

Introduction

This study originates in a personal fascination I had with images of Greek women warriors and the enduring national myths constructed around them. The trail I embarked upon opened up the vast and rich history of symbolism and its relationship to politics, in particular the politics of nation-building and national identity. My initial interest was in the iconography of the Greek Revolution, otherwise known as the 1821 War of Independence, which ended four centuries of Ottoman rule. The heroic exploits of Lascarina Bouboulina, Greece's first naval commander, at sea and on land; the legendary women of Souli, who leapt to their collective deaths in order to avoid capture and dishonour by Ottoman soldiers; and the much-lauded contributions of Mado Mavroyeni to the war effort, represent some of the more renowned instances of feminine valour and 'patriotism', which were as intriguing as they were unconventional. They were neither peaceful nor modest instances of historical agency—in spite of the prevailing social paradigm which rigidly curtailed the scope of women's activities and life choices across the social classes and which persisted well into the twentieth century—and nor were their contributions obscured from the historical record. The paradox of a nation, which celebrated such unorthodox displays of female defiance and agency, juxtaposed against the rather unimpressive fate of Greek women as a group in pre- and post-revolutionary Greece, presented an overwhelming proposition. This paradox eventually drew my attention to the concept of the nation and of national identity as 'gendered'—a concept not only prompted by the celebration of such figures within patriarchal societies but also by the frequent use of the female allegory throughout all modern history to depict nations at key moments of definition or redefinition.

1

This trail crystallised into a study of the impact of the symbolism of women-in-arms on Greek feminist discourses and identities, that is, the extent to which representations and histories of women's armed participation in the nation's key conflicts have been utilised by feminists to advance and legitimate women's integration into the nation. Alternatively, it can be conceptualised as an investigation of the relationship between Greek nationalism and feminism, refracted through the image of the female warrior.

2

The book focuses on three key nation-building junctures in modern Greek history in which women's armed participation was a defining feature: the War of Independence or the Greek Revolution of 1821 (Elliniki Epanastasi),¹ the National Resistance movement (1941–44) (Ethniki Adistasi), and the Greek Civil War (1946–49) (Emfilios Polemos). These were all instances of total war, waged by 'informally' organised fighting bands or units, the combined outcome of which blurred the separation of the private and public spheres of life, and by extension the space between the home front and the battlefield, and as such, in a sense, paved the way for women's participation. The informal aspects of revolutionary upheaval and the participatory opportunities it engenders highlight the contrasting rigidity of the structure and sociology of the regular and legitimate army, the military apparatus of the state. Enloe (1983)

3

