violence between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots between 1958 and 1974. Tensions between the two communities started brewing in the 1950s during the struggle for independence by Greek Cypriots from the British colonial rule. Greek Cypriots established *EOKA* (National Organization of Cypriot Fighters) and started to fight for *Enosis*, to which Turkish Cypriots responded by mobilizing a counter paramilitary organization, *Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı* (TMT, the Turkish Resistance Organization), that would fight for *taksim* (partition) to unite a part of the island with Turkey. The Republic of Cyprus was established in 1960 following an agreement imposed by the United Kingdom, Turkey and Greece on the two main communities living on the island. The agreement secured sovereign bases for the UK and gave the three countries guarantorship. This partnership of Greek and Turkish Cypriots did not last long and intense communal fighting erupted at the end of 1963. In 1974, the military junta in Greece attempted to overthrow the government of the Republic of Cyprus (then controlled only by Greek Cypriots), causing chaos on the island. Arguing that the fighting was spreading to include Turkish Cypriots as targets and that the independence of the island was being threatened, Turkey used its guarantor status and launched military

operations on the island, securing *de facto* division of the island that lasts to this day.⁶ The estimated death toll from 1955 to 1974 is between 5,000 to 7,500 (Lacina and Gleditsch 2005), and there are 1,493 Greek Cypriots and 502 Turkish Cypriots that are officially reported as missing on an island where the population was 632,000 – 116,000 Turkish Cypriots and 499,000 Greek Cypriots – in 1974 (CMP 2006).⁷ There is limited information on the prevalence of sexual violence committed against women during the conflict. There are accounts and reports of Greek Cypriot women that were raped by Turkish soldiers (Agathangelou 2000) and a 1976 European Commission of Human Rights report⁸ includes a doctor's account of about 70 Greek Cypriot women having been raped. There are no such documented rape cases of Turkish Cypriot women.

The official discourses surrounding this period of conflict have created separate 'national fantasies' for the two communities on the island (Agathangelou 2000). While the Turkish Cypriot official discourse described the events of 1963 as 'the destruction of the 1960 Partnership Republic of Cyprus by the Greek Cypriot partner through force of arms' (North Cyprus Foreign Ministry n.d.), the Greek Cypriot official discourse described the breakup as 'tragic but isolated events ... utilised by the Turkish Cypriot nationalist leaders in their propaganda that the two communities could not live together' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus 2006). According to the latter, after 1963 'a large number of Turkish Cypriots withdrew into enclaves, partly as a consequence of the hostilities that had taken place but mostly due to the efforts of their nationalist leadership to enforce a de-facto partition of the island' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus 2006). The Turkish Cypriot discourse held that 'between 1963 and 1974, Turkish Cypriots outlived the agonies and losses of the Greek Cypriot armed attacks, were confined to small enclaves, and subjected to gross violations of human rights ... living under open air prison conditions' (North Cyprus Foreign Ministry n.d.). In describing the events of 1974, the Greek Cypriot discourse maintained that 'Turkey found the pretext to impose its partitionist plans against Cyprus following the coup of 15 July 1974 ... claiming to act under article 4 of the Treaty of Guarantee, the Turkish armed forces staged a full scale invasion against Cyprus' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus 2006). According to the Turkish Cypriot discourse, however, 'the Turkish Peace Forces in Cyprus were dispatched to the island in 1974 in accordance with the rights and obligations of Turkey arising from the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee, in order to prevent the annexation of the island to Greece in the wake of a bloody coup d'état by the Greek Junta' (North Cyprus Foreign Ministry n.d.). Loss of lives, displacements and missing persons from the side of the Other are mostly omitted in both discourses. Almost 40 years after the war, these competing, blame-generating discourses seem to have consolidated the intractability of the conflict. While the Republic of Cyprus joined the European Union in 2004, the northern part of the island remains under the *de facto* control of Turkey and isolated from the rest of the world.

The creation and perpetuation of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot nationalisms were shaped by the patriarchal systems from which they originated. One of the foundations of patriarchy, the victim–protector dichotomy, formed the basis of these nationalist constructions. While Greek Cypriots, who perceived and depicted themselves as victims of British colonialism, identified with Hellenism and Greece as their savior, Turkish Cypriots identified with Turkish nationalism and appealed to Turkey to save them from Greek Cypriot Hellenism. Some contemporary historical accounts and leftist public discourses in both communities have begun to criticize ‘motherlands’, their self-interested policies and the hierarchical relationship. All of these ‘alternative’ accounts, however, continue to place Cypriot communities in the ‘victim’ seat, rarely positioning them as either survivors or agents with accountability, choice or will to change existing structures. Greek Cypriots, now seeing themselves as victims of Turkish occupation, appealed to the EU as their new savior, while many Turkish Cypriots (mainly left) also identified the EU as a savior from the Turkish occupation and the post-1974 isolation. This continuing emphasis on victimization and the persistent refusal to acknowledge women’s war experiences of agency and victimization are reflections of the patriarchal value systems that have shaped ethno-nationalisms on the island.

RECOVERING MEMORIES AND SITUATED KNOWLEDGES

We were both raised in the north of Cyprus, and both had internally displaced parents whose roots were from the Turkish-speaking Cypriot communities living in the south. We both left Cyprus for higher education and found our way back to the island as formally educated women who are critical towards nationalism, patriarchy, militarism, racism and hetero/sexism. The women we talked to for this research had no prior knowledge of our political views in general or about the Cyprus conflict in particular. During the interviews we paid special attention not to reflect in any way, verbally or otherwise, our critical stance towards nationalism and our views about the Cyprus conflict.

We employed compassionate and empathic listening; we had the mindset and focus to open a space, cognitively and emotionally, to women’s experiences. Whatever they conveyed to us, we regarded them as ‘truth narratives’, as expressions of ‘what people understand from their own realities’ (Porter 2007: 21). We recognize ‘the unavailability of the original experience and the fragmentary and mediated nature of the reconstruction’ (Hirsch and Smith 2002: 9). Yet, it is these ‘realities’ that influence women’s perceptions of the present in relation to their past (Connerton 1989; Hirsch and Smith 2002).

We conducted interviews with twenty women between January and May 2012. None of the women we interviewed were close friends or relatives of either of us. We consciously aimed to move away from our family and

friends in case there were memories that those women did not want to share within their close circles. Interviews mostly took place in women's homes. The interview process was friendly, as they felt comfortable in their homes and perceived us as 'young women', giving us friendly advice about marriage, love and generally about life throughout the interviews. As seniority in terms of age is a significant determinant of hierarchy in the Turkish Cypriot culture, this age difference helped to minimize the problem of power asymmetry between us and the women we interviewed (Tickner 2005). Consequently, we did not observe any signs of women trying to shape their responses according to what they might have perceived our expectations to be.

We aimed to talk to women from different regions of Cyprus and reached women from seven different districts through referrals of women whom we knew and our interviewees trusted. Women whom we interviewed came from locations where intense conflict happened and/or where women became war prisoners. It has to be noted that 'war prisoner' was defined differently by women who came from different regions. For example, in Limassol, where women witnessed men being held in a football field for weeks, they did not consider themselves as war prisoners when they were held in the local school or hospital. In Akdeniz, on the other hand, women identified the situation they were in as being war prisoners. We are considering eight women as war prisoners (POW) based on their self-identification. Eight out of twenty women were internally displaced due to war. One of the interviewees was from Guzelyurt/Lefke (Morphou) region, five from Kyrenia district, three from Famagusta district, three from Nicosia district, one from Larnaca district, five from Limassol district and two from Paphos district (one left for Limassol after 1963). The oldest woman we interviewed was born in 1919 and the youngest was born in 1958. The average age of women during the conflicts was 27. During these periods, three of them were engaged, seven were single and eight were married. Of the married women, five had children. One was divorced and one was widowed during the war and also had children. Two of the women were health care professionals, six were farmers, five were students and the remaining seven were homemakers. Four of these women had functioned as paramilitary aids with the duties of hiding guns, carrying messages through checkpoints, cooking and sewing military outfits for *mücahids* (TMT fighters). Nine have close family members who either remain missing or were killed during the conflict. We mostly aimed to talk to women who have not been asked about their war experiences before and, more importantly, to women who have not been engaged in any political groups in the Turkish Cypriot community.⁹

Feminist methodologists argue that traditional science asks questions and gathers information from the perspectives of the privileged (Sprague 2005). While women in general are not recognized as sources of knowledge, women who are not politically involved are even further removed from knowledge and discourse production. Hence, we had a conscious aim to engage these

women in the reconstruction of historical knowledge. We use pseudonyms for women's names because they preferred to remain anonymous.

In our initial contacts we told women that the subject of our interview would be the conflict. We started our conversations by asking women generally about their memories and their lives, not mentioning war in particular. When they started recounting their war memories, we asked them to elaborate using the following questions if necessary: What was their relationship like with Greek Cypriots? When and how had they first heard about TMT? Did they know of any cases of violence against women during the conflict? If they were originally from the south, under what circumstances did they flee their homes? Some women talked only about 1963 or 1967,¹⁰ some only talked about 1974 and some talked about both of these distinct historical moments in Cyprus history depending on how much they experienced war during these times.

We see interviewers and interviewees in interaction with each other, and treat interviewing as a process of knowledge construction, a 'twice-behaved behavior' (Schechner 1985 in Hirsch and Smith 2002: 9), where meaning 'is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter' (Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 4). Hence, rather than try to extract answers from the interviewees, we aimed to 'uncover subjective meanings', which led us to avoid strictly structured interviews (Holstein and Gubrium 1995: 7). Instead, we had open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews, which allow 'free interaction between researcher[s] and interviewee' (Reinharz 1992: 18). Because we believe that 'meaning [depends] upon how we connect the actions and the context' (Feldman 1995: 11), starting interviews as conversations about women's past memories, including their childhood, allowed us to contextualize and locate them as subjects. Seeing women in both past and present contexts, we moved from the premise that the existing dominant ideologies, in this case patriarchy and nationalism, 'impose[d] limits on what can and cannot be said' (Feldman 1995: 51). As a result, we paid special attention to strategies of deconstruction (Manning 1992 in Feldman 1995), particularly to silences, whispers, gaps, laughter and commonly emerging descriptors or words.

It is important to note that a deep 'fear of rape' emerged in the very first interview and was echoed in all subsequent interviews. This led us to inquire further about this fear and ask more directly about known cases of wartime rape. The silencing of rape and the prevalent fear of rape will be explored further in a different study.¹¹

WHAT WAS WAR LIKE FOR TURKISH CYPRIOT WOMEN?

Women's war narratives deviated from the official discourse in significant ways. The official Turkish Cypriot accounts describe the war as being fought by heroic and righteous men, who had their hearts and faith even when they

had no guns, and fought to protect their ancestral lands, honor and their community against Greek Cypriots at all costs. A Turkish Cypriot middle-school textbook authored by Serter (2001) used for over 30 years describes only combatant men as having been at the receiving end of security threats, listing 'martyr' names page after page with no mention of civilian casualties or insecurities faced by civilians left behind in supposedly safe homes (Serter 2001: 124–41). Women's narratives we have collected revealed that this limited notion of security and the policies that resulted did not necessarily protect women, children and other non-combatants; to the contrary, in some instances they created insecurities that are concealed in the official discourse. Women's narratives also revealed various threats to their security that came not from the ethnic Other, Greek Cypriots, but from men in their own community. The resurrection of these socially 'forgotten' memories from the dark, therefore, challenges the prevailing notions of nationalism, security and hence the hegemonic discourse production of patriarchal nationalism.

The war experience of women in Akdeniz, a small remote village along the northwestern coast of the island, is a striking example of the safety and survival of women and children being jeopardized by prioritizing the security of men as the protectors of the nation. According to the narratives of five women from Akdeniz, ranging in age from 18 to 29 at the time of the war in 1974, men collected their guns and fled to the mountains once they received information that Greek Cypriot forces were approaching. Some women expressed their belief that if the men had been found along with them in the village, Greek Cypriots would have massacred them all. However, with men gone, women, children and the elderly were all taken as prisoners of war, their imprisonment lasting 28 days in harsh conditions, with fear and deprivation threatening their everyday survival. Women's narratives show how they faced serious threats to their security as well as that of their children. Seval recounted:

They separated the young and the elderly. They wanted to take Mustafa [my nephew] as well. He was seven, they were saying he is fifteen. I held him between my legs, I would not leave him. They were tugging, I was tugging. I said 'I am not going to let him go, if you are going to shoot, shoot us both, I am not going to give him to you'.

Ayten recalled how her son and her motherhood were attacked:

One day *Rumcuk*¹² came and took him [my infant son] from my arms. He hit my breast. I was breast-feeding my son then. He said, 'If we leave him, he will grow up and kill us too'. Kill them? A child that small . . .

While Turkish Cypriot men trivialized the security threats that endangered the women and children they left behind, Greek Cypriot men perceived all males and only males, including young boys, as threats to their security.

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These are two sides of the same coin – essentialist patriarchal construction of security. As Christine Sylvester argues, this conceptualization of security does not see ‘war as an experience of the body’ and excludes violations of ‘freedom from fear, want, and dread’ as sources of insecurity (2010: 24–5). Fear of war rape is a key example.

Constant fear of rape appeared prominently in the narratives of all women from Akdeniz. Always under the scrutiny of armed men, some days they were kept together in a small community building; some days they were allowed to go back to their homes temporarily, mostly to clean up. In the words of one participant, Seval:

I was always telling my sisters to have knives with them. I was engaged then. If they try to take you, if they try to do something to you, hold the knife up like this and lie on it [showing with hand gestures how the self-stabbing would occur], if you can't bear to just kill yourself. *We'd be better off dying Turk than becoming Rum.* (emphasis in her tone)

The women's narratives illuminate the real security threats, emotional and physical, that they endured on a daily basis for 28 days in 1974. The fact that the story of Akdeniz is completely missing from written history is not a coincidence. These narratives directly challenge hegemonic notions of security, which restricts the definitions of threats to security only to physical threats faced by combatants. They also challenge patriarchal nationalisms, which depict heroic men as putting themselves under constant danger for the protection of women and children who are supposedly distant from the battlefield.

One of the ways patriarchal nationalism justifies the exclusion of women from considerations of security is by assuming a distinct line between home and the battlefield. As Wibben states, ‘given the nature of war, especially protracted war, unconventional battlefields and the high numbers of civilian casualties, frontlines have shifted in conventional understandings’ (2011: 164). As seen in the example of Akdeniz, homes can be invaded and civilians can become direct targets of violence. As the following narratives illustrate, this was not specific only to Akdeniz. Even when their homes were safe from attack, women had to venture out into the combatants' battlefield. We heard a number of stories of women violating curfews, restricted areas and orders of their captors for their children's well-being. When we asked Halime what she remembered from the war, the first thing that came to her mind was the ordeal of taking her sick 6-month-old son to the nearest hospital in a nearby city in 1965, occupied by Greek Cypriot forces. She persuaded a man driving a bread delivery vehicle to take her along:

The doctor said ‘You risked your life to bring this baby here. You could have had other children later’. And he was a doctor, imagine. ‘You came with this baker. Were you not afraid to drive through the city?’ I told him that I was not. And I really was not. Or maybe because the baby was so sick.

As we can see in this example, this imaginary line between home and the battlefield also renders invisible various forms of structural violence women had to endure because of the war. Women had to deal with hunger, disease and poverty alone, all of which were exacerbated because of the war. Sevgi, then a newly married 23-year-old living in the village of Serdarli/Catoz, described how she had to open her house to refugees from surrounding villages when she herself had trouble finding food to eat: 'We had to go through severe hunger for 25 days . . . we did not even have flour . . . How many people could I fit in this yard? Where would they sleep? We had no bread, nothing to eat'. The 'no flour' trauma appeared in other narratives as well. Pervin remembered how women in her village started yelling out in excitement and running towards a United Nations truck with 'UN' imprinted on it, which also happens to be the Turkish word for flour. They were disappointed to find out that the truck was not there to bring them flour.

A common theme that emerged in women's accounts of the war was the use of homes by men as meeting venues for military strategizing and for hiding guns, which in itself militarized homes, making them part of the battlefield. Pervin remembered:

Some nights my father would tell my mother that she should take us all to visit someone so we would not be home. When we come back, it would be apparent that there had been a big group there, a lot of cigarette butts around. He eventually had to tell my mother what was going on.

In Ayten's case, the use of her home to store guns led to repeated invasions after Greek Cypriots took control of the village:

They found my husband's gun in the house. The cartridge belt was there, the gun wasn't. They had hidden it under the rocks. They were looking for it, breaking in everyday, they wouldn't leave any clothes in the wardrobes. We were coming home some days, putting the clothes back in the wardrobes, going back to my sister's house where we were staying all together, and when we come back the next day to get clothes for the kids, we would again find them all on the floor, the whole house in shambles . . . One day, a *Rumcuk* came and threw a bomb at our house. It hit the door and fell in front. If it had gotten inside, we all would have been burnt, we would have died. I was sitting by the door, others were injured.

As communities in protracted conflicts become so militarized that they start to define their security or well-being on 'imagin[ed] military needs and militaristic presumptions', women and children can be willfully put in danger in the name of national security (Enloe 2000: 3). Women's narratives reveal what appears to be an internal contradiction within the security definition of the nationalist discourse, as in some cases 'heroic protectors' expect women and children to put themselves in danger for the sake of national security. It appears in Pervin's story that women's involvement was sought by men

in particularly dangerous and crucial missions. She recounted many such fearful memories of involvement, which at the age of 60 still continues to haunt her. During 1964–7, when she was a teenager, her village was under siege and she had to pass through checkpoints, interrogations and searches every day to get to her school in a nearby town. When communication between men in the village and the outside armed forces became difficult, she started shuttling notes in and out of the village, hidden inside the waistband of her underwear, her mother preparing her for the mission and her father driving the bus to pass through the checkpoints:

One day . . . they stopped the bus at the checkpoint . . . After searching men for a while, they told everyone to get back on the bus. When I got on the bus and my eyes met with those of a baby, I smiled with relief. Apparently the soldiers saw this. They said to my father ‘your daughter has smiled’ and ordered everyone to get back off the bus. They called in a female combatant to search women and children, a big woman. She took us into the barracks and told us to take our clothes off. I had no choice. I did. Fortunately, she still could not find the note, but my relief was short-lived. As soon as we got back on the bus, I had to face my dad’s scolding: ‘Did you have to smile?!’

In some cases women faced direct danger in order to protect the men. Fezile was 15 when the war broke out in 1963 and the roads from her village to Nicosia, where her fiancé was stationed as a police officer, were closed. She accepted the offer of a friend and his fiancée to accompany her to Nicosia. Shortly after they set off, they saw armed men with heavy artillery in the street. The male friend took out a gun and told his fiancée to hide it in her bra. When they reached the roadblock, armed men searched the male friend and called in a female police officer to take the women into a nearby police station:

She took us inside and had us undressed. After leaving us bare-naked, they searched us thoroughly. When they found the gun, we only had our panties on, and more and more *Rums* started coming in . . . They then took us to *Ískele* police station. They placed us in separate small cells next to each other.

She seemed to relive the agony and fear as she recounted how she was too scared to ask to use the bathroom outside as ‘men with guns would be watching us and yelling “You Turks, dogs! We will kill you all, we will cut you up!”’ and chose most of the time to relieve herself in the bed. It would be 37 days before they were set free, during which they had no communication with the outside.

Prioritizing men’s security over that of women and children was not restricted to isolated cases; in fact, it was systematic. Fikriye told us one of her earliest memories was from the late 1950s, when she observed women walking against British soldiers holding sharp-edged metal bars cut from the

mosque fence: 'Of course they put women forward, men never were seen, you know, so British could not do anything to them. It was always women who were demonstrating'.

Perhaps the most striking example of official policy was POW exchange deals negotiated by community leaders in 1974. Not only did men flee their villages or neighborhoods when Greek Cypriots closed in during the war, but POW exchange deals between the two sides following the ceasefire also gave male prisoners priority over the safety of women and children. When an area was taken over, men and women (often grouped with children and the elderly) were typically held separately as POWs. In many cases we heard, while men's exchange or return to the 'liberated' north was negotiated and arranged safely, women were left behind in their neighborhoods or villages occupied by the 'enemy'. Women watched as their husbands, fathers and brothers were loaded on buses and taken to safety. Women had to individually seek and utilize potentially dangerous and arduous ways to get to the north. For some women this took months, for others years. Official history avoids this 'detail'. Below is Feride's account of the untold story of women fleeing from the Greek Cypriot controlled south without any male or military 'protection':

They captured us . . . Only women and old people were left behind . . . The men stayed prisoner for 41 days. After that, our Grandfather Denктаs, may he rest in peace, took the POWs to the north . . . we [Feride and her children] stayed in the south for two more years. I tried to flee a few times, but they captured me, how could I run with five children? . . . At the end of two years, I had to leave three of my youngest children behind and walk for two nights and three days from the mountains with two of my children.

After the men were already transferred to the north, some women had to walk difficult terrains and long distances to reach safety; some had to arrange and trust strangers to drive them to the north, and some were eventually flown to Turkey and back to the northern part of Cyprus. In 84-year-old Yelda's narrative, the dangerous nature of women's ordeals of finding ways to get to the north is apparent. She describes how one woman's husband was already in safety when the woman was slaughtered with her children while trying to flee to reunite with him in the north:

Family arranged a car for the woman, her two children and neighbor's daughter to cross [to the north]. She was assured that this person took another family safely to the north. Her husband was already on this side [north], he had fled and come to this side. The driver took her to the Greek regiment. Terrible. They both got it [raped] and they slaughtered them all.

While excluding women from considerations of security by drawing an arbitrary line between safe homes and dangerous battlefields, patriarchal

nationalism also denies recognition to security threats by powerful men directed towards less powerful individuals within their own community. It creates and reinforces a strict line between the ethnic Self and the Other, considering only threats coming from the Other as legitimate and worthy of response. Women's narratives, on the other hand, uncovered various stories of corruption, sexual harassment, rape and extra-judicial killings committed by high-ranked Turkish and Turkish Cypriot military officers against the Turkish Cypriot community both during and right after the war. Yelda, who worked as a tailor for the TMT, recounted many memories of arbitrary seizures of property and money and extra-judicial killings committed by the TMT against Turkish Cypriots, some of which she had seen in person and others she had heard of: 'The TMT was never good to anyone. Maybe the good men in it did not know. They instilled so much fear, especially at night ... This TMT has done a lot, not to the *Rums*, but to its own people'. Although Yelda did not talk about rape specifically, she told us stories of high-ranked TMT officers sending certain soldiers away to guard duty so that they could 'spend time' with these soldiers' wives. She was hesitant to comment explicitly on whether or not women were involved in these relationships voluntarily.

Sevda and Fikriye, who lived in Greek Cypriot-controlled Limassol until after 1974, told us similar stories: 'They were sending men to guard duty for sixteen hours instead of eight. How could they say "no, I will not stay"?' commented Sevda. Fikriye recounted two specific stories involving high-ranked military officers:

The man they sent there [Limassol district] was crazy. He would blow a whistle, say there is a security risk and send all the men to guard duty. He had arranged a woman to be with when men were away. The locals eventually figured it out. Through word of mouth, they all came together. They went to his door, they were not afraid anymore, yelling 'come out, we are going to kill you, this is honor!' His men called the headquarters in Nicosia. A helicopter came from the headquarters for him and he fled from the back. They saved him from lynching. Afterwards they rounded up all the leaders of this rebellion and took them to the headquarters in Nicosia. They kept three of the young men locked up for days. I know two of them, they are around here. The third one they found the day after they were released under an overturned tractor in a river. They killed him and threw him away. 20 July 1974 just erupted around then, otherwise they would have taken care of the other two as well. So, if you rebelled, if you raised your voice, they certainly took care of you.

A similar story was from the district of Larnaca:

They say she was a very beautiful woman. She was newly married. He went and raped the girl. She was screaming, everybody heard but nobody dared to say anything. But her husband did not stay silent. He got a gun and shot him in the forehead. He killed him but they invented a cover up story. They said he was killed by a *Rum* during combat and flew his body to Turkey.

These kinds of cover-ups and the total omission of these stories from official history afterwards served to free intra-communal perpetrators from accountability and reproduce the image of heroic, self-sacrificing men of the Self.¹³ Protecting this image required suppression of real physical and emotional insecurities caused by powerful men against their own community. In some cases it even legitimized creating insecurity for the sake of national unity and security. Fezile, who identified her husband as one of the hit men employed by the TMT against Turkish Cypriots labeled as ‘traitors’, said: ‘If you said anything to anyone, they immediately made you disappear. How many Turkish Cypriots disappeared that way!’ Talking about the father of someone she knew, Fikriye recounted how an innocent non-combatant was murdered by his ‘protectors’ to strengthen a false sense of national unity by reinforcing the villainous image of the Other:

He was working in the fields. There were no martyrs yet from that village. They had been in combat but nobody got killed. So they killed him in the field and said he was killed by a *Rum*. They buried him and they have been commemorating him every year ever since. Of course people do not talk because they are afraid.

Women’s war narratives pose challenges to both sides of the Glorious Self/Villainous Other dichotomy. They surface not only insecurities caused by members of their own community, but also examples of compassion and solidarity from the Other. Now in her mid-sixties, Feride told us that a Greek Cypriot couple saved her son without expecting any favors in return for bringing her baby boy home. The Greek Cypriot man who saved her son did not allow Feride and her family to tell the story to his daughters years later when the two families met after the opening of the Green Line for crossings between the two sides. For forty years, husband and wife together hid the fact that they had saved a Turkish Cypriot baby boy and had reunited him with his parents. Feride, a hard-line nationalist herself, believed he hid ‘what he had done’ [saving the boy] because he was a strongly nationalist man and he did not want his image to be ‘damaged’. Still, it did not stop him from wanting to meet the child whom he had saved; he hugged him and was delighted to see him as a grown man.

REINTERPRETING THE PAST, ENVISIONING AN ALTERNATIVE FUTURE

This article is an initial attempt to uncover women’s silenced experiences and forgotten memories about the war in Cyprus. Women’s war narratives from north Cyprus reveal how war history has been based on, and has reinforced, a selective and gendered memory of events. In some cases, women’s accounts highlight events and relationships that have been strategically omitted from history. In others, they directly contest official and hegemonic accounts, which both reflected and reproduced the interests of those in power at the

time, mainly military power embodied within the TMT which excluded women and involved all able-bodied young and adult males in the community to some degree. The result has been the establishment of one account of war, as the 'reality' about the war, which serves patriarchy and nationalism. This 'reality' and the images that support it have been fiercely guarded by those who constructed them and whose interests they continue to serve. Women's war narratives we collected, however, clearly defy the images of the ethno-nationalist Self as a heroic, virtuous, unitary actor on the one hand, and the brutal, murderous, evil Other on the other hand. They also surface different ways of victimization, insecurities, agency and struggles, which have been systematically suppressed in the hegemonic war discourse.

Documenting and integrating women's war narratives into the public discourse is a highly political and oppositional endeavor. As their narratives contest fundamental tenets of patriarchy and nationalism, their contributions to the deconstruction of 'reality' and history create prospects for the transformation of both gender and ethnic relations. Reengaging women in knowledge and history production transforms women from being objects of knowledge to being direct subjects of knowledge production. It carries the potential for shaking the foundations of status quo, for reinterpreting the past and for considering new possibilities for the future. As 'alternative' historical accounts of the war start emerging, breaking the mutually-reinforcing alliance between patriarchy and nationalism requires that women also take the stage in recounting their experiences and memories. Any attempt at reconciliation and sustainable peace that does not attempt to integrate women's war experiences would fall short in terms of deconstructing ethno-nationalist fantasies and polarizing images of the Self and the Other.

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Notes

- 1 *Rum* is the Turkish word that refers to Greek Cypriots as an ethnic group.
- 2 In this paper we are focusing on the Turkish Cypriot community and avoid generalizing Greek Cypriot experience without comparable research.

- 3 See Enloe (1989), Yuval-Davis (1997), Nagel (1998), Altınay (2004) and Kaufman and Williams (2004).
- 4 See Enloe (1989), Connel and Messerschmidt (2005), Elshtain (1987) and Sjoberg (2010).
- 5 See Hartsock (1983), Collins (1990), Enloe (2000), Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis (2002), Haraway (2004), Harding (2004), Jaggar (2004) and Cockburn (2010).
- 6 For extensive analysis of Cyprus case and identity issues see Ozveren (2002/2003), Lacher and Kaymak (2005) and Diez (2002).
- 7 CMP stands for the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus.
- 8 <http://cyprus-conflict.org/materials/echr/page12.html>
- 9 For a detailed account on women's political engagement for peace and standpoints of Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot women involved in bi-communal peace initiatives, see Cockburn (2004).
- 10 Violence and economic restrictions against Turkish Cypriot enclaves had intensified in 1967.
- 11 Cockburn (2004) also mentions fear of rape among Turkish Cypriot women.
- 12 The suffix *-cuk/-cik* is widely used as a sign of endearment and empathy in the Turkish Cypriot dialect. For example, *bebek* means baby and as an endearment people use *bebecik*.
- 13 In a book published in 2012, a Turkish-Cypriot retired military officer suggests the two high-ranked military officers mentioned in the two stories above to be the same person, dismisses one of the incidents as 'untrue' and cites a different incident (one that involves an argument between this commander and Turkish Cypriot men, who were furious with this 'outsider's' treatment of a local, drunk man) as leading up to the killing (Sadrazam 2012: 477).

Acknowledgments

The first product of this research was presented at the Gendered Memories of War & Political Violence Conference held by Central European University-Sabancı University Joint Initiative in Istanbul in May 2012. We thank Aysegul Altınay and Andrea Peto for the opportunity to present our work at this venue. We thank Cynthia Enloe for her encouragement to further pursue this research when we shared our initial findings with her in Istanbul. We would also like to thank two anonymous reviewers and editors of *IFJP* for their very constructive and helpful comments.

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