



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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.

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## 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

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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)<sup>5</sup> of 1944 and the Varkiza Treaty of May 1945.<sup>6</sup> 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 measures<sup>7</sup> 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 backlash<sup>8</sup> 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).<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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).<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup>

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*.<sup>15</sup> 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'.<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

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'.<sup>19</sup> 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,<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup>

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 Karras<sup>23</sup> 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,<sup>24</sup> 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,<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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)<sup>28</sup> 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 Dimitis 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,<sup>29</sup> 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).<sup>30</sup> 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,<sup>31</sup> including lists of those who received the Electra Medal.<sup>32</sup> 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':

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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.

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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'.<sup>33</sup>

## 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 historians<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> 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'.<sup>37</sup> 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





























































