

## Epilogue: Silent Pictures, Unsafe Histories

In 1982, the Greek state, under the newly elected socialist government, PASOK, officially recognised the National Resistance movement. It aimed to restore to the historical record the contributions made by the Resistance generation to the Greek nation, after decades of partisan vilification and estrangement from the polity. This climate of historical recovery inspired other state-sanctioned tributes, including the issue of eight commemorative stamps by Hellenic Post in 1982, which depicted heroic figures from two of the nation's most important revolutionary conflicts—the Revolution and the Resistance—temporally separate but morally related by insinuation. The male-dominated images depicted famous war heroes such as Karaiskakis and Aris Velouchiotis, the most renowned hero of the Resistance, as well as depictions of the Battles of Crete and Thrace and the bombing of the Gorgopotamos Bridge—a famous act of partisan sabotage during the German occupation. The only female image was the one depicting a weapon-clad partisan woman gazing into the horizon from a mountain top, an image identical to that which had been circulated by the Resistance movement across the international press during the Second World War. It was to symbolise the movement's high moral purpose and to distinguish its modernist aspirations for Greece to be counted amongst the enlightened nations of Europe. 1

In contrast to her eponymous male counterparts, the identity of this female figure on the one postage stamp was a mystery to most, including myself. A chance encounter led me to discover her identity, after which I was able to trace and meet with her: Titika Panayiotidou, the woman with the rifle, who everyone had seen but nobody knew. Her image was as much an allegory in 1982 as it was in 1944. 2

The anonymity of partisan women in Resistance literature, and in the partisan memoirs which proliferated in the 1980s with the rise of the socialists to power, is the norm. Even the memoirs of well-known cadres of the Resistance are interspersed with countless images of the *adartissa* about whom there is seldom any comment in the text. In his chronicle of EPON, Petros Andaios (1977, 1979) relies on the remarkably high ratio of young women amongst EPON's fighting ranks to captivate his readers, even though he makes a lot more of women's material contributions to EAM/ELAS as nurses and support staff. His choice of partisan women bearing arms over images women doing the laundry or nursing the wounded to depict the Resistance universe and to maximise the legitimacy and readability of his memoir is very much a statement in itself. The same can be said of the memoirs of former KKE/DSE cadre Vasilis Barziotas (1984, 1985) and of countless others which have since appeared. 3

These oversights can surely be understood, in part, as force of (sexist) habit. But the implicit assumption is located within a long Western cultural and political tradition in which the female allegory is used to depict political and other ideas that have little to do with the images per se, 4

and as such do not warrant further comment. These allegories derive much of their power from a contradiction they embody—in the case of Titika, it is the unlikely association of femininity with power and autonomy as represented by the rifle she carries.

The particular impact of this allegory, of a woman in arms, suggestive of her readiness for physical violence, has long fascinated, excited, and disturbed across the human spectrum— 5  
from the controversy sparked by the female suicide bomber, to pop depictions in contemporary film culture as evidenced by the success of big-budget feature films like *Lara: Tomb Raider*, *The Bandit Queen*, *Nikita*, *Zina*, *Tank Girl*, and *Crouching Tiger*. Even *Wikipedia's* entry on the Greek Resistance features a photograph of a female ELAS soldier.

In Greek collective memory, images and myths of a fierce and militant femininity have an ancient pedigree. The image of the omnipotent female warrior, capable of both giving and taking (male) life, has been celebrated for centuries (albeit ambivalently) in literature and in myth. As mentioned at the outset of this journey, my initial inspiration for writing this book was my curiosity to reconcile national pride for figures such as Bouboulina with entrenched patriarchal attitudes as regards gender roles and relations; the cult of motherhood; and the centrality of the family unit to the life, identity, and respectability of the individual, especially of women, which arguably persist to the present day in a diluted form. The sum of these cultural idiosyncrasies and contradictions, continuities and discontinuities, confirms that the ancient and ongoing appeal of these figures that populate the Greek imaginary derives from an inherent ambiguity—they mean everything and nothing; like the nationalist ideology that gives them life, they can be moulded and remoulded to serve any political program at all. The patriarchal or masculinist nature of nationalist discourse and ideology, indeed of the nation itself, deprives these images of the necessary substance which powers the images of their male counterparts—for example, Kolokotronis, Androutsos, the Klephts of the Revolutionary era, and Aris Velouchiotis of Resistance lore. In a sense, these female warriors are patriarchal icons, after all, mostly of allegorical importance, never intended to reflect the special heroism of women or to be an instructive model for womanhood. 6

Nevertheless, as this book has argued, Greek feminists have incorporated such patriarchal constructs into their own mythologies and as a result have subverted their intended significance. Most of these efforts have occurred in the context of sympathetic nationalist politics and likewise the potential of these symbols resided in their nationalist logic. Greek feminists exploited this potential frequently enough to advance their purpose, and often to great effect. Both nineteenth-century and post-war feminists made due advantage of their times, and both understood and drew on the legitimating power of history, especially the heritage of woman warriors, to stake a claim for women in the nation. 7

Even though 170 years separated these activists, their rhetoric has at times been strikingly similar. One might say that amid a sea of historical discontinuities many post-war feminists picked up a Greek feminist 'tradition', which simultaneously celebrated women's innate pacifism as well as their participation in war. This book has illuminated this narrative thread in Greek 8

feminist culture, which fuses two important paradigms shaped by the specificities of Greek national culture and history: the Moral Mother and the Just Warrior. This hybrid, which strives to reconcile tradition and modernity, in a striking parallel with the history of modern Greece itself, has had an enduring currency in Greek feminist discourse since its first articulation in *The Ladies' Newspaper* in the late nineteenth century. Since then it has resurfaced sporadically in Greek feminist discourses of the twentieth century and, most recently, in women's (negative) responses to the latest government efforts to introduce female conscription in the 1990s. It has also surfaced, as I have argued, in the mobilisational narratives of the great populist movements of the twentieth century, which sought the active contributions of women, namely, the Greek Resistance and, later, the Civil War.

The point here is universal—that the contours and idiosyncrasies of national feminisms, and politics more broadly, cannot be understood outside the specific histories and cultures that shape them. In Greek culture, it makes sense for women to celebrate Bouboulina and the *adartisses* of the Resistance, while simultaneously condemning government moves to extend 'national service' to women. For Greek women and feminists, the debate around military or national service for women has been an emotive one, and the underlying logic of Greek women's unanimous objection would defy most observers insufficiently versed in the country's history and traditions. For the essence of the objection lies in the particular history of Greek women's involvement with political movements and national conflicts, which has routinely occurred as spontaneous independent action, motivated by familial ties and the basic desire to protect and defend family, community, village, town, and country. The informality of their involvement in war is regarded as a historical tradition, antithetical to conscription, and to the professional soldier, who fights wars uncritically on behalf of the state for reasons and on terms remote from him or herself. It is a culturally specific attitude and stands in stark contrast to conceptions of equality and liberty in hegemonic Anglo-American liberal feminisms, which is equally culturally determined but nevertheless dominant; but in Greece, women's right to bear arms in war alongside men is seen as vital to the ultimate goal of achieving full and equal citizenship rights. Liberal logic, although flawed as countless feminists have convincingly argued, is nevertheless much easier to comprehend than the romantic and muddled fusion of difference and equality that Greek feminists and women, generally, have so often put forward in the debate about the woman, war, and national citizenship nexus.

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This is not a glorification or idealisation of Greek feminist perspectives or of the virtues of progressive nationalism. The slipperiness of nationalism in the Greek context became all too evident, especially as the events of the Second World War unravelled, as this book has argued. As power shifted hands so, too, did prevailing formulations of national identity and the national interest. Moreover, images of armed femininity, which had hitherto been part of the symbolic arsenal of the progressive left, were co-opted very easily to serve conservative ends. Here, the images of Bouboulina and other national heroines became emblematic of national tradition and of national-mindedness, rather than as portrayals of feminine valour and independence. They aimed to inspire contemporary women to return to and be content with a resumption of their

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pre-war traditional roles as wives and guardians of the private sphere in short, the proper expression of female patriotism. This remarkable shift in the use of such symbols invokes the central premise of this book that the inherent ambiguity of nationalism and its symbolic universe is a double-edged sword, and social movements that utilise its logic are built on precarious foundations at best—readily soluble if and when the pendulum swings from one political extreme to the other. Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989) and McClintock (1996) have warned against the deployment of 'national logic' for emancipatory purposes. McClintock (261) insists that nationalism is constituted from the very beginning as a gendered discourse tipped symbolically and materially in favour of men. Enloe (1989: 44) has argued that nationalism '... has typically sprung from masculinised memory, masculinised humiliation and masculinised hope'.

These universal warnings, however legitimate, are inadequate, too abstracted from the reality on the ground to be historically meaningful. Could one condemn the women of EAM-ELAS (and, indeed, of the DSE) for being inspired by patriotic nationalist sentiment or for being drawn into war? The circumstances of many nations do not permit women to come into their political subjectivities as feminists, in the Western manner. One of this book's main aims was to illuminate the importance of context in the shaping of feminist and other political traditions. For many Greek women, political involvement in all its forms has been the transformative factor, and this legacy has shaped, even inhibited, the trajectory of feminist politics per se in Greece. Due to the tremendous legacy of left-wing populist movements for freedom, independence, and social justice in the twentieth century, it has been difficult to define emancipatory movements of any kind, including the women's movement, that are independent of the Greek left. This association has underpinned the inability of Greek feminism to extricate itself and grow into an open-ended, diverse, and autonomous cultural force, a phenomenon peculiar to Greece, whose basis can only be found in the nation's unique and complex history.

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This book has focused on but a few of the key moments in the historical relationship between Greek nationalism, gender equality, and feminism since the foundation of the modern nation-state—both the clashes and the moments of divine symbiosis. Nehru (1982: 443) once said famously, albeit in a very different context, that '... nationalism is good in its place, but it is an unreliable friend and an unsafe historian'.

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