

From Heroines to Hyenas: The Civil War, 1946–49

5.1 Introduction

As the previous chapter argued, EAM's importance lay in its parallel function as a social movement that sought to transform national socio-political culture according to the standards of Western modernity. As such, the mass mobilisation and participation of Greek women in all facets of the national liberation project ushered in new possibilities for women's citizenship and gender politics in Greece. With liberation in 1944, great promise for lasting social change held sway, and few predicted the tragedy that was to unfold over the next four years.

1

How did the Civil War, and the attendant cultural turbulence, affect notions of social justice and gender equality established on a mass scale during the Resistance? Was the experience of the partisan women fighters of the Civil War seamlessly linked to that of the EAM-ELAS women fighters? How does the experience of the female partisan fighters of the Civil War inform our understanding of the relationship between nationalism and emancipatory politics, or feminism, which are questions pertinent to this book?

2

Put simply, the Civil War was the culmination of escalating tensions between left and right during the Axis occupation, complicated further by foreign intervention in the context of emergent Cold War politics. At another level, it was underpinned by the clash between Greek traditionalists and progressives, between those hostile to EAM's socio-economic reforms and those who were its greatest beneficiaries. Officially, the Civil War began in 1946 and ended in 1949 with the defeat of the partisans on the northern Macedonian mountains of Grammos and Vitsi. By its close, the combined effects of the German occupation and the Civil War had left the country in ruins. Svoronos (1976: 145) estimates that, by 1949, human losses approached 8 percent of the population, while agricultural production fell by more than 70 percent, and shipping capacity dropped by 73 percent. Indeed, the country's infrastructure was almost totally destroyed. Some 1,000 villages had been razed to the ground, the national currency collapsed as inflation spiralled out of control, and, perhaps most significantly, wholesale internal migration to the cities and external migration to other countries (primarily to Australia, Germany, the USA, and Canada) followed. The Civil War thus deepened the wounds of an already traumatised nation, and remains the single most influential conflict of the twentieth century for Greek politics and society. For, while other occupied nations of Europe spent the latter half of the 1940s repairing the damage of war, Greece (which had suffered more than many during the occupation)¹ embarked upon a new, more complex conflict, which violently divided and often decimated whole families.

3

From this author's perspective, there is one important and controversial dimension of the Civil War which has nevertheless received scant scholarly attention. Namely, the striking quantitative increase in women's armed participation in the reconstituted partisan army—the

4

Dimokratikos Stratos Elladas (Democratic Army of Greece; DSE hereafter). Why was this so? Was it not paradoxical that the number of women fighters rose within an army whose leadership, ostensibly, ordered the transition from a guerrilla force to a regular army? This curiosity is prompted by the well-worn observation that, historically, the transition from guerrilla to regular army organisation has been synonymous with the withdrawal of female forces from the combat zones, and thus with the abandonment of a key aspect of the revolutionary character of such populist movements, as for example, in the case of the Spanish Civil War.

In the DSE, the number of women fighters was consistently estimated, across a wide range of sources, to lie between 20 percent and 30 percent of total DSE forces at any given time; even during the last and most intense phase of the conflict in the Grammos and Vitsi mountain ranges.² None of the numerous restructuring phases resulted in a significant shift in these figures. Moreover, sources show that DSE women in fighting units did undertake combat roles and handled most, if not all, available weaponry. 5

In the first part of this chapter, I investigate the structural and personal reasons which underpinned this uncannily high representation of women in the DSE, in spite of the public outcry inspired by them as well as significant pockets of continued male resistance within the DSE itself, varying in magnitude across regions and brigades. My emphasis on partisan women's own perspectives of the war and their role in it is intended to complicate the prevailing view that links women's participation almost exclusively to KKE pragmatism.³ 6

Historically, the symbolic significance of women-in-arms lay in its rich potential for political manipulation by (predominantly male) leaderships. To use the example of the Spanish Civil War once again, for its comparative likeness to the Greek Civil War in numerous ways, Mary Nash (1989) has argued that, for the strategists of the partisan Popular Front, the symbolic value of the *miliciana* was in her propaganda potential—as a symbol of revolutionary virtue.⁴ This type of symbolic exploitation, which in a certain way undermined the authority and legacy of the *miliciana*, does not, however, cancel out the historical validity of her own perspective. Additionally, the acts of individuals transcend structural designs and constraints, that is, they retain a level of autonomy within the chaotic context of war, especially in a ferocious and prolonged civil war in which, as Van Boeschoten (1997: 177) has noted in the Greek case, people are often left to their own devices. Likewise, my focus will not be on the 'novelty' value of the *adartissa*, especially as this was less applicable to the Civil War than it was perhaps to the Resistance, but on the rich history of Greek partisan women's own rationale for involvement, their experiences in battle, and the specific problems they encountered. 7

The second part of this chapter is dedicated to the history of female warrior symbolism—the symbol of the *adartissa*. Far from embodying a symbolic novelty, the *adartissa* acquired a symbolic significance which reflected the volatile and polarised discursive environment of the Civil War. The war that raged on a symbolic level was a rich and crucial dimension of the Civil War and as such warrants separate attention, in which I will bring to the surface the two dominant competing visions of Greek society and national identity, refracted through two 8

opposing narratives of the *adartissa*. On the one side, there was the rhetoric of the KKE/DSE, which eulogised women warriors, and on the other, the increasingly powerful countermovement that dehumanised them. Somewhere in between lay the women fighters' own aspirations, perceptions, and interests, and this chapter endeavours to shed some light on this dimension. The task is arduous given the fate of the partisan movement—the ultimate defeat, heavy losses in battle, exile, and the customary unwillingness of many surviving participants to talk openly about the Civil War. But my hope is that by the chapter's end, the reader will see the *adartissa* as more than an allegory or a desperate solution to a military crisis.

The emphasis on the DSE women seeks to complement the work of Hart, Vervenioti, and Van Boeschoten, and also to challenge their collective assessment that the only period of transformative significance to women's political identities was the Resistance movement, which initially mobilised them (1941–44), but whose vast social gains were jeopardised by the ensuing political backlash and the Civil War itself. However, I shall try to convey that precisely because the Civil War was distinctively brutal, traumatic, and disruptive, for partisan communities it also constituted a crucial if unrecognised milestone in the trajectory of gender politics, as women and men fought side by side and gave and lost as much as the other. Finally, this chapter's gender perspective of the Civil War best exemplifies the central premise of this book that when emancipatory political projects, especially feminism, are linked to nationalist logic, those links are fundamentally unstable. An important aspect of Greek nationalism in the post-war decades, during which pre-war political elites resumed power in Greece, was a virulent social conservatism that seemed to represent a deliberate counterdiscourse to the social order envisaged and to some extent realized by EAM, which had so antagonised traditionalists. The figure most heavily targeted in countermovement tirades against the EAM project, and who seemed to embody its worst excesses, was the *adartissa*. The systematic demonisation of partisan women during and after the Civil War, in a sense, foregrounded the limits of post-war Greek society for women. It was not until the collapse of the Civil War state, with the fall of the last military dictatorship in July 1974, that a new era of progressive gender politics would flourish in Greece.

9

5.2 Women in the Democratic Army of Greece

As in the Resistance, women in the DSE also demonstrated that they were excellent organisers, mobilisers, logistics and financial managers, as well as administrators of the areas under partisan control. The most striking difference was that the women of the DSE comprised a significant proportion of its fighters. Historiographically, the dominant interpretations of women's armed participation has reflected, and fallen prey to, the oversimplifications characteristic of Cold War historical analysis. On the one hand, the *adartissa* of partisan literature is a glorified romantic figure whose purpose is to endow the movement with an air of moral superiority. On the other hand, opposing narratives speak of the DSE woman as the

10

outcome of forcible 'abduction', or an anomaly occasioned by the destabilisation of the social order. The experience of DSE women is located somewhere in between these extreme and simplistic portrayals.

The political polarisation which led to war can be traced back at least to the critical interim period between the Dekemvriana (December Events)⁵ of 1944 and the Varkiza Treaty of May 1945.⁶ The latter was effectively a disarmament treaty, whereby EAM- ELAS would surrender their weapons, in exchange for the British promise of free and fair elections—a promise that was unfulfilled. Instead, the post-Varkiza period was marked by British army efforts to counter EAM's popularity and to establish an alternative government. The anti-EAM alliance under construction relied on a nucleus of collaborators and pre-war political parties whose inertia during the Resistance had discredited them in the eyes of the general public but who now acquired a new legitimacy through the unequivocal support of Winston Churchill and the British Army commanders on the ground. Fear spread rapidly across urban and, in particular, rural Greece, as violence unleashed by police and paramilitary forces terrorised the countryside unchecked, and the re-establishment in Athens of a conservative government saw the enforcement of legal measures⁷ which facilitated the mass imprisonment and exile of leftists in the cities. The treaty was therefore an effective device for the systematisation of a multifaceted backlash⁸ against the unarmed partisan movement. As Hart (1996: 238) notes, these measures were '... aligned with a now, deeply divided reactionary culture, which added moral insinuation and a politics of shame'. This set the Civil War well apart from the relatively united and hence uncomplicated phase of the anti-Axis struggle. Sultana Boubari, a former DSE fighter from rural northern Greece, recalls the violence perpetrated across the countryside during this period: 'Any women who happened to be passing by could get beaten. We got up and left. What else could we do? We joined the partisan army [the DSE]. I joined my husband. I believed in their struggle' (*The Hidden War*, a BBC Television/Channel 4 Documentary, 1986).

The cumulative effects of the chaos unleashed after the Varkiza Treaty led to a regrouping of partisan forces, albeit markedly diminished in number. But in the place of the political pluralism of EAM-ELAS, the dissolution of the EAM coalition after Varkiza signalled the absolute dominance of KKE in the DSE. In this sense, the DSE was effectively KKE's military arm.

The DSE was formed in the mountains of northern Greece in October 1946, and this was followed shortly by the formation of the Provisional Democratic Government (Proisorini Dimokratiki Kyvernisi) in the same region. Initially conceived as a defence force of the persecuted ELAS partisans, the decision to enter the offensive phase and to redefine the DSE as a regular army was not taken until September 1947, due to an acute ambivalence by the KKE/DSE leadership on the question of embarking on a full-fledged military campaign. By this stage, the partisan mission had shifted from popular defence to recapturing the influence which EAM-ELAS enjoyed during the Resistance; the ultimate goal being the creation of a People's Republic (Laiki Dimokratia).⁹

The dominance of the KKE in the new partisan movement was total, but the KKE created a new coalition, perhaps in a bid to re-create the aura of a broad-based movement, reminiscent of EAM-ELAS. The result was a coalition involving the Agrarian Party (Agrotiko Komma), the Democratic Youth of Greece (DNE/Dimokratiki Neolaia Elladas), and, crucially, the Slavo-Macedonian National Liberation Front (Naroden Osvoboditelen Front/NOF). Of these, the Agrarian Party and the DNE were little more than KKE fronts.¹⁰ By contrast, NOF, comprising Slavo-Macedonians from minority villages in Greek Macedonia (many of whom fought alongside ELAS against the German occupation), was autonomous, and its alliance with KKE proved significant militarily, but also politically costly when a pre-war KKE policy promising Slavo-Macedonian autonomy later re-emerged.¹¹ To add to the outrage of nationalists and anti-communists, NOF also provided the DSE with up to 3,000, apparently formidable, women fighters. 14

The DSE was far smaller in size than ELAS (arguably between 25,000 and 50,000, compared with the 120,000 fighters of ELAS). Nevertheless, and in a piling contrast, the relative number of women soldiers rose to between 25 and 30 percent of the total number of soldiers, thus setting a European precedent for women's armed participation in the Second World War. There were at least three categories of women who fought in the partisan army during the Civil War. A significant minority of women were KKE members who made a conscious choice to enter the armed conflict after the backlash against the Resistance began to escalate. They were motivated by a high sense of patriotism, a sense of moral indignation occasioned by the backlash, some degree of proto-communist idealism, as well as the personal freedoms that political involvement afforded them. A commitment to the intricacies of Marxist-Leninism seems to have been more or less absent; indeed, references to study sessions organised for female fighting units attest to a low level of interest in, and understanding of, communist doctrine. 15

A number of DSE women occupied important political positions—for example, they were appointed political commissars (*politiki epitropoi*) or deputy political commissars, the latter becoming increasingly important during the Civil War. Many women were motivated by the need to find refuge, as Sultana Bourbari's comments above illustrated, in order to escape the terrorist violence against leftists and their families which had gained momentum nationwide by 1946. Likewise, partisan records indicate that the first cases of female enlistment coincided with the chaos unleashed by the Varkiza Treaty of 1945. For many women (and men), the DSE represented the only safe option, especially with the breakdown of families caused by imprisonment, exile, execution, and conscription, as well as the physical destruction of homes and the ensuing abandonment of whole villages. 16

The biographical details of Aglaia Vlachou and Olga Giotopoulou (1948), who joined the DSE in 1946 and 1947 respectively, attest to the new climate of terror among ex-Resistance fighters (and their families), which led both to take to the mountains after the Varkiza Treaty. Vlachou remained outside the combat zone, but Giotopoulou '... was an ordinary fighter who fought in many battles, including mopping-up operations' (*Eleftherotipia/Free Press*, 2 March 1986). For 17

these women, the romantic depiction of DSE women in partisan literature is misleading. Niki Karras, former DSE partisan, also claims that she joined to escape persecution. As for the imagined heroism of DSE women in combat, she stated: 'Life compelled you to be heroic. You *had* to be heroic to survive' (emphasis my own).¹²

A dearth of reliable data renders the task of establishing even an approximate number of women involved in DSE operations impossible. However, the following excerpt from a pamphlet published by the PDEG (Panellinia Dimokratiki Enosis Gynaikon/Panhellenic Democratic Union of Women) in 1949 offers a statistical breakdown of women's representation in the DSE in 1949, which must be assessed, though, against the difficulty in assembling and maintaining records during the Civil War, with a weakening partisan infrastructure and the increasing use of propaganda to aid recruitment drives.¹³ 18

Overall female numbers in the DSE: Fighting units: 30 percent; Auxiliary functions: 70 percent.

Number of DSE women officers (operational): 500 second lieutenants, 66 lieutenants, 8 captains, and 1 major.

Fallen officers: 73 second lieutenants, 26 lieutenants, 11 captains, and 3 majors.

Medals/Honours: 40 medals for bravery, 244 Orders of Electra, 11 honorary mentions for tank destruction, 1 for airplane destruction, 1 for sniper action, 3 for reconciliation (with enemy soldiers), 28 promotions for bravery.

However deceptive these statistics may be (i.e., any equivalence between a regular army lieutenant and a DSE lieutenant is unlikely), just as in professional armies, the DSE honours system was important in the struggle to boost and maintain (flagging) morale and commitment. Nevertheless, there is a general consensus across a range of sources from both the right and the left that women partisans comprised 25 percent to 30 percent of all DSE fighting forces, which arguably reached 20,000 to 30,000. This ratio should be taken to include the full range of tasks that women performed outside actual combat. Laiou (1987: 60) claims, however, that the recurring figure of 25,000 DSE forces across American as well as Greek non-partisan sources was partly due to broadly circulated American military assessments that logistical constraints made it virtually impossible for the DSE to maintain a greater number of 'men'. 19

Additionally, Laiou estimates that the very low number of approximately 5,000 reserves, coupled with an overall replacement rate of 50 percent to 60 percent, indicates that the total number of DSE-affiliated populations in the mountains reached no more than approximately 45,000 to 50,000. Most were rural folk, as a consequence of KKE's delay in organising urban forces for the conflict zones in rural Greece. As a result, a large number of potential DSE fighters were interned by government security forces and sent to concentration camps on remote islands. Barziotas (1985: 82), the DSE's political commissar of general headquarters (Geniko Archigeio), also states that 20 percent to 25 percent of DSE forces were women. In his estimation, this translated into 7,000 to 8,000 fighters, most of whom (approximately 70%) were very young members of the Democratic Youth of Greece (DNE). The more mature fighters (25 20

years and over) were fewer (15%–20%) and were regarded as veterans. Many had fought in ELAS and were promoted to commanders and political commissioners, middle- and higher-ranking cadres of the DSE.¹⁴

The number of women in fighting squads was variable but averaged between 20 percent and 30 percent. Former partisan Niki Karras recalls that the fighting units she encountered in the Peloponnese comprised about six to eight men and two 'girls' per unit, depending on overall numbers and on the responsibilities that were, eventually, equally distributed (i.e., after the initial reluctance of some DSE men to accept women was overcome):

The machine gun and the munitions were carried on the backs of men *and* women: One hour for the *adartis*, one hour for the *adartissa*.¹⁵ The only disadvantage we had was our monthly period, which was a big problem, when you consider that we spent most of the time travelling on foot, not just one or two hours, but all night, crossing rivers in the rain; the women would often become totally numb—it wasn't just a silly adventure.

Karras also recalls that, at least in her own experience, the decision to participate in battle lay with the administration: 'One could not simply volunteer, especially if an entire family was mobilised into the war . . . they would ensure that some family members would be kept away from the front and spared, so as to minimise the chances of the annihilation of whole families'.¹⁶

The KKE was responsible for providing the organisational framework for women's participation in the Civil War, just as it had done during the Resistance.¹⁷ This time, however, it was unconstrained by the earlier compromises stemming from important alliances with the bourgeois and traditionalist factions of EAM-ELAS, and was thus able to increase and accelerate the integration of women into the DSE's command and combat structure at will, and according to need. What did this mean in terms of the gendered division of military labour? The task of establishing a pattern or system in the distribution of military roles for women and men within the DSE is fraught with contradictions and this, to some extent, was a matter of regional and inter-battalion differences, as well as a general breakdown of conventions amid increasing chaos. But the resilience of traditional gender roles is in evidence in the exclusive allocation of auxiliary roles to women.¹⁸

Barziotas (1985: 78) mentions the lengths women would go to subvert prejudice about their comparative weakness and inefficiency. For instance, they would decline to use the portable beds offered to exhausted partisans, beds which had to be carried by fellow partisans on long treks: 'As well as possessing these virtues, women also kept our camps in order. In the aftermath of battle, they would clean our clothes and we were thus clean and tidy. They also provided light-heartedness and liveliness in the units, always the first to start a song and dance'.

John Dollis (1994: 182), a DSE officer based in the Pindos mountain region, remembers his female comrades thus: 'It was there in Palia Kremini, where the strength of a woman proved to be everything: they were fighters, sisters, nurses, cooks, mothers, everything. There were about 20 in my division, aged between 20 and 25'. 25

An unknown number of women, however, did carry out full combat roles as indicated by their names included in long lists of soldiers killed in action, and compiled by surviving comrades, as well as those mentioned in oral testimonies and in obituaries in the DSE bulletins of the era. These sources do not provide a sociological overview of the 'front line', and so cannot reveal the business of role distributions or episodes of gender conflict, but they do provide hard evidence of the active presence of women in all facets of battle, engaging all manner of available weaponry. A list of 'exceptional' or 'elite' women and the military honours they received for specific acts of bravery in battle appeared in the pamphlet *Mahitria* (a PDEG 1949 publication, loosely translated as *Woman Fighter*), in an article entitled 'From the Epic of Grammos and Vitsi'.¹⁹ For example, Evthimia Labrianidou '...treated and carried many wounded soldiers on her back for three days and nights. She also carried large quantities of weapons and ammunition while engaging the enemy on numerous occasions'; Ioulia Zouzou, sub-lieutenant of the infantry in the Sixteenth Brigade, gained a decoration for her exploits as a machine-gun sniper; Stella Datsina destroyed enemy artillery with her 'pancer'; while Vaia Karabaziou was mentioned for her precision as a mortar-aiming officer. 26

The vulnerability of DSE troops and the chronic shortage of reserves and resources presumably lessened the likelihood of regional military administrations to systematise gendered practices. After all, the ferocity of the Government Army's mopping-up operations did not discriminate between men and women. As DSE units were forced to scatter, individual men and women were left to their own devices until they could once again regroup. A number of women recount that their capture was occasioned by these circumstances (Petroula, 1986: 96). 27

By 1948, the KKE/DSE passed a resolution to implement a special support infrastructure to manage the growing numbers of women in the DSE. The decision, made in cooperation with the DSE General Headquarters (GHQ), was discussed at a special women's conference which took place there in February 1948 and which was attended by women representatives from the entire spectrum of the partisan alliance, including the Yugoslav AFZ (Anti-fascist Women's Front). The resolution was passed to create a new institutional position, an assistant to each political commissar,²⁰ from the level of GHQ down to the level of the platoon. This assistant cadre or deputy commissar (*ypethini*) was required to participate in military planning, to express an opinion on all important matters, and to prepare the fighters ideologically, politically, and psychologically for the execution of their tasks. The special needs and problems of the DSE women were to be consistently evaluated and solutions were to be drafted jointly between the political commissars of all companies, battalions, and particularly the brigades, and, of course, the newly appointed deputy political commissar. 28

The unprecedented expansion in the number of political commissars during the Civil War reflected growing concern about the need for efficient information networks and propaganda infrastructure. The new horde of political commissars sparked criticism from partisan elites who feared the consequences for an army whose political cadres far outnumbered its military experts. Their role in the support program envisaged for DSE women was both to deal with the political issues raised by growing numbers of often reluctant and ill-equipped women soldiers and to care for new recruits as recruitment procedures intensified. More specifically, the role of the female deputy commissar (the *ypefthini*) was to participate in the overall implementation of the special women's program, which included assisting in (a) training the fighters, with special emphasis on endurance and specialisation, (b) elevating individual fighters to the rank of cadres and petty officer, and (c) educating and promoting woman cadres.²¹ The role of the deputy commissar can perhaps be likened to that of a 'Mother Superior', who oversaw the acclimatisation of the women to the hardships of war, the importance of faith in the noble and just cause, *and* the handling of weapons. Female leadership, or the absence thereof, was taken very seriously and strong candidates were often promoted into leadership positions in haste. The success of the support program varied, sometimes meeting with indifference and/or hostility from male counterparts, as partisan (official) women's literature indicates.²²

The papers in the archive of a former *ypefthini* or deputy commissar, Maria Beikou (1949), which includes reports to the leadership regarding women's overall progress, refer repeatedly to the chronic shortage of female leadership for an army which comprised a significant and growing number of women soldiers. Reports suggest that the willingness of women to train and assume the full range of military tasks was considerable. Barziotas's (1985: 112) and Katsis's memoirs maintain that officers' schools, which were set up by GHQ in 1947, were a great success in terms of the number of women trainees who graduated into leadership positions in the field:

The women fought well, very well, in the DSE, in both attack and defence . . . They showed a capacity for responsibility, unparalleled deeds of heroism and self-sacrifice, endurance and resistance. Furthermore they showed that they could fight with skill, especially those who graduated from the Officers Schools of GHQ and were subsequently given the title of officer, commandant of platoons and companies, political commissioner of platoons, companies, and battalions.

Maria Beikou's diaries challenge this idealised portrait. In them she reveals the '...large number of women who graduated even though they were deemed unsuitable to proceed to battle as leaders, and they ultimately remained in the training camps as trainers'. The striking contrast between the glowing depictions of female heroism and courage in the movement's literature, on the one hand, and the serious problems many women encountered as soldiers in the DSE on the other, particularly those in combat units that Beikou describes, betray the propaganda aims of partisan literature, which was distributed regularly to DSE women soldiers. One specific example of politically motivated misinformation concerned the cavalry, which was far from the great success which the movement literature boasted. Maria Beikou's reports

portray a cavalry in crisis: the women in the cavalry suffered perpetual ill health, and desertion was rife. The recollections of DSE fighter Diamando Grizona reflect the inconsistencies and contradictions of DSE life for women, as she meanders from the memory of the 'brutal equality' of 'women fighting just like men' or 'being thrust into battle and sacrificed alongside the men' to the observation that '... during serious operations they left the women behind and took men so that they would move more easily' (in Boutzouvi-Bania, 1993: 204). Grizona herself reveals that while she carried a gun for self-defence, she never actually used it.

In assessing the experiences of DSE women, one must bear in mind the particular hardships and brutality of the Civil War, which increasingly left little room for choices. For example, partisan munitions supplies were so low that battles were waged only when they could not be avoided. In this sense, the partisan war essentially remained a guerrilla war. Niki Karras²³ recalls the long stretch of time she spent as an unarmed camp follower, until 'proper' units had been formed in 1948, following a succession of successful battles and the seizure of vital enemy arms. Grizona also recalled the dominant role of women in the building of fortifications, as sentries, nurses, stretcher-bearers, and childcare providers. There were also office positions in the battalions and the commissariats, and jobs as radio operators, which were highly prized in spite of, or because of, their relative insulation from battle zones. 32

In the December 1948 issue of *Mahitria (Woman Fighter)*, concern was expressed about the continuing problem of low levels of confidence amongst the women, compounded by condescending attitudes of male administrators, especially the political commissar who, in most cases, ignored his assigned deputy. This undervaluing led to the underutilisation of women fighters, even of cadres, who were delegated to harvest operations rather than be groomed for battle leadership. There is also evidence of reluctance amongst administrators to train women to use the full range of weapons, although some sources claim that this situation improved as women demonstrated that they could perform just as, if not more, bravely and efficiently than men. The respective reports of Deputy Political Commissars Maria Beikou and Soumela Sidiropoulou outline many of the successes as well as the difficulties faced by deputy commissars: 33

The assistant cadres . . . are at a political disadvantage. They need a lot of help in this undertaking from their assigned Political Commissar who often ignores them. Deputy 587 proved useless as she was weak politically and inexperienced which resulted in an unnecessary injury. . . . The underestimation of women has been worn down a little and there has been an increase in mutual understanding. Their bravery, courage and improved behaviour has been recognised, and solidarity has developed. Women themselves have assisted greatly in this progress. Male cadres, however, are not providing the assistance women need. They see the women as women, rather than as comrades. When asked to assign tasks to the women deputies their frequent response is 'that she doesn't meet the political criteria'. (Sidiropoulou in *Eleftherotipia*, 22 January 1986)

Beikou's reports also speak of an unbridgeable cultural gap between the women cadres and the women fighters below them, which was often linked to class differences. This was only compounded by the personal difficulties of deputy commissars involved in establishing themselves as leaders, without the support of their male superiors, particularly the political commissar to which they were assigned (unpublished report by Beikou, 22 March 1949). This view contrasts sharply with the official portrayal in DSE pamphlets,²⁴ according to which the deputies had been integrated into the DSE structure and had settled into their roles with great success. 34

5.3 Women in the Communist Party of Greece (KKE)

The backlash after the Varkiza Treaty led to a frenzied, uncoordinated exodus to the mountains of partisans, their families, and other sympathisers of EAM-ELAS. Forced to flee villages and the towns which had come under the surveillance of the paramilitaries,²⁵ their unplanned sojourn into the mountains put the KKE in a strategic and moral bind, given the KKE leadership's initial reluctance to form a new guerrilla force, and to enter a second phase of armed conflict, albeit a defensive one.²⁶ In the interim, paramilitary activity, which involved the ransacking of 'EAM villages', delivered to the authorities a great number of leftists who had delayed or declined to flee to the mountains. Some were transported to various concentration camps set up on remote islands of the Aegean such as Makronisos, while others were conscripted into the Government Army (Kyvernitikos Stratos), and others still were court-martialled, and some summarily executed. By the time the KKE decided to militarise and set up the DSE, its potential rank and file had shrunk significantly. 35

In this austere climate, the partisan movement was reduced to a hard core of 'believers' and refugees. Few bourgeois liberals and 'salon' socialists had either the opportunity or the inclination to enter into this new conflict. Many refugees, especially rural women, fled villages targeted by paramilitaries as 'red' and joined the DSE as a sanctuary from violence, quite independently of any commitment to KKE ideology.²⁷ In its August 1949 issue, the DSE's *Bulletin* reported that the majority (70%–75%) of KKE members, as well as the majority of the DSE women, came from the peasantry. It also reported that a significant number of DSE women who occupied middle- to high-ranking positions (military or political) were also KKE members. Furthermore, there is some evidence that middle- to high-ranking women within the DSE were often promoted on the basis of their 'KKE pedigree'; that is, they came from families with a solid communist background and were thus considered by KKE's leadership as 'safe'. Many of them had become KKE members during the Resistance, and almost all were active within EPON. As such, their induction into the DSE was likely to have been a conscious political choice. Surviving DSE archival records contain biographical summaries of such 'accomplished' KKE/DSE women, samples of which were published in the Athenian daily *Eleftherotipia* on 22 January 1986. One such excerpt follows: 36

I was born into an agrarian family. My father was a Party member. I attended school until the second year of high school, at which point the school closed down. I became an EPON member on 23/11/1943, when Mr Pericles, KKE's Secretary in Kastoria, brought me into the organization. I had previously been a member of OKNE [the youth branch of KKE]. I was simply a member of EPON. I became a partisan on 20/3/1944 and served until Varkiza, after which I participated in public rallies in Kastoria. On 26/5/1945 I was caught (by the Bouradathes)²⁸ and taken to Argos Orestikon where I was beaten and had my head shaven. They held me for 5 days and I was so badly bashed that I was then taken to hospital. I stayed another 15 days and then left for Drama. By May 1946 I had arrived in Hiliodendro but couldn't exit the house in which I lived because the Bouradathes forbade it. On 28/9/1947 I fled to the mountains as a fighter and then attended Officers' Academy where I graduated as a DSE sergeant. I have taken part in many battles and have been injured once. I am pleased to be serving the DSE. (Dated 13 April 1948 and signed Konstantina Galbou [DSE-540-11th Company], daughter of Christos and Olga, from Hiliodendro, Kastoria)

Of the 413 military cadres who graduated from the DSE's GHQ Officers' Academy in northern Greece, DSE officer Dimitrios Katsis was able to recall thirty women, in his diaries. Almost all were KKE members. Nonetheless, the question of women's precise representation in the upper echelons of the KKE/DSE hierarchy is unclear, although it is certain that the numbers became increasingly sparse the higher the level. Chrysa Hatzivasileiou, for example, was the only woman on KKE's Central Committee throughout this period and, Mazower (1993: 281) presumes that she struggled to exercise her agency, stifled by her domineering male peers. This, however, did not stop her from producing a feminist manifesto (see Hatzivasileiou, 1946), the sophistication of which has still to be equalled by subsequent generations of communist women, at least within Greece. The archive of Maria Beikou (1948–49), deputy commissar of the First Regiment (operating on Mount Grammos), reveals that the low level of female representation within the leadership was a source of concern to at least some members of the DSE (male) hierarchy, who thought that the under-representation of female political and military cadres, as well as a shortage of suitable candidates, was a serious problem for an army which utilised so many female soldiers. 37

An examination of the numerical strength and social composition of KKE membership within the DSE, published in the DSE's journal in August 1949,²⁹ states that '... the proportion of women Party members in the overall membership fluctuated between 8 and 21%, whereas the female overall average was 14%'. The average number of female members in the overall KKE membership of DSE (14%) was considered grounds for '... the introduction of more women into the Party, women who have shown in their daily life and actions that they are worthy of carrying such a title. We note the decision of the 7th Congress of the Greek Communist Party on the question of the recruitment of women to the Party with a view to raising their representation to fifty percent'. 38

The concern to boost the number of women in the KKE did not, however, relax the traditionally rigid eligibility requirements of prospective recruits. For example, the promotion to cadre or party membership of a partisan with an immaculate personal record could be denied if the 39

candidate had a close relative with a proven or even rumoured history of collaboration (with the Axis authorities during the Resistance) or desertion. The political commissar of her battalion, for example, stopped the promotion of Ourania Markou to military cadre, after learning that her brother had been both a deserter and an informer (*Eleftherotipia*, 19 February 1986).³⁰ The superior infrastructure of KKE and the rigid emphasis on efficiency, crucial to preventing instability within the DSE, persevered well into the war, in spite of increasingly adverse circumstances. It prevailed even throughout the Government Army 'mopping-up' operations that commenced in 1947; operations which weighed heavily on partisan communication, coordination, and cohesion. Records outlining women's military contributions continued to be compiled throughout,³¹ including lists of those who received the Electra Medal.³² Party registers and official 'individual diaries' comprehensively prepared by each DSE administrative branch contained an extensive checklist of background details, strengths, weaknesses, and overall progress of individual women partisans who occupied combat and political positions.

To conclude this portrait of DSE life, DSE commander Belas (see Papakonstadinou 1986, 2: 733) of the Peloponnesian Regiment, offers an interesting first hand assessment of his female comrades at the 'front':

40

The women still carried the weakness of the mother, which did not allow them to take difficult initiatives and decisions. The girls felt everyone's pain, the pain of all mothers. War is often a brutish enterprise. In battle, the soldier loses many of his civilised attributes. Many parts of him have to be truncated if he is to be a good fighter. Women resisted this process to a greater extent than men. Of course there are always exceptions even if it is true of the majority. In matters of self-sacrifice and heroism the girls did not lag behind the men. They out-performed them in matters of discipline and steadfastness. However, they were inferior in terms of initiative and inventiveness in the hour of battle. This was a serious disadvantage.

But the sight of bands of armed women, fighting to the death, did have a detrimental impact on the enemy's morale. Nikos Anagnostopoulos, a conscript with the Government Army throughout the Civil War, recalls how on one occasion in 1949, his Regiment was bogged down for days, even though the DSE troops on the opposite side were outnumbered totally. The battle had begun when the Government Army descended upon a small valley from surrounding peaks and blocked the exit routes of a relatively small DSE unit. For an entire night, the Government Army's heavy artillery pounded them continuously, and at dawn the officers ordered an assault, expecting little or no DSE resistance. To the dismay of the front guard, the resistance was not only fierce but was also accompanied by women's voices alternating between curses and invitations to switch sides. 'As it turned out', Anagnostopoulos recounts, 'they were all women!' A second night of artillery bombardment followed, during which the cries of seriously injured DSE women (some of them calling upon their comrades for assistance) were reverberating in the valley. However, when the government soldiers attempted another frontal attack the following morning, they found no one. 'No bodies, no injured, nobody. Just pools of blood on the grass. It was as if the earth had opened up and they had disappeared in it.

41

They somehow managed to slip through our lines, carrying their dead and the injured on their backs. Let me tell you that, from that moment, we prayed that the enemy units facing us would be men'.³³

5.4 Female Combatants—KKE Policy

In a *Bulletin* issue of March 1949, Lieutenant-General Karagiorgis quoted excerpts of a speech made by Stalin, about the futility of conducting a proletarian revolution without the active contribution of the female half of humanity:. 42

Working women, both urban and rural, comprise a vast reserve for the working class. This reserve represents one half of the population. The fortune of the proletarian struggle depends on the extent of women's support, the victory or destruction of proletarian power. But these women are not just reserves. They can and should be, with the appropriate political support of the working class, a true army of the working class, which will fight against the ruling class. We must forge from within the reserves of women workers, an army of women who will fight alongside the ranks of the proletarian army. (DSE *Bulletin*, 3 March 1949)

The dialectical relationship between political action and personal transformation was considered to be critical, not only in bringing into existence the new socialist woman but also for the successful consolidation of post-war socialist society. Karageorgis continued: 43

In the bosom of the DSE the new woman is moulded, the new contemporary Greek woman, she who upon victory, will enter the cities and villages as the almighty ringleader who will modernise, advance, and rapidly bring into line the female population of Greece towards socialism. (DSE *Bulletin*, 3 March 1949)

Overlooking the implicit portrayal of woman as historically, if not constitutionally, conservative by virtue of their reproductive role within the family, feminist historians³⁴ have rightly acknowledged that the priority of concerns in Communist Party attitudes towards the 'woman question', the Greek example included, have been problematic. Women's liberation was not portrayed as an end in itself but rather as critical to the success of the proletarian revolution. Moreover, the best intentions of the predominantly male leadership were undermined by a historical suspicion of independent feminism and 'sex theory' (as demonstrated during the EAM-ELAS period), a suspicion shared by Lenin in his discussions with Clara Zetkin.³⁵ Such suspicion rendered communist doctrine incapable of theorising aspects of women's oppression not overtly connected to class location, and thus ruled out an investigation of the gendered dynamics of the private economy, assuming instead that the gendered patterns of domination and subordination would be sorted out with the end of capitalist exploitation. In short, by downgrading the age-old association of the subordinate with the feminine, or the simple deferral of women's emancipation to the post-revolutionary period, the organised left refused to see through the process of radicalisation which it had sponsored. Instead, the aim of the Greek 44

left to mobilise and to maintain popular support entailed a very formal, albeit important, approach to the 'woman question', as embodied in the unprecedented granting of formal civil equality to women in the PEEA constitution.³⁶ Family law remained outside the jurisdiction of the provisional government and eventually divorce matters sorted by the popular justice system that had been established were cauterised as they '... risked violating institutions which had to remain respected' (Tsouparopoulos, 1989, 1:79). Beikos (1979: 185), a former partisan and architect of popular democratic reforms during the Resistance, recalls that lawmakers of the movement (mostly KKE cadres) were reluctant to draw '... the popular courts into family feuds, and to publicise delicate matters in a place where patriarchal custom prevailed'. As such, the 'revolutionary leadership' from the very beginning overlooked, quite intentionally, the most important locus of Greek women's oppression: the private sphere.

However, the situation in Greece in the 1940s was such that the formulation of a distinct and explicit narrative of women's liberation, which was not linked to the issues that had thrown the country into a tragic conflict, would have been inconceivable. Moreover the socio-economic position of most Greek women would have made a narrative of liberation on the basis of gender, independently of a critique of the prevailing socio-economic structures, irrelevant. The relative ineffectiveness of the pre-war feminist movement was a case in point. 45

The last words of a captured partisan woman in the Averoff women's prison in 1948, before her execution, captured the appeal of the movement for many women. 'I am a worker. I am proud to say that I didn't betray the working people of this country. I fought so that working people could see better days, and even for you, my executioners. You are all my brothers. Long live freedom. Farewell'.³⁷ 46

The communist movement in wartime Greece, with its explicit support of women's liberation, offered opportunities for women to express such sentiments, which were, for the most part, what drew women to political involvement. So, in a sense, one can argue that the cloak of social justice, peace, and popular democracy characteristic of partisan rhetoric were necessary prerequisites to a feminist revolution of sorts amongst Greek working-class and peasant women. The framework of national liberation, simultaneously broad and narrow, inspired a great number of Greek women and offered them an opportunity, for the first time, to become familiar with and experience first-hand the principles of equality and social justice. Kaklamanaki (1984: 52) has noted that, as a result of this history, many Greek women have grown to associate their own emancipation with their contributions to mass social movements. 47

5.5 KKE Pragmatism

The effort to recruit women into the DSE and to institute a special women's support network to manage them efficiently were a typical example of communist pragmatism, with similar examples taking place in both Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. The following scenario is a 48

case in point, and highlights a problem that acquired acute dimensions for the DSE. A common Government Army tactic was to relocate whole villages forcibly into neighbouring towns and centres, in order to cut off supplies to the partisans. This tactic proved successful as it deprived the DSE of valuable reserve populations, as well as the communities (of women primarily), which provided the necessary material infrastructure for the partisan units.

The disappearance of the 'rear' in many regions simply compounded an already disadvantaged position of the DSE due to the delay in its formation. As mentioned, the KKE authorised the formation of the DSE after tens of thousands of its most experienced ELAS fighters had already been interned in concentration camps, particularly after the Varkiza Treaty of disarmament. Government Army conscription absorbed further segments of the male population, including many former EPON and ELAS men, later exiling those thought to be 'untrustworthy'. 49

A desperate shortage of 'manpower',³⁸ expertise, and of course weapons and ammunition, coupled with the fact that the Government Army was amply resourced by the British and, after 1947, by the United States, combined to concentrate the leadership's focus on women's mobilisation into the armed struggle as a solution. 50

There were many functions for which women were thought to be well suited. With numbers so low and the reserve problem ever present, the spreading of propaganda referred to as *diafotisi* (ideological enlightenment), and the generating of grass-roots support, even from within the enemy ranks, became vital. The prime targets of *diafotisi* were Government Army conscripts, many of whom had been EPON and ELAS members. Women served an interesting and decisive role in trying to 'turn' war-weary, frightened, and alienated Government Army conscripts to the partisan side. They formed 'reconciliation teams' and approached enemy lines with cardboard loudspeakers to speak of peace, the suffering of soldiers' families perpetrated by the 'monarchofascist state', the noble policies of the DSE, the futility of fighting for American interests and against their former Resistance comrades. They even spoke of the power and respect they as women had gained in the DSE (see PDEG pamphlet, 1949), in an effort to entice soldiers to desert and join the DSE. An article in the DSE journal entitled 'Our Subversive Work Inside the Ranks of the Monarchofascist Army' describes the rationale for this work clearly: 51

The ear of the soldier is always sensitive to talk of his family, his village, the children of the rich who are stationed at the rear or overseas, proposals for reconciliation and peace They always respond to women more easily who speak to their emotional world, and remind them of their sister, their wife, their loved one. Hence, whereas they were prepared to fire on hearing a male voice, they did not upon hearing a female voice. Afterward they would actually request to speak with her. 'Get Katina to come and tell us'. And indeed she did, and with her plain manner, she spoke directly to their souls. (DSE *Bulletin*, 7 July 1949)

This special role of women fuelled the abuse they received in countermovement propaganda. The epithet 'bloodthirsty hyena', from which this chapter derives its title, was a commonplace, at least amongst nationalist officers and journalists. A high-ranking officer of the Government Army offered his own interpretation of the effect that the DSE women had on his men. Watching them (the women) fight in the field of battle was like watching 'a fanatical struggle of hyenas. It is very difficult for us to make them surrender the slope they are defending. Their war-cries have a particularly negative effect on the morale of our men' (*To Vima*, 1949). This suggests that Nikos Anagnostopoulos's experiences were representative and that a confrontation with the partisan women in the field of battle was a dreaded event. 'The DSE's women's brigades fought doggedly and were never captured alive. Even their wounded and their corpses would disappear in the middle of the night as their (women) comrades would undertake almost suicidal missions so that the enemy would not take them alive or dead'. Such confrontations threw into confusion all the familiar binaries found in traditional narratives of war. 52

5.6 Conscription

The construction of the DSE as a people's revolutionary army, whose strength and only advantage lay in the superior morale of its soldiers, obliged it to be strictly voluntary. This, however, was compromised towards the end,³⁹ and thus emerged a third category of DSE women, the conscripts. This development further weakened the morale, legitimacy, and stability of the DSE, and it also created a new urgency in the need to establish a special women's support program. 53

Niki Karras, a DSE fighter,⁴⁰ maintains that at least in the Peloponnesian Regiment where she served, all male and female conscripts were taken from left-wing families for security purposes, as the DSE could ill afford 'weak links'. A general evaluation of existing data indicates the frequent delegation of women conscripts to non-combative roles as well as their own personal preference to remain outside the battle zones. The reserve crisis raises doubt as to whether these wishes were honoured. 54

DSE conscript Ourania Markou's autobiographical details reveal an agrarian background and a family '... which believed in popular democracy'. She had been an EPON member during the occupation, and after her recruitment on the 27 October 1947 at age 16, she never took part in military operations (*Eleftherotipia*, 19 February 1986). Chrisoula Remmou came from a working-class family which fell into poverty after the death of her father (a baker) in 1939. Remmou '... did not participate in the Resistance due to her young age'. On the 8 January 1948, she was conscripted by the DSE where 'she worked as a baker at the central commissariat of the Dailani Battalion' (*Eleftherotipia*, 9 February 1986). The forcible recruitment of women (and men) caused morale to plummet in 1949 as the odds against 55

partisan victory also rose, war weariness set in, support waned, and the material conditions of partisan existence became dire (e.g., a shortage of food and weapons). Woodhouse (1976: 132) comments on morale in the DSE:

For the minority of Greek volunteers still with the *DSE*, the physical hardships were less demoralising than the growing sense of moral corruption. An army in which the proportion of forced recruits probably exceeded 50% could not have had a high level of morale. More and more men and women were surrendering voluntarily. A British witness who spoke to such a group in 1948 found that only five out of twenty admitted to having joined the *DSE* voluntarily. Post-war interrogation of women prisoners by an American social scientist showed that typically they had been deceived into joining the Communists by promises of 'fine homes and machine made dresses'.

Such comments must be interpreted with caution, especially given the uncertain degree to which partisan confessions were blurted under coercion,⁴¹ but the tragedy of partisan conscription and its consequences for morale and stability became a central theme in the partisan literature itself. For instance, a DSE woman's correspondence to the Athenian newspaper *Eleftherotipia* refers to the 'mischievous' behaviour of some conscripted partisan women: 'What could one demand from people who were taken by force from their homes? That conscription policy was the greatest mistake—a crime to oblige people to suffer the hardships, and to die for a cause in which they did not necessarily believe' (*Eleftherotipia*, 6 February 1986). 56

In her 1949 progress reports on the 'special work' (*eidiki douleia*) undertaken in the 'women's program' on Mount Grammos, Maria Beikou, a deputy political commissar, recalls the new crop of fighters (referred to as '*yliko*', roughly translated as 'raw material') brought to the battalion from southern Greece who '... were completely unsuited and unused to war. With the daily and systematic guidance and supervision of the Deputy Political Commissar (*ypethini*) the misery and fear of war was overcome and now they are requesting to be sent on missions, with an interest in all aspects of the struggle, including weapons' (Archive of Maria Beikou, ASKI). 57

The 'women's support program' was successful in stemming the inappropriate, perhaps opportunistic, delegation of new recruits to fighting units. Belas, a DSE commander in the Peloponnese, recalls (see Papakonstadinou, 1986, 2: 956) that as a result of negligence by commanders, girls and women fighters were being ordered into front-line battle with no prior training, irrespective of their individual talents, wishes or state of health, resulting in heavy and rapid losses, or else provoking a rapid deterioration of their physical condition. While Belas attributes this misfortune to general ignorance on behalf of unit leaders (and indeed to desperate circumstances), other sources indicate that it was partly motivated by spite, a malicious application of the equality principle. You want equal rights? Carry the same load! Former DSE recruit Grizona (see Boutzouvi-Bania, 1993: 206) also recalls the ill-preparedness for war of many DSE women, including those who fought voluntarily: 58

They would take them to fight untrained, inexperienced women, they knew nothing, these women they gathered, many of them the wives of partisans, who were being hounded and pursued by the National Guard, while their husbands were in the mountains or had fled the borders for Yugoslavia or Bulgaria They threw those untrained little women into battle; so many were killed and their children remained in the border countries. I encountered many who returned without mothers afterward.

An excerpt of the progress report of Soumela Sidiropoulou, deputy political commissar for the Seventeenth Brigade, reveals the myriad problems affecting women cadres in her position and the special problems of the women under their command. She writes about the behaviour of one political commissar and platoon leader who perpetually hurled verbal abuse towards the women under his command, as well as ignored their personal needs and requests for shift changes when girls tired of carrying weaponry. This, she said, 'only exasperates and breaks the spirit and morale of the girls' (1948, in *Eleftherotipia*, 22 January 1986). Sidiropoulou informed the company administration as well as the political commissar of the battalion, after which a joint effort was made by higher-ranking officers, including herself and the offending political commissioner, to solve the problem. There were problems of feminine hygiene as resources were scarce, which resulted in transferring women with menstrual disorders to auxiliary work and relieving them from heavy labour. The positive impact of the female deputy PC was especially apparent amongst girls in the fighting units:

59

The conditions here are particularly harsh and supervision inadequate. The girls suffer seriously from inadequate clothing, unhygienic conditions, and are almost fighting naked, with bare feet. Our work helped them understand that they are not simply beasts of burden. The special attention to women has helped a great deal as they get an opportunity to discuss their needs and their weaknesses which can be treated accordingly. It has also helped loosen their tongues Generally the special woman-to-woman attention raises their spirits and enthusiasm. Aspirations rise as the women observe that their efforts in the DSE are vindicated. (27 May 1948, in *Eleftherotipia*, 22 January 1986)

Maria Beikou's reports indicate that the role of deputy political commissar was indeed crucial to the acclimatisation of women to the hardships of war, and to maintaining an enthusiastic attitude and a sense of collective purpose. 'In Roumeli, when our [women's] program ceased, so did the enthusiasm—that special quality which women contribute to the unit. Doubts emerged and complaints increased, the thirst for learning waned. Rebellions and desertions followed. When our effort improved, so did the overall situation' (Archive of Maria Beikou, ASKI, 1948). Needless to say, the extension of forcible recruitment to women and younger girls and boys provided the opposition with a stupendous opportunity to generate greater fear and hysteria amongst the population. Charges of abduction abounded and became ubiquitous across the national media. The Salonika newspaper *Ellinikos Vorras* (*The Greek North*) on 2 August 1949 eagerly pointed out the inherent irony of forcible recruitment for a 'democratic

60

army: 'A young girl from Tripotamo in Florina was abducted "very democratically" from the arms of her mother and placed in the looters' cavalry A detail which is not mentioned in the boastful rants [of PDEG] about the presence of women in the cavalry'.

5.7 Heroines: Retrieving Partisan Women's Agency

The extent of women's voluntary participation in the DSE remains a key question, muddled further by the shift towards forcible recruitment. But the conscious choice of many women to join must not be discarded out of hand. Even conservative commentators, in their recollections of the war, have acknowledged the commitment of a great many DSE women⁴² for the historical record. 61

The question of the relative proportion of women conscripts to volunteers in the DSE combat units is elusive given the scarcity of data. Contradictory claims abound and all are difficult to substantiate or disprove. Van Boeschoten (1997: 185) claims, for example, that most DSE women conscripts were reluctant to carry weapons and thus occupied auxiliary roles. On the other hand, most volunteers comprised ' . . . women who had experienced terrorist violence personally'. She makes the assertion that the DSE's ranks contained more conscripts than volunteers. In contrast, the Athenian newspaper *Eleftherotipia*, in a belated tribute to partisan history (22 January 1986), concluded that most DSE women were both armed and volunteers, with fewer in administrative positions and fewer still in auxiliary roles. Laiou (1987: 59) sums up the historiographical difficulties encountered in her own research on population movements in the Greek countryside during the Civil War, which revealed, above all else, the unreliability of all available data. She cites, as an example, the famous assertion made by DSE commander-in-chief Markos Vafiades that, by 1947, 90 percent of DSE forces were conscripts. Laiou reminds us that Vafiades's statement was made on 15 November 1948, in the context of a bitter polemic against KKE's leaders' decision⁴³ to convert the DSE from a guerrilla force to a regular army. Was Vafiades exaggerating to make a point? To confuse the picture further, Woodhouse (1976: 233) reminds us that even Zafeiropoulos (1956: 18), a Government Army general, believed the DSE's recruitment policy was of a distinctly ' . . . democratic character'. 62

Setting aside the problem of figures, the task of retrieving women's own perspectives looms large. Diamando Grizona evokes this neglected perspective of the tragic war when she recalls the enthusiasm generated by the news of the first DSE Women's Conference that was held at the beginning of 1949. Awaiting the birth of her child, she had been transported to a hospital near the Greek-Albanian border, along with many of the wounded and ill DSE men and women. While there, she encountered countless young women who were injured, ill with tuberculosis, many suffering shell shock, including a decorated former ELAS second lieutenant. It was there that she heard of the Women's Conference. 63

Nearly all of the mothers left for the Conference, leaving the children in the care of nurses and some old women, we left them behind and headed south. . . . What enthusiasm we had! I said to myself 'What am I going to do? Sit around while others get killed and fight and I settle for teenage motherhood?' We all took it this way. We should leave them. How many girls abandoned them, watching them suckle their babies, then wrenching them off the breast, the milk dripping, leaving them behind to go, fight, and be killed. (See Boutzouvi-Bania, 1993: 214)

Niki Karras⁴⁴ has challenged the very notion of 'voluntary' participation, because nobody wanted to fight, but rather '... life forced you to be a hero'. The last words of DSE fighter Athina Benekou contained in the court martial transcript, at which she was given six compound death sentences, provides some invaluable insights into her own perspective of the war and her role in it. The witness for the prosecution, Dimitris Aggelopoulos (a vice-captain in the gendarmerie), testified that 'During 1939–1940, Benekou was a student at the teachers' academy of Tripoli and had been influenced by Professor Papanoutsos.⁴⁵ She and her family, including her priest father, were all communists'. Another gendarme added: 'She was inseparable from her mate Captain(ess) Argyro, the one who was Captain Prekeze's protégé. They would indulge together in orgies and exterminate whoever fell into their clutches'. In her defence, Benekou said:

This case is inextricably and directly linked to the tragedy of our tortured people since December [1944]. Since then the State saw it fit to dismantle equality before the law and its institutions. The terrorism which is being unleashed against the common folk, especially in Laconia, forced me to flee to the mountains as the only means of defending myself. I look around me in this court and I see eyes full of hatred and antipathy and I understand that I find myself in a hostile environment. This does not bother me because I did my duty as a guerilla and thus I am ready to accept any punishment you see fit. Do not ask me to tell you why I came to Tripoli and what is going on in the mountains; I am not so naive as to put in danger so many people who are fighting for freedom daily. My crime is that I loved our people and made its troubles my own, so that they could at last experience freedom. I am sad though for these women whom I deceived in order to achieve my objectives.⁴⁶ If what they did was punishable, I must suffer their punishment. Do not expect me to tell you more; I cannot repent for I did no wrong. As for those who maintain the struggle in the mountains, I have this to say: They are doing their duty and are not, as you call them, gangsters. Nothing else. Please show me to the execution squad. (See Papakonstadinou, 1986, 1: 956)

Personal accounts of the war by DSE women themselves are elusive in the wake of the large numbers of casualties, exile, the dearth of records, as well as the problem of unwilling subjects. One fragment of the Civil War experience from the perspective of participant women and which has been overlooked to date is contained in the literature of the PDEG (the Panhellenic Democratic Union of Women).

In October 1948, several months after the introduction of the special women's program, the PDEG was founded in the areas of Greece controlled by the DSE. It aimed to be the official mouthpiece for what was ubiquitously referred to during the Civil War as the women's

movement. It portrayed itself as having emerged from within the by-then defunct PEG,⁴⁷ which was founded during the Resistance. The implication was that PDEG was designed to fill that vacuum and to salvage the women's movement which was threatened with collapse within the advent of the Civil War. PDEG constituted the Greek branch of the communist-dominated Women's International Democratic Federation.⁴⁸ Its manifesto remained consistent with that of its predecessor (PEG) as well as with the goals of WIDF:

- (1) The co-ordination, direction, and intensification of Greek women's struggle for peace and democracy, and the quick liberation of the country from 'the American and monarchofascist yoke'.
- (2) The political, economic, and social equality of woman, independently of national, religious or racial difference, as well as her intellectual and political advancement.
- (3) The protection of mothers and children.
- (4) The unity of all women in our country, Greek, Slavo-Macedonian, Turkish, Vlach, Albanian (Arvanites) women, who collectively and wholeheartedly gave themselves to the struggle.
- (5) Adherence to principles and goals of the International Federation of Women, the establishment of links with its various sections, popularisation of the Greek cause abroad, coordination of the partisan struggle with the struggle of the international democratic women's movement, against the perpetrators of war, for peace and democracy. (*Mahitria*, 16 November 1948)⁴⁹

Women cadres attended its inaugural conference, from the four organisations which comprised the DSE (KKE, transliterate the Agrarian Party, NOF, DNE). As a communist organisation, PDEG worked very closely with the KKE leadership and the organisation spoke highly of KKE's contribution to the women's movement in its literature. More generally it espoused the central tenets of the party, which in turn offered the PDEG its full support. Naturally, the two organisations (KKE and PDEG) shared a commitment to peace and reconciliation,⁵⁰ the adoption of internationalist tones, and used the terms 'democratic', 'anti-fascist', and 'communist' interchangeably. 67

On 3 March 1949, at a PDEG meeting, a decision was made to intensify the organisation's effort, as a leader of the women's movement, in boosting women's participation in the partisan war effort. Here the function of the PDEG as a vehicle for the *management* as well as the collective expression of DSE women became evident. It was within these mobilising narratives of PDEG that the idealised partisan woman fighter is reconciled with traditional notions of Greek womanhood. 68

The formation of the PDEG at this time coincides with the problems within the DSE arising from reserve shortages and the increasing desertion rate. Accordingly, an overview of the PDEG's March conference emphasised concern over the inertia that had enveloped vast numbers of women in occupied Greece, women '... who remain[ed] outside the struggle, hoping for popular victory, while others [had] been paralysed by slander and terrorism' (*DSE Journal*, April 1949). The propaganda work (*diafotisi*) which PDEG resolved to undertake more intensively after this conference—namely, imparting and preserving the revolutionary spirit was a function 69

previously performed in the EAM-ELAS years by EPON, an organisation which had the highest level of female representation and appeal for the young but which failed to re-emerge intact during the Civil War.

The reserve difficulties faced by the KKE/DSE, which led to renewed efforts to boost women's armed involvement, necessitated a renewed campaign to boost enthusiasm amongst women, and to reconstruct an efficient communications channel between the leadership and women, ideally mediated by a separate but affiliated women's organisation. As Stites (1981: 109) observes, in the context of Soviet politics and in line with European Marxist prognostications on the role of women in revolution, the 'special' concerns of women as well as their relative political 'backwardness' entailed the separation of women's affairs or a special 'proletarian women's movement' to be led by Marxist women under the direction of the party, rather than an autonomous movement. This had also become a consistent organisational strategy under the KKE in the Civil War, starting with the appointment of the deputy political commissar, the segregated Democratic Assemblies, the development of literacy programs, and the growth of women's journals such as *Agonistria (Woman Activist)* and *Mahitria (Woman Fighter)*, the latter being PDEG's publishing organ. 70

Hence, PDEG colluded with the KKE/DSE in the campaign to indoctrinate and integrate women into a war, many of whom were unwilling or unfit to undertake such a commitment. Nevertheless, PDEG's formation was not initiated, nor was its program driven exclusively by the directives and concerns of the male-dominated KKE/DSE leadership. It was also defined by an autonomous objective of salvaging the gender political dimension of the movement, even if this purpose was couched in androcentric or non-feminist terms favoured by socialist/communist doctrine. 71

Acting 'on behalf of all democratic Greek women', PDEG sought to preserve the full implications of women's participation in the war for post-war society, in the event of victory. 72

A vast front spreads before the enemy from every direction. It is the front of Peace. And on that front, there is a very significant personality. The personality of the Greek woman who never let her heart harden, in spite of the terrorism lurking behind this bloody war and its countless injured and dead. She, who confronting the same dangers as men, did not lose her sensitivity, her humanity. She became a warrior out of necessity. A necessity that sprang out of her own life, from her just passion finally to see Peace on this burnt land, where she herself was raised, and raised her own family. In this just war the soul has been enriched with new emotions of measureless humanism. In this context a new prototype of Greek woman was born. The type who builds her happiness, the happiness of her children and her family with her own hands. The type of woman who tomorrow will stand proud beside her man, to rebuild their free, independent Greece, ruled by the people. (PDEG archival material, 1949)

While the PDEG, like the emancipatory movements which preceded it in the earlier phase, at no point offered a substantial critique of sexual politics within Greek society, or within the male dominated movement itself. It did, nonetheless, depict 'monarcho-fascist aggression and repression' (particularly of women and children) as distinctly male or masculine. Simultaneously, it referred to the notions of peace, freedom, and democracy as if they were, in turn, imbued with femininity.⁵¹ The institution of the family, the primacy of motherhood, and, by extension, the innate pacifism of women and their penchant for self-sacrifice remained staple features in the left's wartime discourses of revolutionary womanhood. It was with these ideas that Greek women of the left identified collectively, and were neither perceived nor portrayed as antithetical to, the image of the woman warrior, which PDEG so vigorously glorified.

The organisation systematically employed the symbolism of women in arms enmeshing it in a narrative of women's agency which worked to preserve the discourse of female emancipation within the broader objective of national liberation and popular democracy—a thread which threatened to fade into oblivion as the conflict deepened. PDEG effectively acted as a vehicle for the continued articulation of these values, situating the DSE women fighters 'at the front, [as] the pioneers, the chosen leaders' of this (just) cause, and hence linking discursively the efforts and imagery of the ubiquitous women fighters to the overall cause for women's incorporation into post-war society as political and social equals. Some of the role models cited in the women's literature and to whom the women of PDEG have paid tribute in their writings included: 'Zoya (Kosmodemyanskaia)',⁵² who had 'become a symbol for young Greek women'; Tania Lagounova, whose book *In the Forests of Smolensk* apparently was a great success amongst women fighters; Daniella Kasanova (France); Yiabourkova (Czechoslovakia); Margareta Toutoulianou (Albania); Elen Lavel (Romania); Fournalska (Poland); Jortanka Tsankova (Bulgaria)—all of whom were celebrated as heroines of the 1941–45 anti-fascist struggle. PDEG's narratives represented the clearest articulation of the goods at stake for women if the war was not fought and won with their active participation. The story of PDEG lies at the intersection of many important histories of the twentieth century, but it remains a thoroughly obscured dimension of the Civil War, a silence which the author hopes this book may begin to subvert.

73

The history of PDEG also suggests a convergence with broader historical patterns, namely, that women's reasons for participating in revolutionary struggle may not coincide perfectly with the leaderships' motivation for female recruitment and participation, in spite of shared goals and values. As Meyer (1981: 105) observes, while the intense mobilisation of women by communist parties during revolutionary and defensive wars has often been 'pragmatic' and 'insincere' (as they end with women's demobilisation and redomestication), the gains that women made by themselves and for themselves have often been significant. The efforts of PDEG, I argue, must be counted amongst these gains, rather than ignored or discredited as valuable history, for its close association with the much-maligned and ultimately defeated ideology of communism. To end this section, it is important to point out that the defeat of the partisans and the trials that awaited them either as political prisoners, fugitives, or political refugees did not erase the

74

positive impact of the war on gender relations, at least within partisan communities and families. As former partisan Niki Karras told me: 'The best thing that came out of the Civil War was the feeling of solidarity between partisans, men and women alike, that still exists today'.⁵³

PART II

5.8 Hyenas: Gender, National Identity, and the War of Symbols

The slide from a united struggle against an external invader to total Civil War was accompanied by a massive discursive shift whereby all those associated with the anti-fascist Resistance were portrayed as national traitors, *ethnomiasmata* (national germs), and *kommouno-simorites* (communist bandits) by a countermovement in the ascendancy. The latter referred to themselves as *ethnikophrones* (nationally minded) as they strived successfully to regain the mantle of patriotic nationalism and popular sympathy, which they had lost for a time to EAM-ELAS during the Occupation.⁵⁴ With their patriotic credentials in tatters after 1944, opponents of the left adopted an aggressive strategy of admonishing their own opponents as (un)Greek 'germs', feeding on the body of the nation and indulging in unspeakable moral acts against an otherwise pure and untainted Greek polity. In retaliation, partisan rhetoric referred to the 'monarchofascist' enemy, whose renewed dominance had been facilitated by their collusion with the forces of American imperialism in Greece.⁵⁵

Tasoula, who is from Rethymno, Crete, recalls the post-1945 context in which Greek conservatives recaptured the high moral ground which they had previously lost to EAM-ELAS, in the absence of an equivalent visionary platform during the Axis occupation:

After the Germans left, that's when we really began to pay a high cost for being in the Resistance. After all those who fought and paid with their lives . . . they didn't see us as patriots who fought against the conquering armies, but as evil spirits (*miasmata*), evil communist spirits as they called us. I couldn't leave my house, and even though they claimed that we were the immoral ones, it was really they who were immoral. They were the ones who would proposition me on the street; they were the ones who shouted dirty words at me; they insulted us and claimed that we had participated in orgies and other things that we had never heard of before. (Hart, 1996: 247)

Between 1946 and 1949, the national 'goods' at stake were high and the battle between two competing universes was waged at multiple levels—discursive, symbolic, and bodily—from which nobody was exempt. The new 'catchphrases' were emblematic of the discursive shift. Where the Resistance once identified itself as the National Liberation Front/Army (EAM-ELAS), it now called itself the Democratic Army (DSE), and the Government Army (Kyvernitikos Stratos) had become the National Army (Ethnikos Stratos). As the right recaptured the discourse around the national interest, the KKE/DSE appropriated all things

'democratic' (Democratic Army of Greece/DSE, Provisional Democratic Government/PDK, Panhellenic Democratic Union of Women/PDEG, etc.), and, in turn, democracy became tainted by the stain of communism.

At this time, the countermovement campaign to discredit the Resistance, and recoup the symbolic terrain which the latter had famously occupied, also entailed the appropriation of the 1821 Revolution and its attendant myths and symbols. Conservative newspapers were replete with articles about the plight of the nation against the partisans as the modern incarnation of 1821. Articles such as 'The New Souliot Women' (*Vradini*, 16 January 1948) typified this effort to reclaim what had once been the symbolic capital of the Resistance. An article entitled 'Souliot Woman' (*Alitheia*, 18 January 1948) tells the story of a young woman who, after proclaiming, 'Bulgarians, you shall not pass!' grabbed a light machine gun and heroically avenged the murder of members of the local gendarmerie, at the hands of DSE partisans. The journalist concluded that '... with this degree of faith and these kinds of sacrifices our enemies and even our friends can see that Greece will never die'. Meanwhile, the newspaper *Kairoi* (*The Times*, 3 September 1948) paid tribute to all 'true Greek women', of all ages and classes, who served the 'fatherland' in a myriad ways against the 'Slavs', writing that '...they sense the patriotic duty of Greek women and they tremble with the same heartbeat which propelled the souls of other great women of the Greek Race, from Telesilla to Bouboulina and Mado Mavroyenous'.

The increasing polarisation of Greek society during the Civil war cannot be understood outside the context of global Cold War hysteria. Indeed, the Greek Civil War was the first manifestation of the Cold War, which intensified to dominate world affairs for the following 45 years. The directives of the so-called Truman Doctrine swept through Greece in 1947 '... to assist Greece in preserving her democratic form of government'. As Woodhouse (1976:63) has explained, the 'Cold War began in Greece with the British-American attempt to prevent the creation of another puppet satellite behind the Iron Curtain'. The Anglo-American intervention succeeded in forging an anti-left coalition comprising a diverse range of interest groups which had been previously threatened by the ascendancy of the leftist populist movement represented by EAM. They included pre-war elites whose economic and political status were intertwined with the Greek state; politicians who had spent the war in Cairo during the occupation; military officers who had either been dormant during the occupation or had fled the country; local elites and others who had vested interests in the pre-war clientelistic power structure; the quisling government and security officials established by the Germans; and of course the monarchy, which faced a bleak future while EAM remained powerful. Another group hostile to the EAM order were individuals of diverse socio-economic backgrounds who had extracted significant personal economic gain from the hardships perpetrated by the German occupation. They included informants, black marketeers, members of the Security Battalions, and profiteers from large-scale sales of real estate, precipitated by widespread famine during the occupation.

Finally, as noted by Van Boeschoten (1997: 141), another group within the countermovement coalition included individuals who had 'fallen out' with EAM and who had consequently distanced themselves from the movement.⁵⁶

Hence, the ascendancy of the countermovement to military and cultural dominance after 1945 was assisted by a vigorous campaign which claimed that the KKE/DSE, despite acts of bravery during the Resistance, were essentially agents of Soviet imperialism.⁵⁷ The self-prescribed mission of the new architects of Greek nationalism was to safeguard Greek national identity and integrity against communist designs to hand over Greece to the Slavs. A short-lived policy by the KKE which granted Slavo-Macedonian villages within Greece limited autonomy, consistent with the official internationalism of the KKE and the Comintern, only added substance to this campaign, even though the policy was hastily rescinded when KKE's leadership realised the tremendous political cost.⁵⁸ But the damage lingered. 80

Captain Belas (pseudonym), a DSE fighter with the Peloponnesian Regiment, wrote in his memoirs (see Papakonstadinou, 1986) that the government propaganda on the Slavo-Macedonian issue was so powerful that villagers who came into contact with DSE fighters for the first time were puzzled to discover that they spoke Greek fluently; so convinced had they become that DSE soldiers were not Greek.⁵⁹ Iatrides (1981: 243) has suggested that the conviction of Soviet involvement provided a comforting rationalisation for the Civil War: 'If the rebels served the sinister purposes of traditional foreign enemies, they were traitors and not real Greeks. The existence of a sizeable Slavo-Macedonian nucleus among the rebels tended to lend substance to such an explanation'. This in turn was bound up with Greek perceptions of Slavic backwardness and DSE fighters were portrayed as wild and uncivilised as the mountain ranges which were their habitat. 81

The following extract from one of the largest conservative Athenian newspapers of the time *Vradini* (*The Evening* [Newspaper]) is representative of the post-1945 climate. The writer introduces himself as an illiterate but patriotic peasant who was 'fortunate enough' to hear the story of the plight of an old woman who had arrived in his town after fleeing the partisans: 82

It's not the first time that our village suffered a stampede by the pigskin-shod bandits, who prefer to speak Slavic than our own language. Nor the first time fellow villagers had been abducted and killed. This time they were even more savage. Their voices bore no human characteristic. . . . They were not Greeks. They requested food upon arrival. We gave them what we had. . . . But this was not enough. . . . They also wanted women. Seven daughters of fellow villagers had hidden in bushes . . . next to the cliff face. . . . The others were younger, but old enough for the horror which awaited them, the eternal dishonour and deformation of their lives. As the gangsters (*simmorites*) approached they were bombarded by stones. The gangsters beat them with their weapons but the girls embraced and their song overwhelmed the sound of gunfire. Greece will never die, they sang, as each leapt off the cliff.⁶⁰ As they watched their loot disappear, the pigmen lunged forward to grab whomever they could. . . . Santa Marina will

receive their innocent souls for they died as they were born, as Greek women.
(*Vradini*, 16 January 1948)

It becomes clear after even a cursory perusal of newspapers and other documents of the time, that the national interest as defined by the new regime shifted away from reflecting 'national independence' and 'social justice' reminiscent of the Resistance and, instead, reflected the historic desire of the Greek conservative bourgeoisie to be identified with the peoples of the West, or of Western Europe, and to distance Greece from perceived Balkan (mainly Bulgarian Slav) backwardness, the legacy of Ottoman rule. For this group, collaboration with the Allies guaranteed entry into the Western alliance—a goal that was paramount, however subservient an arrangement it entailed. At this time, efforts were also made to 'wash over' the stain of their own collaborationism with the Nazis during the occupation, emphasising the imperatives of making a 'clean break' with the Ottoman legacy. Collaborationism even became defensible in circles supporting the view that dependence on the West was inevitable. Indeed, collaborators and their apologists often argued that in 1941 the only European power capable of rescuing Greece from the Slavs was Germany.⁶¹

83

The political polarisation of the Cold War was thus instrumental to the realisation of the age-old bourgeois objective of national identification with Europe, an objective which coincided with the preservation of the pre-war status quo. In this sense, the Civil War can be read as a conflict or contest between the Old Greece and the New Greece, which had emerged from the toils of the Resistance. As such, the former found it imperative to dismantle the Resistance movement that had inspired the majority of the population to engage in national political life for the first time, but whose enfranchisement threatened to dislodge the class which had enjoyed exclusive privileges since Independence. Woodhouse (1976: 63) maintains that it was not a class struggle, as classes were equally represented on both sides, but more an ideological conflict between two conceptions of society: one traditional and one revolutionary. The Resistance did appear to threaten (at least the structure of) two of the most sacred Greek institutions: the church and the family. However, the popular evaluation that the Greek people ultimately chose the nation-state they knew, rather than the communist paradise they were offered, is weakened by the systematic persecution of those who desired the latter.

84

5.9 Nationalism and Misogyny

Just as the DSE male partisan was not 'truly Greek', so too the DSE woman fighter was not really a woman. Far from embodying the ideals of the Revolution in the spirit of the warrior Bouboulina, the woman fighter was invested with a great evil. She was the 'blood-thirsty hyena' who, like any woman who turned her back on her 'nature' and raised guns against the established order, represented the highest form of all profanity; a creature combining poisonous female cunning *and* the gun. For instance, following the capture and subsequent death sentence by court martial of a DSE partisan woman, the conservative Tripoli newspaper

85

Alithia (Truth) published an article entitled 'Death to the Bloodthirsty Hyena: The Beast in Feminine Form' (7 December 1947). The article provided a summary of the trial as well as excerpts of the testimony of the 'Red teacher', 'the beast', or alternatively, 'the savage executioner of Mt Parnonas'.

The moral outrage provoked by the image of gun-toting women roaming the countryside amongst men, and the contempt for church and family (the exclusive domains of Greek womanhood) that it represented—in conjunction with heavy propaganda campaigns regarding the communist will to compromise if not destroy family, religion, and national sovereignty—made for an explosive combination that strongly galvanised popular opposition to the partisans in the Civil War phase. Other more representative voices in the Greek press rationalised the *adartissa* phenomenon as a simple, however sinister, case of the mass abduction of vulnerable women by terrorists, which they saw as a logical extension of the *paidomazoma*, a communist policy which allegedly involved the removal of Greek children to Soviet bloc countries,⁶² rather than contemplate the possibility that women may have joined voluntarily. 86

Countermovement claims of partisan debauchery acquired new dimensions during the Civil War, although it had been a well-worn strategy of anti-EAM forces during the Resistance. Highly sensationalised depictions of sexual permissiveness in the DSE, which were provoked by the cohabitation of men and women fighters, excited and appalled the Greek imagination and partly explains the special contempt with which women DSE fighters were treated upon capture. Niki Karras, a former partisan, recalls that female prisoners were often referred to as 'Bulgarian whores', and rarely referred to by name. She also recalled an exchange between a security officer and a very young female comrade shortly before she was executed at a concentration camp in the Peloponnesian city of Tripoli. The officer, puled and exasperated at the girl's insistence that she was neither doped nor molested by her male comrades in the DSE, muttered that, 'It couldn't be possible. . . . Just looking at you standing there before me makes my blood boil. What the hell were they, eunuchs?'⁶³ 87

Woodhouse (1976: 132) has referred in his memoirs to the problem of the ' . . . abandonment of sexual morality [in the DSE] which seems to have become a matter of policy during the "third round"; a logical consequence of the "modernising puritanism"⁶⁴ of the Left, in the context of a socially backward and sexually frustrated society'. 88

While Woodhouse, a British government official at the time, suggests that sexual degeneracy was a great problem, it is likely that the widely disseminated *idea* of promiscuity was damaging enough in itself, given the rigid sexual taboos of the day. Van Boeschoten's (1997: 186) oral histories suggest that KKE had 'relaxed' a rather austere internal social policy rather than 'enforced' a policy of sexual promiscuity, as Woodhouse has suggested. Van Boeschoten says: 'As is well known, during the *EAM-ELAS* phase, romantic relations were illegal and punished 89

severely, often with the death penalty. This regime prevailed in the *DSE* at least at the beginning, but later these relationships were given the green light, as long as there was mutual consent'.

The excitement provoked amongst opponents by the idea of a 'mixed' partisan army sparked cries of sexual abuse, rape, and forced prostitution of women by partisans, especially by the *kapetanioi* (platoon or regiment 'captains'). Take for example, an article titled 'The Animal People' (*Alithia*, 10 January 1948), which was dedicated to the portrayal of the DSE as a playground for the subhuman, morally corrupt men and women of Greek society. Based on the alleged testimony of a captured and repentant DSE woman soldier, Vasiliki Likouriotou, of Kalavrita, '... it was proof of the absence of ... even the most elementary dignity which distinguishes humans from animals'. The description of her ordeal began with her 'capture' by the gang of 'Sfakianos', amongst whom were five girls, '... armed and dressed in male clothes, one of whom *belonged* only to the Kapetanios', and ended with a vivid 'account' of the orgy-filled nights where '... each gangster would await his turn to take us'. Her story concludes with an appreciation of her final capture by the National Guard, which she was said to have likened it to '... salvation from a tormented life of dishonour'.

The association of national honour with feminine virtue and chastity clashed directly with the subversive images of the DSE women roaming amongst men to generate the moral hysteria characteristic of the ultra-nationalist press, such as that of the newspaper *Alithia*. The above article ends as follows: 'Death would be preferable to falling back into the hands of those dogs. The other five females, cruel and wicked as they were, did not hesitate to commit all manner of heinous crimes. After all they had already surrendered their bodies to those wolves and their souls to the devil'. Although such extreme characterisations of the DSE woman were not representative outside the rightist fringe, the image of armed women roaming the mountains became fixed in the public imagination, and acted as a vehicle through which a generalized anxiety about the proper place of women in Greek post-war society was expressed.

There is a marked reticence in partisan literature and memoirs on the subject of sexual relations in the DSE ranks, an unspoken agreement that the partisan legacy must continually be guarded against distortion and wilful misrepresentation. But the question finds its way to the surface in oral histories of the war, sometimes by accident. A former DSE woman, who remained anonymous, expressed her objection and disappointment with journalists responsible for the unedited publication of recently discovered DSE records. The archive is comprised of personal profiles of partisans that were kept by the administration and which included moral judgements passed on a certain partisan woman described as a 'gossip, sly and immoral'. The publication of this unsympathetic portrait provoked an outcry that reflected the eagerness of former partisans to protect the memory of their comrades, especially in view of the final defeat and the ensuing traumas:

A little discretion is required on the subject of these clearly contradictory biographical reports by superiors. We do not know if these women are still alive

and I ask you: Is it right, for one of them, or her family, her children to read an indictment of her character by some platoon leader whose criteria are unknown? If you had been a DSE fighter you would have taken greater care. It is a fact that sexual relations with women fighters were strictly forbidden, and when they did occur harsh measures were taken. I personally recall one such episode, at the end of 1947, when two young people were caught in a unit tent. Before they were banished to their respective villages, the whole section, lined up to spit at them. The girl returned to her village and the boy took his own life. But it was very human for romances to occur between young people who watched their comrades fall before their very eyes on a daily basis . . . but they were so pure, beautiful and hid inside them so much humanity. No young person today could ever experience or even imagine what we experienced back then. A life full of humanity and solidarity (*Eleftherotipia*, 6 February 1986)

5.10 The Spectre of Suffrage

At another level, the image of the DSE woman became a catalyst for a new dialogue between moderates and conservatives on the issue of women's appropriate national role in post-war society. The moderates issued warnings that the DSE women are the unfortunate, if predictable, outcome of a backward patriarchal society of 'male egotists'. They urged that the national interest, and Greek society as a whole, ought not to be threatened but empowered and strengthened by the long overdue enfranchisement of women and their incorporation into the nation-state. Moreover, the representation of women partisans in arms, 'who fight with more determination and courage than their male comrades', provided moderate commentators like Palaiologos with evidence that women were more than ready and capable of accepting the responsibilities associated with full citizenship rights (article in mainstream liberal Athenian newspaper *Vima*, 5 January 1949).

93

This view, of course, was consistent with nationalist logic and in fact echoed feminist discourse of the pre-war period. The post-war moderate view on the women question continued this tradition, arguing that women's suffrage, workplace protection, and educational opportunities were vital to the strengthening of sacred Greek values of family, religion, and country (*patrida*). Loula Ieronimodou, a journalist writing in 1949, elaborated this line of argument in an article paying tribute to the 'tireless, relentless commitment of the League for Women's Rights to the advancement of Greek women's status and suffrage in particular'. Here she claims

94

. . . that while women's primary role must remain that of mother and wife, the state simultaneously owes them civil equality, as women exited the home to work, precisely for the betterment of family life. Because her educational level has risen, her critical judgement has matured, because she stood tall with her head held high, in the midst of the great battle which Greek men are waging since 1940. Because civilisation means justice and gender equality, and because Greece cannot but count itself among the civilised nations. (*Psaras*, 28 January 1949)

On the other side of the argument, conservative voices within the conservative nationalist coalition, led in many instances by religious leaders, considered the DSE woman to represent the logical outcome of women's enfranchisement. They saw political rights for women as detrimental to the Greek nation (*ethnos*) and the race (*filii*). This most rigid maternalist conception of women's citizenship role demanded that the Moral Mother be restored to her pre-war glory in the private sphere as a matter of national identity. This step backwards for women was nevertheless charged with political purpose, reminiscent of the deifying campaigns for 'national motherhood' in fascist Germany and Italy.⁶⁵ 95

An article entitled 'For the Elevation of the Idea of Motherhood and of Women' (*Acropolis*, 20 July 1949) praised a series of articles written by the prominent artist Kostas Mousouris, who argued for the national importance of establishing the institution of Mothers' Day in Greece. These articles, we are reminded, argued . . . 96

. . . that we must all—the state, labour, professional, intellectual organisations, the academy, the university—work for the establishment of this day . . . so that it is regarded from the bottom up, by all of society, and nationwide, as a supreme moral necessity; the worship of the Mother, who represents the creation of life, the foundation of the home, she, who nourishes our children, gives hope to the Nation, with her kind sentiments and love for all things noble, superior and gentle. (*Acropolis*, 20 July 1949)

Evangelical tributes to motherhood became a commonplace across the Greek press by 1949. Some illuminating examples, like 'Women' (*Acropolis*, 12 July 1949), proposed the establishment of the 'Tomb of the Unknown Mother'; while 'The Breath of the Home' (*Ta Nea [The News]*, 14 April 1949) celebrated the crucial contribution of women to the spirit of Easter as she (the housewife) 'carefully and creatively plans the "rebirth" of the house . . . and transforms her lounge into a shrine and the table into a vision of Easter sacrifices on the altar of our stomachs'. In this article, the author (a priest) laments that ' . . . the pride inspired by these deeds has bubbled over to a point where certain progressive ideas have distorted tradition and the role of women as mistresses of the house'.

A final example highlights the alarm inspired by DSE women as symbols of women's liberation from their prescribed destiny in Greek society. 'The True Queen of the House' appeared in the 18 September 1949 edition of the *Acropolis* and was written by the bishop of the island of Chios. The bishop expresses his gratitude for a letter sent by 'an honourable Greek mother' in Macedonia, 'Anna S', which is reproduced in its entirety. Anna S wrote to the bishop in frustration and dismay after a request was made to her by some 'ladies of the Athenian aristocracy' that she lead a regional campaign for women's suffrage, an issue regarded by these women as being 'of supreme national significance'. Anna S described the anger she felt over these 'untimely' concerns when she was witnessed a disturbance on the street. Through her window, she observed: 97

. . . a mob of gangster women (*simoritisses*) [who] were being led to the camps after capture. They were drenched in grease, in tatters, shamelessly donning men's clothes, with frightful faces. I became faint. I thought that before me stood Greece, pointing to these creatures and beckoning in a quivering voice: Is this the fate they wish upon honourable Greek women. . . . Your worship, I cannot bear to see women outside their natural role. I cannot tolerate the image of a woman with a cigar in her mouth, wearing men's trousers just like those gangster women on the street. The rightful place for Greek women is in the home. That is her kingdom, where she is the queen and not merely a number on the sidewalk. And in the midst of the turmoil to which our nation is subject, women have a place in hospitals, in organisations for the material and moral support of soldiers, in Church, in places where they [Greek women] can perform endless entreaties for our children, who are fighting for Greece. Women who fall outside this mission are not natural women, but DEBAUCHED BEASTS. (Capitals in the original.)

The priest replied, 'You are absolutely right, great Greek mother. God save us if the ideals of contemporary Greek women echo those of the gangster women. God save Greece!'

5.11 Conclusion: Feminism and Nationalism—An Unhappy Alliance Revisited

The official discourse around the issue of Greek women's social and political status of the Civil War can be understood as a counterdiscourse to that of the DSE/ PDEG, which originated in the Resistance movement. The consolidation of the Greek–Western alliance, promised by the collaborative effort to expel the 'communist menace' within Greek borders, would create a further impetus to raise the standards of Greek women's participation in the nation in accordance with Western values. This tension did not necessarily bear any real fruit for Greek women. In 1948 the idea of extended political involvement for women in the nation found expression in government initiatives to mobilise special groups of women into the war effort. A select group of professional and skilled women in the sciences were the targets of this program, which was hailed by the government, feminists, and moderates,⁶⁶ who supported women's advancement, as a great and novel step forward in the name of national progress. Moreover, the initiative was construed once again as a modern take on the role of women who rose spontaneously in the nation's hour of need during the 'Revolution'. An article in *Ta Nea* (*The News*, 17 January 1949) congratulated the minister of defence for requesting the participation of women in military operations (in contrast to the all-male National Army), for now they had the chance to move from the rear to the front, ' . . . following the steps of the women of 1821 who delivered to us a free nation'. This initiative by the Greek state was essentially pragmatic as it liberated 'manpower' that could move to the war front in the mountains, but it was opportunistically and astutely woven into a narrative of women's importance and special capabilities in the arena of 'national politics', which insinuated the possibility of a renegotiation of their political rights in the post-war era (which was never realised). Newspapers such as *Ebros* (*Forward*) recommended that the government fully exploit women's potential by assigning to them a broad set of tasks. Ignoring the military involvement of their own women in the lines

98

of the DSE, the newspapers cited women in the armed forces from Britain and the USA as inspiring role models (5 January 1949). Still-active pre-war feminist organisations such as the League for Women's Rights supported the mobilisational effort of women by the Greek state in the partisan war. By 1947, the League had not only withdrawn its support from the left-wing women's movement (that had sprung out of the Resistance), but by 1948 had also joined in the national chorus against the partisans.⁶⁷

Pre-war feminists—some of whom had participated in the mass women's movement which formed during the Resistance (PEG) but had since withdrawn their support for the partisan movement—remained optimistic about the possibilities for women's suffrage in Greece even throughout the course of the Civil War. While these feminist organisations (which included the National Council and the League for the Rights of Women) were cognizant of the decidedly narrower political playing field in the post-war period, the government's Western aspirations encouraged feminist hopes that such an alliance would bind the Greek state to institute all the laws of modernity, including the women's vote. In 1949, Act 949 was passed, which granted women over 21 years of age the right to participate in local elections, and those over 25 the right to stand for election as local councillors, though not for the mayorship. In April, while the Civil War still raged in northern Greece, the press and radio stations announced 'the great and joyful event for the women of Greece that the City of Athens could now claim to have two women representatives on the council board' (*To Vima*, 21 April 1949).

99

The much-publicised visit to Greece by three prominent American women activists, in 1949, consolidated feminist optimism. Before representatives of the Athenian press, the visitors repeatedly raised the issue of necessary changes which had to be made to Greek women's political status in the post-war period. The three women in question were Blair Bach, president of the International Federation of Women; Althea Hottel, president of the Union of Professional American Women; and Anna Strauss, president of the Union of Women Voters in the United States. Blair Bach was also reportedly 'a personal friend of President Truman, a member of the Marshall Plan Committee, and numerous other State Committees which dealt with child welfare, social policy, etc. 'Among their concerns on this tour was the progress of the national struggle, the mass evacuation and deportation of children by the partisans (*paidomazoma*), the problem of political refugees, and social reform'.⁶⁸

100

Greek feminist hopes for change were soon dashed as they found they had little room to manoeuvre in a society governed by the values of nation, religion, and family. In fact, national integration into a 'Western order' far from entrenched an ethos of liberalisation which feminists and other liberals had anticipated. Rather, the Greek state better resembled the structure of patriarchal police-states reminiscent of Latin American countries rather than the liberal democracies of its British and American allies. The restoration of rigid pre-war models of Greek womanhood was an efficient marker of the limits of post-war Greek politics and culture,

101

especially with the introduction of the country's first Civil Code in 1946, which enshrined women's subordinate social, political, and cultural status in law; a legal subjugation which had been a feature of the constitution (see Moschou-Sakoraffou, 1990).

The project of 'cleansing' the political social and symbolic landscape of the last remnants of partisan culture and the so-called return to normality after the war ended were synonymous with the restoration of traditional mechanisms of social control, including the traditional control of women by men, the reinstatement of restrictive behavioural norms, limited avenues for women's political expression, limited life choices for the poor disenfranchised majority, a generalised idealisation of motherhood which cut across class, and the resumption of a legal and political status equivalent to that of children (see Kaklamanaki, 1984 and Moschou-Sakoraffou, 1990). 102

As for the women of the DSE, partisan defeat in 1949 ended in either long-term exile behind the Iron Curtain,⁶⁹ imprisonment, state-sanctioned execution for national treason, or else the hardships of a life lived in poverty, under a cloud of social ostracism and with few opportunities for employment. For some women, dislocated by the breakdown in social and family structures, prostitution presented itself as an option. Mary Henderson (1988: 46), an English journalist travelling through Greece shortly after the end of the Civil War, recalls the sight of two peasant girls who 103

held hands as they stood shivering outside the Grande Bretagne's [a luxury hotel in the centre of Athens] revolving door. . . . Their skirts were too short, their heels too high and unsteady. The doorman who saw me looking at them told me that they had been abducted by guerillas, debauched by the *kapetanos* and deserted by them when they had fled over the Yugoslav border. Now, he said, as they could no longer return to their villages—bathed in shame—they had become prostitutes. Or, to use his Greek phrase, '*Now they were making the pavements.*'

Though this portrayal of DSE women must be assessed with caution in the context of the vigorous propaganda campaigns of the time, there was a significant rise in the number of prostitutes during and after the Civil War, which is partly attributable to the effects of dislocation and social ostracism imposed on women on the losing side.⁷⁰ The devastation of the countryside, family fragmentation, the breakdown of community solidarity in response to the threat of paramilitary violence or imprisonment, and massive unemployment were all factors contributing to a rise in both prostitution and the supply of female domestic labourers as women flocked into urban areas from the countryside. Opportunities for employment were limited to domestic service, as factories were regularly monitored for employees with politically 'tainted' backgrounds. These live-in positions were notoriously exploitative and often provided fertile and unmonitored terrain for private left-wing persecution. Simultaneously, the Civil War state's drive to restore the social order entailed making moral examples of the women who had stepped out of their 'proper' national and social roles. This could be discerned by the systematic neglect of mass rapes and violence towards women partisans and kinswomen of partisan men, perpetrated by paramilitary groups; death sentences and executions meted out 104

at regular intervals by court martial;⁷¹ the indiscriminate severity of prison sentences; rituals of torture; and the uncanny toleration of prostitution. The message to women was that soliciting was far more in keeping with women's citizenship role, the civil order, and national identity (the triptych values) than active political participation in the nation, and that the objectification and commodification of women⁷² was preferable to a society of female citizens/agents. The hypocrisy is striking when one recalls that alleged sexual promiscuity within the DSE was a favourite rallying point against the left.

These circumstances become a lot more poignant when contrasted against the political gains of the Resistance a few years earlier. The backlash against the Resistance can perhaps be partly explained by an insidious patriarchal revanchism. The military and strategic head of ELAS, Major-General Stefanos Sarafis, did in fact claim that women's entry into public life had been '... largely responsible for much of the post-war backlash against the Left, especially in the countryside' (see M. Sarafis, 1990: 186). 105

The political compromises made by bourgeois-feminist politicians after the Civil War provide a stark contrast with their full involvement in the mass women's movement, which had grown out of the Resistance a few years earlier. Many feminists had formed alliances for the first time with 'democratic' or leftist women's groups shortly after Liberation in 1944. The history of this mass women's movement, unprecedented in its political and class diversity, was buried with the defeat of the partisan movement. 106

A brief portrait of the movement in question is valuable here. The first women's organisation to emerge out of the Resistance movement was the Panhellenic Union of Women (PEG), which formed in February 1946. PEG had strong links with the International Democratic Federation of Women (WIDF), founded by the communist-dominated Union des Femme Francaises in Paris. This was followed by the establishment of a chain of women's associations throughout rural townships, which attracted a wide membership. Kaklamanaki (1984: 52) notes that the 'populist' spirit permeated even the most 'specialised' organisations which emerged during this period. For example, the Association of Intellectual Women (Syndesmon Dianouomenon Gynaikon) founded in Thessaloniki, defined the 'intellectual' very broadly to include a broad spectrum of women, not just those who had received a formal education. These organisations were committed to the intellectual and political advancement of all women, the struggle against fascism, the establishment of peace, as well as the solution to broader long-standing social problems. 107

In February 1946, the PEG organised a gathering of the newly formed women's associations, as well as pre-war feminist organisations such as the League for the Rights of Women and the National Council, to discuss the issue of women's suffrage. It resulted in a petition by 35 participating organisations, which contained a formal request to the government for the consideration of the women's vote as well as reforms to the Civil Code, both of which were rejected or 'postponed'. Avra Theodoropoulou (representative and president of the pre-war League for Women's Rights) recalls the optimism of the time and the '... exceptional success 108

of the meeting, where women's commitment was in such abundance, that it seemed as though women had finally become conscious of the need to be regarded as free citizens, and that their opinions ought to weigh heavily upon the Laws of the Nation' (League Annual Speech 1946–47, in the archive of Avra Theodoropoulou, Hellenic Writers' Association).

This conference also enshrined interorganisational cooperation and founded the Pan-Hellenic Federation of Women (POG) as the umbrella organisation for groups concerned about the political advancement of women. This overarching aim drew the support of bourgeois- feminist groups in the first instance, and was consolidated with Theodoropoulou's subsequent presidency of the Federation and with long-standing feminist colleague Rosa Imvrioti's position as general secretary. The POG staged the first Panhellenic Women's Conference in Athens, in May 1946, while the idea of popular participation in the nation was still strong. Chaired by Theodoropoulou, the issues discussed ranged from the status of women in public and private law, to workplace reforms, children's welfare, and education.⁷³ But the Federation was ill-fated in the context of increasing political volatility, as Hart (1996: 246) describes:

109

Delegates from newly formed women's groups in villages and towns all over Greece attended this convention, including Maria Svolou, a *PEEA* deputy and Ruling Council member, and the prominent educationalist and pre-war feminist Rosa Imvrioti. The goal of the conference was to re-emphasise the importance of women's rights and women's solidarity on a national scale. Unfortunately, any optimism was marred by reports of repression in the delegates' home districts. For example a photograph from the League for Democracy in Greece archives at King's College, the University of London, shows broken glass, splintered wood, a shattered typewriter, torn paper scattered on the floor, and demolished signs. The caption reads, 'Women's Centre at Karditsa, wrecked April, 1945.' After a unanimous vote in favour of women's suffrage, it was submitted to parliament and subsequently ignored.⁷⁴

POG continued to function throughout 1946, against increasing government indifference and a generalised escalating adversity. In February 1947 tensions between leftist and bourgeois elements within POG culminated in the resignation of Avra Theodoropoulou from the presidency, '... immediately after she had learnt of the unjust and unjustifiable attack by the left-wing WIDF against the bourgeois International Alliance of Women' (printed in the WIDF's bulletin, Oct./Nov 1946). As president of the League, which had also been the Greek branch of the International Alliance of Women since 1920, and, as an 'active cadre and Alliance board member for 12 years', Theodoropoulou condemned the attack as pure slander. In her letter of resignation, Theodoropoulou revealed tensions that underpinned the wartime women's movement, perhaps from its inception:

110

After all this, I feel obliged to step down from the organisation which was formed on the initiative of the WIDF, and whose ranks include members of the WIDF. Furthermore, I believe that my presence on the Executive Committee of PEG was and would continue to be an impediment to POG in its relentless pursuit of

objectives laid down by the WIDF for the organisations that emerged from its bosom. (Theodoropoulou, cited in Boutzouvi-Bania, 1990: 25)

One can speculate as to the offensive content of a still-elusive document on the basis of the well-worn socialist tradition of hostility to the bourgeois women's movement. Boutzouvi-Bania's (1990: 25) understanding of the conflict is as follows: 'Well-funded and claiming to speak for 80 million women, the WIDF even challenged the right of older organisations to represent women at the United Nations. And so the cold war enveloped the world of international women's organisations also'. POG's rejection of the alliance with the United Nations would have come as a heavy blow to the League and to Theodoropoulou personally, who had invested an entire political career in internationalist feminist networking and who drew much currency from the specific relationship of the League with the United Nations, which had recently formed a special committee known as the Statute de la femme. The tensions were aggravated by the broader conflict between left and right, which would eventually lead to the outbreak of Civil War, making the POG coalition untenable. 111

Civil strife had also begun to stifle and corrode the ideal of not only inter-organisational solidarity but also individual organisations themselves. Sakoraffou (1990: 231) observed that the annual address of the incumbent, General Secretary Virginia Zanna, to her colleagues at the League for Women's Rights, on 29 January 1947, lacked any substantial feminist content. 'Greek women were once again to show humility and discretion with regard to their cause. Afraid that their meeting would be judged as untimely and indulgent in the face of serious political and national problems, they hushed'.⁷⁵ To add to this picture of increasing polarisation, the only left-identified women's organisation that continued to operate during the most difficult years (1948–54), albeit with periodical harassment from the authorities, was PEOPEF (the Panhellenic Union of the Families of the Exiled and Imprisoned), comprised mainly of mothers, sisters, and daughters of prisoners. The women and purpose of PEOPEF did not threaten, but indeed were compatible with, the values promoted by the new order—maternal love, charity, and sacrifice—and the organisation flourished, even though the sons, husbands and children of the women of PEOPEF were branded enemies of the nation. Maria Karra (1995: 7), a founding member, reflected that in hindsight 112

... the actions of these women had added significance. They were the only remaining symbol of popular resistance to violence and autocracy in the cities and towns controlled by the Nationalists, and played an important role in keeping the flame which would re-ignite much later into a new 'Spring' for Greek women. . . . On a daytoday basis their purpose was to provide love and affection, solidarity and comfort to the families and children of those in prison and in exile.⁷⁶

POG was dismantled by the Security Forces in 1948. Its demise was reported in the DSE *Bulletin* in the 24 March 1948 issue, which stated that in the cities (controlled by the government) all democratic women's groups had been abolished: 'Pending the decision of the security commission, fifty-three cultural intellectual and social bodies as well as democratic 113

organisations have been dissolved in Athens. Of these, nineteen are women's organisations, amongst which was the Panhellenic Women's Federation (POG). Today no democratic and progressive organisation exists in American-occupied Greece'.

The pre-war feminist organisations that had shared briefly in the POG project resumed their autonomous status and continued to operate, although their campaigns were couched in much more moderate tones. The women of the League continued to lobby the Greek government for women's right to vote, albeit in quieter tones, and retained their links with international networks, keeping abreast of developments in human rights legislation. But 1948 signalled yet another shift for the League of Women's Rights, an organisation which had begun life as an autonomous or politically neutral outfit before the war and then became actively involved in a left-identified but broad-based mass women's movement in 1945. In 1948, the League joined the chorus of nationalists that rallied against the 'gangster war', sharing in the hysteria generated by the perceived abduction of women by the KKE and the DSE and their carrying out the so-called *paidomazoma* (the alleged kidnapping and relocation of children to countries of the Soviet bloc).⁷⁷ 114

A letter addressed to the International Alliance of Women in 1948 begins with a reminder of two of the League's founding principles: 'independence from political parties' and a categorical rejection of violence. In the same breath it stands in clear judgement of the DSE women who were 'acting against the nation', while other innocent 'women and young girls were being recruited by the rebels for compulsory service and . . . to be exploited as prostitutes'.⁷⁸ 115

The League simply echoed a view of the partisan war which had become dominant across Greek society by 1948 and which was shared by the spectrum of women's organisations that operated in post-war Greece up to 1974. These organisations included the League for Women's Rights, the National Council, the Women's Lyceum, the Union of Christian Youth, the Professional Women's League, the Panhellenic Union of Intellectual Women, and the Greek Federation of Women's Organisations. Their acquiescence or collusion with the Civil War state enabled their survival at a time when all political activities had to be formally approved. However, while they were permitted to operate they were fundamentally compromised as the Civil War state, despite its Westernising pretensions, forced feminists into a very narrow playing field, which was defined by the values *patris-thriskeia-oikogeneia* (country-religion-family). 116

A joint publication by the National Council, the Lyceum, the Hellenic Association of University (Professional) Women, and the Hellenic Girl Guides, notably titled *Hellenia*, exemplifies the conservative nationalism which dictated feminist politics for decades after the war. The February 1949 edition of *Hellenia*, effectively a state-approved 'feminist' gazette, contained three key elements: war propaganda, gratitude for American intervention, and a feminism that worshipped domesticity and motherhood. It reproduced a radio broadcast by Michael Ailianos, minister for press and information, titled 'Speech to the Women of Greece'. In this speech, Ailianos speaks about the nation's gallant mothers whose sons were ' . . . shedding their blood in the great fight for the survival of our country,' adding a note of thanks to ' . . . all the women's 117

organisations which have mobilised for the frontline soldier, his family and for his children'. According to Ailianos, women's greatest asset in this war was their 'feminine soul', which afforded them direct access to 'eternal beauty and truth' and thus rendered them 'the most precious of assets in the struggle to reveal that communism principally threatens the family, the very foundation of society In Greece, our women know that they and their children are fighting not only for Religion and Nation, but also for the Family Our victory will be the Victory of Mankind, a Victory led by the symbol of the Holy Virgin, representative of Motherhood, its Sorrows, Love and Sacrifice'. Oddly, the next article in the same issue was by none other than Avra Theodoropoulou, writing on the case of equal rights for women.

Greek women were granted unconditional voting rights in 1956. Second-wave feminists have traced the timing of this legislative coup to the effect of international pressure, rather than feminist influence. International pressure also pushed through a series of other marginal legal gains for women that were enforced incrementally throughout the late 1940s and into the 1950s. In the absence of civil society in post-war Greece, the landmark legal gains did not have transformative cultural power. Much remained the same. Feminist discourse was kept under 'surveillance', while the other myriad dimensions of women's secondary status in Greek society remained intact for decades. Critical reforms to the Civil Code and the constitution, particularly vis-à-vis family law, were not instituted until the 1980s, at the peak of second -wave feminist influence in Greece, in conjunction with the sympathetic populist Panhellenic Socialist Party (PASOK), which had taken power in 1981.

118

The deployment of the woman warrior as an analytical category has cast the Civil War in a new light—as an historic episode in which the relationship between gender, war, and national identity and the inherently problematic relationship between feminism and nationalism are in full view. The volatile political climate of the 1940s, with its multiple regime shifts, demonstrated the versatile and elastic utility of nationalist imagery and the ways in which it could be used to serve diametrically opposed political agendas. At first, images of partisan women in arms were likened to the icons of the 1821 Revolution in the rhetoric of the leftist Resistance—the similar context of a national liberation war was conducive to forging strong emotive links between Bouboulina and the Souliot women, on the one hand, and between Bouboulina and partisan women on the other. Later, however, the anti-EAM alliance, which regained power during the Civil War, reappropriated this symbolism in the service of a radically different view of the nation, one in which women figured as repositories and guardians of national tradition. Here, the female icons of 1821 were cast not as predecessors but as polar opposites to the *adartisses* of the partisan army; the latter now epitomizing the extent of national disorder perpetrated by the partisan movement, where only a few years earlier, during the Axis occupation, they were the 'poster girls' for the internationally celebrated Resistance movement.

119

Notes

Note 1: With the exception of the Soviet Union, and perhaps Yugoslavia, the scale of material devastation and human loss in Greece exceeded that of other countries occupied by the Axis forces. [back](#)

Note 2: Vasilis Barziotas (1985), a member of the Central Committee of KKE from 1943 to 1956 and political commissioner at DSE General Headquarters, recalls widespread objection to the extensive 'use' of women in the DSE, to which his standard response had been that '... in popular armies, partisan armies etc., the movement is obligated to utilise women in war also'. [back](#)

Note 3: Namely, the widespread view that the KKE leaders accepted women into the army because they had no other alternative, in view of the paucity of new recruits and an overall worsening military situation. [back](#)

Note 4: Recall Nash's (1989) observation that the women fighters of the Spanish Civil War were deployed as useful propaganda vehicles rather than as valued soldiers. Similarly, in Greece, the posters of Titika (see previous chapter) depicted a rifle-toting woman who had, in fact, never fired a shot. [back](#)

Note 5: In December 1944, EAM-ELAS and the British Army fought the Battle of Athens, which ended with ELAS's withdrawal from Athens. [back](#)

Note 6: For a comprehensive discussion of the factors that fuelled anti-EAM sentiment during the Resistance, see Van Boeschoten (1997), Close (1993), and Mazower (1995). [back](#)

Note 7: Following the Varkiza Treaty, articles securing civil liberties were suspended from the constitution and new decrees and special measures were introduced that would enable the imprisonment and exile of partisans to a selection of barren islands in the Aegean. In 1946, Act 509, and later Act 375 enabled the police to round up thousands more to appear before Emergency Court Martials (Ektakta Stratodikeia). Many partisans were found guilty of high treason and sentenced to death (often by judges who had collaborated with the German occupation authorities). For more on the backlash against the left, see Mazower (1995, 2000) and Close (1993). [back](#)

Note 8: The countermovement was an alliance of pre-war political parties, the monarchy, industrialists, local feudal lords (*tsiflikades*), officials of the quisling governments set up by German occupying forces, paramilitaries who had worked for the Axis powers, black marketeers, and others who extracted significant personal gain or 'fell out' with EAM during the occupation. For more, see Close (1993) and Van Boeschoten (1997). [back](#)

Note 9: Also, the ultimate goal of EAM-ELAS. [back](#)

Note 10: Papakonstadinou (aka Belas) (1986), former DSE officer, mentions that although he was a KKE member, he and his platoon were once instructed by the KKE leadership to join the Agrarian Party. [back](#)

Note 11: See Rossos (1997) and Karakasidou (1993). [back](#)

Note 12: Niki Karras, interview with author, Athens, 1998. The following excerpts are translated from that recorded conversation. [back](#)

Note 13: The Panhellenic Democratic Union of Women (PDEG) was a partisan organisation for women that formed during the Civil War. It published much of the documentation that pertains specifically to the experiences of women active in the DSE. [back](#)

Note 14: Barziotas (1985) adds that young men and women were judged for their courage and military prowess in the advanced DSE units. There were also special formations composed of young fighters, as well as companies of the DNE armed with automatics and light and heavy machine guns. In addition, there was the DNE Brigade, which was used in crisis situations during important battles. [back](#)

Note 15: A note on Greek grammar: *adartis* is the masculine form, and *adartissa*, the feminine. [back](#)

Note 16: Karras interview, 1998. back

Note 17: Former members of the EAM coalition either joined the government side after 1946 or were unable to contribute to the DSE struggle, cut off the 'front line' by the government's security and paramilitary forces. Most, however, were paralysed by the climate of fear, propaganda, and hysteria generated by the Civil War. back

Note 18: Additionally, women dominated the tasks of liaison and sabotage. back

Note 19: These two mountain ranges of northern Greece were the main theatres of battle in the final stages of the war. back

Note 20: The political commissioner, regarded as 'the soul of the revolutionary army', was an institutional position borrowed from the Soviet military and it permeated all levels of both military and political hierarchies. The duties of a political commissar involved attending to the spiritual well-being and morale of the soldiers, as well as to the development of military prowess and commitment. In DSE narratives, 'he' (although there is evidence that women occupied some of these positions) is often portrayed as the loving/nurturing father (*storgikos pateras*). back

Note 21: These three tasks are mentioned in a DSE official document dated 1948 (month not specified). back

Note 22: This dynamic has also been observed in the context of the Yugoslav National Liberation Movement, and can be attributed, according to Milovan Djilas, to the fact that when a woman enlists into the revolutionary army, it has far more importance, '... constituting a greater turning point for women than for men' (Jancar, 1981: 152). back

Note 23: Karras interview, 1998. back

Note 24: Note that, on the basis of available archival material, the number of pamphlets circulating during 1948–49 was inversely proportional to the military strength/successes of the DSE. back

Note 25: The majority of paramilitary forces had previously been 'officers' of collaborationist units known as *tagmatasfalites*, set up by the German forces in 1943–44, or they had belonged to right-wing extremist groups such as the X-Groups (*Hites*). back

Note 26: Papakonstadinou (1986) recounts his exasperation at the vacillation of KKE's leadership and his subsequent relief following the decision to regroup and activate what he referred to as a 'defensive campaign'. Other partisan memoirs give similar accounts of the period. back

Note 27: A significant proportion of the Greek rural population was engaged in waged labour on large privately owned estates and thus identified with the trade unionists of the cities who worked in factories. Nevertheless, the leadership expressed anxiety about the predominance of peasants in a Marxist proletarian movement. back

Note 28: She is referring to a local rightist militia. back

Note 29: The self-titled DSE *Bulletin* was initially the political mouthpiece of the GHQ. On 2 December 1948, the leadership decided that it would be published monthly for the additional purposes of disseminating the battlefield experiences of DSE soldiers, as well as offering guidance to cadres on political and military matters. back

Note 30: This episode was recorded in DSE documents recovered by journalists in the Vitsi mountains in the 1970s. Excerpts were published daily in the Athenian newspaper *Eleftherotipia* between January and the end of March 1986. back

Note 31: One of many such examples which appear in the *Eleftherotipia* records is the promotion of Evropi Grigoriadou. In July 1949, the Military Ministry of the Provisional Democratic Government (PDK), which formed in the mountains months earlier, awarded her the Electra Medal for (1) the Kerdilio operation when the machine-gun sniper was injured and she took over his station, (2) the Strimona operation when she dealt with four enemy tanks with her machine gun, and facilitated the safe passage of DSE units, (3) the Manolaki operation when she approached an enemy guardhouse with a panzer and blew it to smithereens, and (4) her repeated heroism in many battles, for which she

received honorary mentions twice (*Eleftherotipia*, 29 March 1986). Data about the promotion of individual partisans also appear in PDEG documents, as well as in personal memoirs such as the four-volume memoirs of Katsis (1990, 1994, 1997, 1998). back

Note 32: The Electra Medal was named after prominent KKE political cadre Electra Apostolou, who was executed by state security forces in 1944 for 'national treason' for her part in the Resistance. back

Note 33: Nikos Anagnostopoulos (1925–2006) was my father. He was conscripted in 1946 and was demobilized in 1950, after having fought against the DSE in every important campaign, from the Peloponnese mopping-up operations to the final battles on the mountains of Grammos and Vitsi. In 1950, immediately after his demobilization, he migrated to Australia, and never returned to Greece. back

Note 34: See Berkin & Lovett (1980), Higonnet et al. (1987), Stites (1981), Werner (1981), Ecklein (1981), Jancar (1981), and Stiehm (1983). back

Note 35: See Tucker (Ed.) (1975: 685–99) for Zetkin's conversations with Lenin. back

Note 36: Recall that the Political Committee for National Liberation (PEEA), founded in 1944, was the provisional government which controlled and administered liberated Greece. It was known unofficially as the Government of the Mountains. For more, see Mazower (1993) and Tsouparopoulos (1989). back

Note 37: EDA/Eniaia Dimokratiki Aristera Archive, ASKI collection (Archive of Contemporary Social History), Athens, Greece. back

Note 38: See Laiou (1987: 59) for a plausible statistical analysis on the relative strength and resources of each side. back

Note 39: When the National Guard's 'mopping-up' operations commenced in 1948, the partisans were concentrated in the Grammos and Vitsi mountains of northern Greece, after a decisive and brutal defeat of partisan forces in the Peloponnese. The ratio of DSE troops to government troops was more than ten to one by 1949, while the US Air Force air bombed the region continuously, leaving the poorly resourced DSE and the population under its control in an increasingly hopeless situation. The reserve problem was a source of concern from the outset and eventually led to involuntary enlistment from surrounding villages during 1948. According to at least two former DSE soldiers, Niki Karra and Patra Georgoulia, of the Peloponnesian regiment, young men and women of left-wing families were the chief targets of forcible recruitment. Harikleia Andoniou, a peasant woman from the northern region recalls that '... when partisans realised that they needed more forces, the older people were put to work and the younger among us were given guns. I was given a Sten gun and trained for fifteen days in the snow with almost nothing to eat, and then we took part in the battles' (transcribed from *The Hidden War*, 1986, BBC Television/Channel 4 Documentary). back

Note 40: Karras interview, 1998. back

Note 41: Note that captured partisans had a better chance of escaping execution if they claimed that they too had been victims of communist violence and propaganda. back

Note 42: See Woodhouse (1976) and Zafeiropoulos (1956), who was a general of the Government Army during the Civil War. back

Note 43: Vafiades's main target was the general secretary of the Greek Communist Party, Nikos Zachariadis. back

Note 44: Karras interview, 1998. back

Note 45: Papanoutsos was a liberal-bourgeois philologist who instituted the first broad education reform in the mid-1960s as general secretary in the Ministry of Education, during the brief prime ministership of centrist George Papandreou (1963–65). The main plank of these reforms was to legitimise and introduce the demotic idiom as the language of instruction in schools. back

Note 46: Benekou is referring here to Maria and Kaliopi Daskalaki and to Sophia and Olga Sollara who had helped her enter Tripoli on a DSE special mission. According to DSE commander Belas, Benekou was attempting to save her comrades by claiming that she had deceived them rather than reveal they were comrades. back

Note 47: Panellinia Enosis Gynaikon (Panhellenic Union of Women/PEG). back

Note 48: According to Tereshkova (1985), the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), founded in 1945, '... was an expression of the will of the majority of women in many countries of the world to unite in the cause of the struggle against war, oppression, poverty, for freedom, justice and peace'. She quotes the first WIDF president, a physicist and prominent public figure in France, Eugenie Cotton, who noted that '... there are many organisations concerned with peace ... but we are concerned with peace as women, with women's arguments ... we better understand the humiliation of colonial peoples submitted to imperialism, as we have been for so long humiliated in our dignity as human beings'. back

Note 49: *Woman Fighter* was a journal published by PDEG. It was designed to provide a forum for the expression of DSE women's concerns as well as being a propaganda tool for PDEG and the KKE/DSE, to shore up support for the partisan cause. back

Note 50: From the outset of the Civil War, an often stated objective of the KKE/DSE was reconciliation with the other side, arguing that the only obstacle to this were the imperialist machinations of the USA. The emphasis on reconciliation increased as the population became more fearful and hostile. back

Note 51: To this effect PDEG was aided by Greek grammatical conventions: peace, democracy, justice, and freedom are all feminine, whereas war and death are masculine. back

Note 52: According to Griesse and Harlow (1985), Zoya Kosmodemyanskaia was a young Komsomol girl, who was captured by the Germans in early 1942 while undertaking an underground resistance mission. She was captured and tortured, and her eventual hanging in a village square outside Moscow was photographed by a passing journalist and was circulated across Moscow press and in the international press, acquiring mythological proportions. She became the first woman to receive the Hero of the Soviet Union Award. back

Note 53: Karras interview, 1998. back

Note 54: Few active members of the government coalition (e.g., the politicians, the gendarmerie, the army officers, the paramilitaries) had actively opposed the Axis occupation. The majority had remained idle within Greece or had fled (e.g., pre-war political elites) to Cairo. back

Note 55: Greece shifted from the British to the American 'sphere of influence' during the early stages of the Civil War. back

Note 56: Possible causes for estrangement from the Resistance movement may include unpopular sentences handed down by the partisan military or the popular courts; excessive taxes on landed gentry; political pressure; violence perpetrated by KKE against collaborators and their families, especially after the December Events of 1944 and under the banner of 'revolutionary violence'. back

Note 57: See Iatrides (1986, 2005). back

Note 58: Vic Dimitry, a DSE fighter born into the Slavo-Macedonian minority in 1936, and also one of the 28,000 children that the KKE/DSE government evacuated to safety in 1948, recalls the short-lived KKE policy to grant autonomy to the Slavic minorities of Macedonia, consistent with the Comintern's internationalist policy. However, he elaborates that the policy antagonised Greek nationalists across the political spectrum and the policy was swiftly recast as an educational reform involving the introduction of the Slavo-Macedonian language into local schools, with Greek language as an elective (see Scarfe & Scarfe, 1994). back

Note 59: The main medium for the dissemination of this view was government radio, where broadcasters would refer to DSE fighters not only as national traitors but as non-Greek Slavic agents sent by Bulgaria and Russia to achieve the long-held Slavic ambition of finding an exit to the Aegean Sea. back

Note 60: Note the parallel drawn between the heroic sacrifices of these women with the legendary Souliot women. back

Note 61: This was the argument put forward by George Rallis, conservative prime minister (1979–81), in a television interview, in order to defend his father's (Petros Rallis) decision to accept the prime ministership in Greece during the German occupation. back

Note 62: For recent research on the *paidomazoma*, see Van Boescheten & Danforth (2005). back

Note 63: Karras interview, 1998. back

Note 64: Former partisan, D. Grizona, also refers to the 'puritanism' of the partisan leadership (Boutzouvi-Bania, 1993: 206). back

Note 65: See Koonz (1987) and De Grazia (1992) respective discussions of fascism's 'nationalisation' of women. back

Note 66: For example, the social commentaries of P. Palaiologos, a writer/intellectual with liberal leanings. His articles were published regularly in centrist newspapers and focused on social issues in which he argued that women's advancement would signal a step forward for all Greeks and society as a whole. Palaiologos praised the initiative to mobilise women into the war because a woman was 'not entering the army to take lives but to save them, which is far more suited to her nature—in stark contrast to the brutal "equality" inherent in the image of the gun-toting partisan woman' (*Ta Nea*, 3 January 1949, and *To Vima [Podium]*, 5 January 1949). back

Note 67: Examples of this argument made by women's organisations appeared in articles in a wide cross-section of newspapers, such as *Eleftheria (Freedom)* (1 January 1949); *Athineika Simeiomata (Athenian Notes)* (28 January 1949); *Ta Nea (The News)* (24 January 1949); and *Hestia (Hearth)* (22 January 1949). back

Note 68: See related newspaper articles in *Vima* (23 July 1949), *Ethnikos Kirix (National Herald)* (23 July 1949), and *Thessalia* (29 July 1949). back

Note 69: Sultana and Eleni Boubari, former DSE fighters, recall the circumstances which led to their thirty-year exile in the Soviet Union: 'We reached the Albanian border as the army was advancing from both sides. I had brothers in the army fighting against us. We had nowhere to go. We had no choice but to flee into the People's Republics. Our leadership should never have gathered us all in the Grammos and Vitsi mountains. That is why we were defeated' (*The Hidden War*, 1986, BBC Television/Channel 4 Documentary). They were subsequently met by Albanian border officials who disarmed them and put them on a train bound for the Soviet Union. back

Note 70: The question of the extent to which DSE women were drawn into prostitution remains a sensitive one for both sides, although for different reasons. Thus this history remains nebulous. Direct references to the issue are sparse with the exception of a PDEG document (1949) titled *A Year's Struggle*, Nov 1948–Oct 1949, which must be read critically given the role of propaganda at this time. It refers to the partisan women and children who were victims of the mass relocation scheme of whole villages undertaken by the Greek Army during their mopping-up operations. Katerina Tsouma, PDEG representative at the March Women's Conference, recalled her shock upon seeing the '8000 people they brought to the town of Karpenisi, uprooted from their villages. They kept them in 11 sheds with tin roofs . . . In the midst of this misfortune and despair the terrorists of Karapiperi and the gendarmerie found their victims amongst the homeless young girls. They raped them and when they became bored, they were taken to the doctor for a medical examination, and then off to the brothels of Lamia. I saw two such tragic groups of women. In the first there were 36 girls, in the other 10; they paraded them

through the main road to humiliate them. They also bundled off those women who had rejected their advances. The girls cried and protested as the [gendarmarie] swore obscenities at them. Those women who did not surrender were raped and tortured'.back

Note 71: The response by Prime Minister Tsaldaris to a United Nations-led international protest against the execution of female prisoners was a directive to prison authorities that the press should not be given free access to internal procedures and information. In the women's section of the Averoff Prison alone (in Athens), 18 women leftists between the ages of 12 and 80 were executed by state decree between 1948 and 1949, for 'anti-national orientation' (*anti-ethnika fronimata*). The executions ended in 1950 as a result of UN pressure.back

Note 72: Legislation, circa 1923, that decriminalised prostitution in Greece surprisingly remained intact throughout the Civil War, despite the moralism of the regime. In 1949 a renewed interest resulted in the tightening of legislation, probably sparked by an increase in reported cases of syphilis. The newspaper *Acropolis*, ran a week-long series of articles, not unsympathetic to the plight of poor women who fell prey to male predators who 'wait outside factory gates, offices, or wherever there is an abundance of "female" raw material' (*Acropolis*, 7–11 August 1949). back

Note 73: Both Theodoropoulou and Imvrioti were members of the interwar feminist organisation, the League for Women's Rights. Imvrioti spent extended periods of time in prison throughout the 1950s for her communist involvement, alongside Maria Svolou, another League colleague, and trade unionist Kaiti Zevgou. Theodoropoulou was also hounded for her wartime activities, as PEG was considered by the authorities to be in cahoots with the KKE. Eventually, state security demanded that she sign the customary declaration admonishing communism and provide a written statement outlining all her affairs, in the service of national security. For more see Boutzouvi-Bania (1990: 63). back

Note 74: As news of the plight of the left in Greece reached outside sources, a League for Democracy in Greece was formed which campaigned for a general amnesty. It succeeded in creating sufficient international pressure to stifle the momentum of persecution. It was initiated by Greeks of the diaspora, as well as philhellenes, with bases in Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Australia, and America. Many of its members were women who established links with PEOPEF. back

Note 75: The downgrading of the feminist campaign is evident in the League's annual speeches from 1947–49. (See the Theodoropoulou archive, located at the Hellenic Writers' Association, Athens.) back

Note 76: For more on the mode of Greek women's political involvement during and after the war, see Vervenioti (2002). back

Note 77: For the most recent work on the *paidomazoma*, see Van Boeschoten & Danforth (2005).back

Note 78: Archive of Avra Theodoropoulou, Hellenic Literary Association (Etaireia Ellinon Logotechnon), Athens. In the private papers of Theodoropoulou, there is a vigorous correspondence between the League and international organizations such as the International Red Cross, the United Nations, and the International Alliance of Women on the issue of 'child abduction' by the communists.back