Female Fighters in the Greek Civil War. Personal Narratives of Survivors.

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Abstract

In the present master thesis an effort is made to examine the gendered dimension of the Greek civil war through analyzing the experiences and choices of the female fighters in the DSE. The study tries to address issues as female memory and lived experience; first-hand accounts and impressions of the DSE female fighters during the Greek civil war. Social and collective commonalities are examined, as well as changes in the gender relations and shifts in the women’s social roles. Politicization and motives for joining the DSE, life experiences and gender relations during the civil war, domestication after the end of the war, are also discussed. The primary sources for the current dissertation are the twelve interviews conducted with women who actively participated as armed fighters in the DSE during the Greek civil war.

Keywords: Oral History, Memory, Women’s History, Gender History, Greek Civil War

Angeliki Petridou
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Preface

I first need to thank all the women in my thesis for their willingness to participate. Without them, my research would not have been accomplished. I would like to thank Dr Efi Voutira, the supervisor of this dissertation, for encouraging me into choosing this subject and instructing me with her endless knowledge. I also would like to thank Dr Giorgos Antoniou for advising and helping me. It was his class in the first semester of this master’s programme that opened new ways of thinking for me, as well as realizations on how to proceed academically and professionally in the future. I am grateful to my colleague and friend, Ms Angeliki Gavriiloglou, without whom I would not be able to complete this current study.

In this point I should thank everyone that contributed into helping me find the present interviewees: Mr Alekos Fakiris the president of the Greek Association of Resistance (KKE) in Nigrita-Serres, Ms Anna Kefaleli, Mr Vasilis Papastefanou, my aunt Anatolia Petridou and her friend Zogia Della. Additionally, I would like to doubly thank my mother and brother, my friends and Ilias for supporting me in their own way in all my endeavors. I gratefully acknowledge the funding that enabled this master’s programme: the Equal Society scholarship and the Christodoulakeio Foundation of Kalymnos.

Last but not least, a special thank you to my father, Apostolos. Despite his financial, moral and psychological support, it was his stories that inspired me from my early childhood and contributed into shaping my political identity. This dissertation, therefore, is dedicated to him, my grandparents, partisans in EAM/ELAS and DSE and to all my family, political refugees in Czechoslovakia. Without memory there is no future.

In any case, I am solely responsible for all the opinions expressed and for any oversights.
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Introduction

Civil wars have always been an intriguing subject, arousing the curiosity of people. During civil wars, the every-day life is overturned, opposing forces are emerged - each with its own propaganda mechanisms - and the concepts of lawfulness and reprehensibility are transformed. The Greek civil war was a turning point in the Cold War and constitutes the bloodiest conflict in Europe from the end of the Second World War until the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Mazower 2016: 7). When dealing with history and the past, the Communist’s Party of Greece (KKE) public discourse- just like any other party’s- consists of symbols used to support its views and silences or gaps for anything opposed to them (Thompson 1998: 21-28). To date, Greek society encounters difficulties when dealing with this historical fact, in an attempt to interpret it and include it in its ratiocination (Vervenioti 2003b: 153).

The mass participation of women fighters in the Democratic Army of Greece (DSE) was a revolutionary actuality for the entire Greek society (Vervenioti 2003b: 153). Periods of social turmoil, as was the Greek civil war, can present to women initiatives and activities beyond their socially acceptable gender roles (Vervenioti 2016: 105). Throughout the course of the civil war making a choice between traditional gender roles or continuing the fight for social liberation was often a life-or-death issue for women (Vervenioti 2016: 105).

Regarding the Greek civil war, much of the existing official historiography is focused on males; men’s experiences and involvement in the war. Moreover, men’s writing about the civil war usually identifies them as the main actors and fails to
address women as active actors, depriving them from their agency. This ‘gender blindness’ does not take into consideration the shift or expansion in the cultural roles assigned to women. It is enough for a man to declare his former status as a partisan fighter in order to taste his own share of prestige and glory (Vervenioti 2006: 165). But for a woman it is more difficult to confess her status as a fighter and usually she will not boast about it. Moreover in order to be believable she will have to account in how many battles she participated. As maintained by the ‘common fantasy’ two battles are not enough as in the collective consciousness, war is identified with a continuous and constant every-day battle. The reality, however, is much different since the DSE as an army constituted a bureaucratic mechanism (Vervenioti 2006: 165).

A recent notable exception that explicitly addresses a woman’s experiences ‘from below’ is the oral testimony of Tasoula Moutaki in the book “Τα πιο πολλά βασανιστήρια τα πέρασε μια Τασούλα. Οι μαρτυρίες της Τασούλας Μουτάκη και του Ηλία Ιωαννάκη για την 7η Μεραρχία του ΔΣΕ στη Θράκη, την υπερορία και τον επαναπατρισμό” (Tsekou, Dalkavoukis & Bontila 2018). Of course no one can overlook the significant work of Vervenioti and Van Boeschoten who have written a plethora of academic works on the subject which are extensively used for the purposes of this study. Other female scholars like Bada, Stefatos, Poulos, Hart also conducted oral testimonies with women in the context of the Greek civil war, addressing several issues as women’s political involvement and identity, gender relations, equality and gender violence.

Avdela (1997: 232) queries “Is there history without women? Is there a history that does not take into account all the gendered dimensions?” The view that every war category is gendered is now underpinned by a significant part of the existing historic-anthropological literature (Bada 2008: 104). Over the last decades, research on women’s active participation in civil wars is growing with scholars being inspired by the link between gender, war and nation (Poulos 2000: 418).

This thesis discusses what motivated the armed participation of women in the DSE; who were these women and what were their contributions; how did their participation contribute to the transformation of women’s social status; and, what were the long term consequences after the end of the Greek civil war. The twelve women interviewed in this study are not heroines or ‘grandi persone’ of history and
humanity. Most of them come from small rural villages, did not manage to finish primary school and were child laborers in agriculture. The core of oral history is to address those who have been “hidden from history”, disregarded by history until the demands ‘from below’ in the ‘70s (Perks & Thompson 2015). Oral history called for the democratization of history by changing not only the subject of research or even the methodology but also the message transmitted through (Thompson 1978: 5-7). The mere idea of giving voice to the voiceless and thus, including individuals or groups that seemed to have been ignored or at least marginalized from the official history, broadened the scope of the historians. The women in the current dissertation were active actors in the history of Greek civil war and their female experiences highlight the active role of ‘everyday’ women in periods of crisis, experiences that most of the times are excluded from traditional historiography. These women are conscious social subjects that lived the history of the civil war; they are the living memory and can offer an interpretation ‘from the inside’.

‘The conceptualization of gender in feminist history as a social and cultural construction sustaining relations of power has, among other things, shifted historians’ attention to the connections between gender and other sociocultural relations’ (Avdela & Psarra 2005:67). As stated by Passerini (1992: 691) during the last years feminist scholars are increasingly concerned with building relations and continuities between different political generations, drawing from history in order to reclaim memory. One explanation may be that continuities with the past are not so intimidating for women. Female scholars do not refuse or defy their past.
Methodology

Oral History

According to Abrams (2010: 9), Oral history is the collecting of first-hand data and the getting substantially involved. From the ‘80s Oral history has been established as the research method for the experiences and memories of social groups neglected by traditional historiography, such as women (Abrams 2010: 15). Oral history helps the communication between social classes and between generations. It challenges the accepted myths of official history and offers a way for the revolutionary change of the social meaning of history (Thompson 2015: 28). Also according to Abrams (2010: 236-267) oral history can prove to be a mean for the self-empowerment of the interviewees and the growth of their self-consciousness. History may be based on the answers that historians have asked or the archives and data they chose to use (Henige 1982: 395). Historians are able to create and recreate history. Oral historians create new data, since before their research none of their data existed (Henige 1982: 395). In the introduction of his book Oral Historiography, David Henige accepts that ‘history’ is not essentially synonymous to the past but consists of whatever relics of the past survive (1982: 1-2). These relics can be words, artifacts or the results of natural forces and they can constitute the new collected data, turning them into evidence. The current thesis fits this category since these women’s narratives compose the traces of the past. On top of that, during the course of an interview power relations are formed (Abrams 2010: 111). Memory can be refracted by the subjectivity of the interviewee but it is shaped by the intersubjective relationship of both the interviewee and the interviewer, thus new data can be created on this basis. Moreover, memory is not only a historical source but it is also the interpretation of the interviewee’s experiences by herself (Abrams 2010: 149), thus every woman’s story offers new data. Every woman’s memory is complex, creative and fluid and the way she chooses to translate her experiences into words, is unique. The focus of this thesis on solely women aims at two different groups; oral historians and feminists. The relatively limited literature on the topic points out the marginalization of women’s roles and initiatives during the Greek civil war.
According to Portelli (2005) in *Oral history* the historian co-creates the oral sources during the dialogic exchange of an interview. The historian has the unique opportunity to interview people who have actually lived a historical event and offer an interpretation ‘from the inside’. However, many have criticized *Oral history* for its credibility mostly due to its relation with memory and subjectivity that tend to “distort” the facts (Portelli 2005: 4). Arguably *Oral history* provides with a more personalized view of history. It is a subjective research method based in its orality (Abrams 2010: 18). Memory narrations are characterized by contingency and unsteadiness. Nevertheless, oral sources have a unique value and can transmit reliable information (Thompson 2002: 157). As Portelli (2015: 68) pointed out, oral sources have a different kind of credibility; “The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism, and desire”. Even information that is obviously not correct can gain a revealing functionality for the purposes of historical research (Portelli 2010: 26). This occurs because the value of the oral sources can be seen as a process of creating meanings and not only as a restoration of facts – certainly with the proviso that their importance to this level is not refuted.

*Oral history* can combine the personal experiences and the socio-political changes, thus rendering it significantly useful in the study of the Greek civil war; where the researcher comes across the politicization of private life, as well as the privatization of politics (Portelli 1998). This connection reflects the aim of the current thesis; on the one hand, to explore the different ways the Greek civil war affected the female fighters and on the other hand, to address the shift in women’s roles that influenced the social and political spheres. According to Van Boeschoten (2000: 124) “The use of oral testimonies and an anthropological reading of data offer an enormous potential for a changed perspective. They are in fact a necessary counterpart to research based on documentary evidence. How can we, as historians, reconstruct past ‘realities’, without taking into account the hopes and fears of historical agents, their interpretations, which served as guidelines for their actions, or their views of the past in the present?”. There still exist a few female survivors of the Greek civil war that can share their testimonies, though their old age is an inhibitive factor in many cases. The
narratives of these women may contribute in a better understanding that they do not represent a dead past, but their stories can highlight the active historical role of “ordinary” people. Their experiences are about the majority of women that fought for a better future. Oral history uses the past in order to shape the present and therefore the future; it creates history.

**Memory**

Memory lies in the core of the practice of Oral history. Memory is not only the source of Oral history but also its subject. It is a social phenomenon, highly complex, with problems concerning reliability and accuracy (Hirsch 1995: 14-15). A common assumption found in most of the studies is that memory is not a consistent space where past experiences accumulate and one can revoke them when suited but it is an active process of creating meanings (Portelli 2009: 23). Receptions of partial memories and multiple intersubjectivities are taking place when memory is analyzed (Ashplant, Son & Per 2013: 107). For example the gender of the researcher can influence to a great extent the testimony of the narrator; this is what is called intersubjectivity (Abrams 2010: 41).

There are three ways to deal with traumatic events and the way they are processed in social memory; institutional and informal forgetting and oppression, transgenerational transmission and collective reconstruction of the past (Marques, Paez & Serra 2013: 254). The space of memory becomes politically relevant when it is seen in a collective light, as a historical memory. This collective remembrance can therefore justify the actions of a social movement and create communities of belonging (Ashplant, Son & Per 2013: 107). As Halbwachs (1992) mentions, a person restructures her past as a member of the group she belongs to, since the individual operation of memory is defined by this social group. The researcher, therefore, has to deal not only with the individual memory and its subjective settlements but also with the collective forms of subjectivity, the collective memory.

Oral sources depend on the narrators’ memory, but their memory is not only shaped by their own experiences but also by the way their fellow comrades or opponents view at the past. Concerning the Greek civil war, the researcher has to
approach its representations as social actions, spot the various and different ‘expression systems’ that the acting subjects use and comprehend that these various expression systems are acceptable by a specific social group and understood as one kind of interpretation (Bada 2008: 105). Both Bada (2008: 105-106) and Vervenioti (2003: 230) offer examples of such expression systems during the civil war, through the symbolic use of words found in the interviews they conducted. More specifically, ‘dogs’ are the “Tagmatasfalites” militant collaborators of the Nazis, ‘blegmenoi’ are the organized people in the resistance and a woman with two braids signals a female fighter of rural origin. The narrative means and representations of the past are considered a social act and form individual and collective identities. For Halbwachs (1992), remembering is an act of reconstructing the present rather than resurrecting the past. Any group of people has its own memories that its members have constructed, usually over a long period of time. Individual memory is engrossed by the collective memory. In a group memory, the remembrances that prevail are those of experiences and events of the majority, while those who concern fewer members often fade away (Whitehead 2009: 128-129).

Having said that, it may seem impossible to determine in any way what were the thoughts and feelings of the narrators almost seventy years ago, since their original memory is modified by later experiences. But according to the view of Van Boeschoten (2000: 136) it can be that these women and their enrollment in the DSE coincided with their emancipation from the patriarchal society and male authority, something that has marked their personal lives thereafter: “If this is true, then the important place these experiences occupy in their memory indicates a turning point in the social frame of reference at the very moment when these experiences were inscribed in the memory. As a result, these particular memories were ‘frozen’ more or less in their original forms”. Memory, subjectivity and lived experience pave the way for a new field in research, historical narration and interpretation of social changes, but also challenge the concept of objectivity (Bada 2008: 107). According to Pennebaker, Rim & Paez (2013) memories that are connected to a political event can create bonds among the actors and result in a highly specific collective memory. On the other hand feelings of nostalgia about a place or a time – as in this case the nostalgia for motherland during the ‘yperoria’ – are related to actor’s attempts to
relive their prior identities by embracing collective memories of the past (Pennebaker, Rim & Paez 2013).

The role that the female fighters of the DSE played in the Greek civil war is underrepresented both in the official memory produced by the state, but also in the traditional historiography. The narration of memories and experiences of the women present in this study can help in the conceptualization of the civil war’s impact in their lives and the transgression of their assigned gender roles.

**Gender and Civil Wars**

Different gender roles emerge during civil wars, the concepts of masculine and feminine identities are changing, and changes in the power relationships between men and women are appearing (Thompson 2006: 342). In mainstream thinking on war, men are assumed to be aggressive and active while women are thought to be peaceful and passive (Coulter, Persson & Utas 2008: 7). This polarization of the generalized images on masculinity and femininity are not new. Men are expected to stereotypical masculine values: violence, intolerance and rivalry (Caprioli 2003: 1). Women subscribe accordingly to stereotypical feminine values: egalitarianism and mutuality. The portrayal of men as actors of violence and aggression deprives women of their agency, depicting them as victims and concealing their range as political and social actors. Furthermore, it defies women’s active participation in violent conflicts (Coulter, Persson & Utas 2008: 8; Mazurana 2010: 12). In this way patriarchal values are maintained and inequalities are reproduced during wartime (Coulter, Persson & Utas 2008: 7). In situations of civil wars, gender is intersected by ethnicity, culture, class and age (Kumar 2001: 7; Mazurana 2010: 12; Trisko 2015: 462). Although women share several similar experiences to that of men - at the same time - they experience conflicts differently than men (Mazurana 2010: 11). Thus gender shapes differently the experiences and impacts of women and men during conflicts (Coulter, Persson & Utas 2008: 7; Mazurana 2010: 11; Walker 2009: 62). Women who join a civil war may share tasks equally with men, getting involved in combat, undertaking leadership roles or commanding regiments (Mazurana & Cole 2013: 211). However, the experiences, roles
and capacities of women are often degraded of their importance (Thompson 2006: 343).

The literature focuses mostly on men as fighters leaving women invisible to the majority of the public opinion, although women are associated with fighting forces in most conflicts (Annan et. al., 2009; Annan et al., 2011: 878; Thompson 2006: 344). Women fighters are thought to go against their femininity and are sometimes regarded as deviant (Coulter, Persson & Utas 2008: 8). The armed participation of women in the battlefield is considered to go against their traditional social acceptable role or constitutes its transgression (Vervenioti 2002a: 128). Women’s agency is strongly expressed when they decide to engage in fighting forces due to their frustration with patriarchy (Mazurana 2010: 19). While most males engage in wars for personal gain, studies show that due to their egalitarian nature, women participate in conflicts in order to minimize power divergences, to achieve equal treatment for all and to share resources (Caprioli 2000: 55). Indications show a much higher number of women combatants participating in insurgent groups, rather than in national militaries (Trisko 2015: 461). This may be due to the fact that frequently the ideologies of insurgent groups are more egalitarian, or due to the differentiation from national militaries in the command structures and recruitment policies (Trisko 2015: 461). Women who voluntarily join a war are often independent, strong and courageous individuals that are tired from society’s expectations of them (Coulter, Persson & Utas 2008: 14). These women have the chance to challenge the existing gender norms which normally restrict their actions and thus’ raise their self-assurance and gain a sense of liberation (Coulter, Persson & Utas 2008: 15; Mazurana 2010: 13).

Kumar (2001: 7) distinguishes the impacts of civil wars on women into three categories: social and psychological, economic, and political. More specifically, the social and psychological impacts may refer to physical insecurity, psychological trauma, sexual abuse and exploitation, family roles and responsibility, and domestic violence. Economic impacts can be viewed with respect to poverty and its consequences, the participation of women in the labor force, and a potential rise in the numbers of woman-headed households (i.e. due to divorce, death or absence of men). As far as the political impacts are concerned, those can be the expansion of women’s public and
The above discussion indicates that civil wars profoundly affect women's personal well-being, their status and role in the family, their access to economic resources, their political participation, and their general attitudes and perceptions. While these conflicts impose massive miseries and hardships on women, they also open new opportunities for changing existing gender stratification. After the end of a civil war, women may start taking new responsibilities and challenge the existing norms about their roles in society (Mazurana 2010: 13). There can be a change in the gender relations in decision-making in the household, formal economy, civil rights or so (Mazurana 2010: 13). Mazurana and Cole (2013: 211), in their study on women of armed groups in Africa defined some of the skills women develop during wartime. In particular they may grow organizational, medical, communication, networking, coordination, leadership and negotiation skills. The list goes on as women can acquire survival strategies, the handling of weapons, spying expertise, solidarity and team work dexterity.

On the other hand, in the post-civil war era, women may abandon their wartime roles completely (Trisko 2015: 462). Situational and individual features might shape the possibility to step away from these roles (Trisko 2015: 462). Any level of gender equality that was achieved during war, may now be absent in the post-war society (Mazurana & Cole 2013: 206). Women may face difficulties in reintegrating into societies and adjusting to the previous traditional gender norms (Mazurana & Cole 2013: 209). Some of them manage to alter their status position after the war, but others return back to more conventional gender roles (Coulter, Persson & Utas 2008: 28).

**Methodology**

The main aim of the current thesis was to examine the gendered dimension of the Greek civil war through analyzing the experiences and choices of the female fighters in the DSE. The thesis tried to address female memory and lived experience (first- hand accounts and impressions) of the female survivors. Social and collective
commonalities, changes in the gender relations and the shifts in the women’s social roles - before, during and after the civil war - are also examined.

The basic and primary sources of this study were the 12 interviews conducted with women who actively participated as fighters in the DSE during the Greek civil war. As a secondary source, the related to the subject bibliography was used, both Greek and English, scholarly literature but also non-academic works. The research strategy that was used presupposed a criterion for the selection of the narrators and that was their enrollment in the Greek civil war as armed fighters. As my grandparents were partisans and political refugees, I started by contacting their surviving friends and acquaintances. Later on, I managed to find more women through personal contacts. My identity as grandchild of partisans and also my gender proved to be an enabling precondition for building up a relationship of trust with the interviewees. The age gap between the narrators and the researcher could constitute a meaningful difference. As Portelli (2005: 2) remarks the interview that is based on a common ground makes dialogue possible, but when it is based on a difference - such is age gap - it can make it meaningful. “It would be a mistake to assume that only similarity allows interviewees to express themselves, that only similarity establishes the ‘trust’ on which dialogue is founded. By definition, in fact, an exchange of knowledge has a meaning only if this knowledge is not previously shared – if, that is, between the subjects involved there exists a meaningful difference and one of them is in a learning situation” (Portelli 2005: 2). Although it was very important to avoid bias in any way possible, the selection of the topic always implies a certain interest on the part of the researcher. And when the interviewer shares a similar ideology to a certain extent with the interviewees, ‘chemistry’ and emotional ties may develop (Fotiadou 2014: 8).

Six of the women were interviewed in Thessaloniki, two in Athens, one in Veroia, one in Serres, one in Chalkidiki and one in Florina. All the interviews were conducted in the women’s homes. Katerina’s Papadimitriou interview was lost the first time so it was repeated again. The first interview was conducted with the help of my friend and colleague, Ms Angeliki Gavriiloglou, since she had a relative experience in interviewing individuals. In all the other interviews I was alone with the narrators, except two cases that the women’s daughters were also present, but fortunately they were not intrusive. Nine of the women gave an interview for the first time in their life,
70 years after their presence in the mountains. These women may have more clear and unconstructed memories than women that have given a lot of interviews in their life. According to Henige (1982: 110-111) the repeated recalling of individual experiences can be juxtaposed with the chain of transmission. That is, the narration of an experience for a second or a third time will differ from the first time someone recalled it. All the interviewees originated from North Greece and all of them from small villages, except one that was from the city of Thessaloniki. As it turned out they were all political refugees in the Soviet Union or its satellites, the People’s Republics. The informal interviews took place during the period from September 2017 until July 2018.

A guideline was designed based on Oral History guidelines for interviewing and combining the practical instructions of EPI (Union of Oral History in Greece). Semi-structured interview methods were chosen to allow time and space to be given to the interviewees to tell their story without interruption and yet focus on the period and topics of interest as well. The same core questions were asked to all women, but naturally there were deviations from the main questions by the narrators. After the end of the interview an agreement for the release of the record was signed. Besides the interview guide and the recording agreement, an informants’ bulletin and a journal were filled after the interview, both retrieved by the website of EPI. The bulletin consisted of the basic information on the interview and the narrators whereas the journal contained the researcher’s first impressions after the interview. Also an Excel master log was created with all the basic data of the twelve interviews. All the interviews were videotaped. Transcription and translation of parts of interviews followed with the purpose of conveying the oral speech close to the written one. Perhaps the translation of the interviews contributed in altering the style and tone of the narrations. It is a difficult procedure since the reproduction of communication’s unique act during the course of an interview contains the pronunciation, the volume of voice, the rhythm, the gestures, the facial expressions (Van Boeschoten 1997: 25). For the transcription and discourse analysis I followed the instructions of Van Boeschoten in «Περάσαμε πολλές μπόρες, κορίτσι μου…..» (1998).

Charmaz’s practical guide, ‘Grounded Theory’ was used for the qualitative analysis of the interviews (2006) along with Abrams’s book ‘Θεωρία Προφορικής
The main topic addressed to women was life during their time in the mountains and the gender relations. The narrators also referred to their life before and after the civil war and generally they had the freedom to give their self-representation. Due to time limitations and a word limit on the thesis, the process of data analysis was quite simplistic. The data were separated, sorted and synthesized through qualitative coding. Labels were attached to segments of data which were sorted and ready for comparisons with other segments of data (Charmaz 2006: 3-10). As Charmaz states “The inductive nature of these methods assumes an openness and flexibility of approach. Thus, you follow the leads gained from your view of the data, not from the careful and exhaustive literature review of the traditional research design” (Charmaz 1996: 47).

Naturally, there were women that refused the invitation for an interview. One woman that belonged to the Slavic-speaking population of Florina denied granting an interview. When I explained to her the purpose of the research, she responded that “These things are not for digging up”. Her case may be connected to trauma since people that have lived a traumatic event, such was the civil war, are often reluctant to participate in surveys and just want to leave the past behind. This is due to the social stigma attached, the lack of exposure to the issues, and a general fear of becoming the object of unwanted attention. On the other hand, my godfather was the one that prohibited his mother - originated from Ziakas village - to grant me an interview. I still do not know whether she wanted to share her narrative or not.

During the process of conducting the interviews, I was initially treated with suspicion, mostly coming from the children of the women I interviewed. Due to the interviewee’s old age, sometimes I had to contact their children prior to the interview and explain the nature of my study. A reason could be the nature of the thesis and the issue of sexual relations. This suspicion and distrust reached its highest peak during an encounter I had at the Greek Association of Resistance (KKE) in Nigrita-Serres, with a member of the historical department of KKE. Having explained the nature of my research and my quest for DSE female fighters, I was faced with a series of astounding questions such were; “Do you have the party’s license in order to conduct the interviews?”, “Why is the essay in English? Isn’t that a little suspicious?”, “Who are the professors that you are collaborating with?” and “I know this University and its
relations with the USA...” In the end of this encounter I found myself wondering if I am a spy of the US only because I attend a master’s degree in the International Hellenic University. To my surprise, the two veteran male fighters of the DSE that were present during this conversation urged me to ask for the license of the KKE. Overall, I visited many Greek associations of resistance subject to three different political parties in my pursuit to find female survivors. Only the “Panellinios Sindemos Anapiron – Thimaton Polemou kai Ethnikis Antistasis” (PSAEA) based in Athens and subject to SYRIZA, made an attempt to help me. There I conducted an interview with Mr. Dimitris Palaiologopoulos, a young man that attended the DSE’s “Laiko Didaskaleio” (People’s School) in Peloponnesus.

This was my first short experience in Oral history which helped me learn about the Greek civil war by listening to women that experienced it first-hand. Oral history gives life to traditional history and extent its horizons; stories of ‘every-day’ women that do not hold power positions and traditionally stay in anonymity, can now enter the public discourse. As Thompson (2015:28) points out “Oral history can give a sense of belonging to a place or in time. In short it makes for fuller human beings”.

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For the purpose of distinguishing - chronologically and fundamentally - in the current thesis the female participation in the Greek People’s Liberation Army (ELAS) and the DSE, the term ‘partisans’ will refer to the women fought in ELAS whereas the term ‘fighters’ to those who fought in the DSE. However, the term ‘partisan’ is used by all the narrators of this thesis since in their collective memory the partisan movement was one. DSE fighters called their struggle the ‘second partisan war’ since in their minds they were experiencing a second ‘new occupation’ where they were fighting the ‘new conquerors’, initially the British and later the Americans (Vervenioti 1999: 406; Vervenioti 2002a: 127; Vervenioti 2016: 116). In the transcription and translation of the interviews the term ‘partisan’ used by the interviewees remained as such.
Historical background

The triple occupation

After the turbulent period of the totalitarian Metaxa’s Regime (1936-1941), the Greco-Italian War (1940-41) and the invasion of Germany in April 1941, Axis Powers occupied Greece and divided the country among Italy, Germany and Bulgaria. After 1943 Germans occupied the whole country, removing the Italians (Vervenioti 2000a: 105). The year 1941 the KKE reconstituted its forces and formed the most radical active Greek Resistance organization, the National Liberation Front (EAM). The next year, its military wing ELAS was found. On the opposite side, there was an opposing Greek Resistance force, the National Republican Greek League (EDES), which was republican, anti-communist, and was supported by the British (Vervenioti 2000a: 105). EAM tried to address several social problems; gender equality, hunger and illiteracy and in 1943 it also established the United Panhellenic Organization of Youth (EPON) (Chimbos 2003: 29-30). The women of EPON in particular did their best to help the ELAS partisans, prisoners and exiled and contributed to the establishment of schools and health centers in the liberated area (Free Greece) (Chimbos 2003: 30). By the summer of 1944, approximately 30 percent of the Greek population constituted active members of EAM\ELAS in auxiliary organizations (Chimbos 2003: 30). During the occupation of Greece by the Axis Powers, women had a significant presence in resistance groups, which were mainly part of the EAM.

Women in EAM/ELAS

The ‘40s was a decade of inversions when it came for woman’s position in society during wartime. Changes in people’s minds and consciences followed which were not easily assimilated, especially if one considers that they did not conform to the traditional stereotypes of the rural patriarchal areas of Greece (Vervenioti 2006: 4). During the occupation the female presence in the partisan movement was more of a prolongation of their traditional social role. Women’s participation in the Resistance was mostly oriented to traditional ‘female’ activities (Vervenioti 2000a: 106). These activities were connected to social welfare, food and schools but to a degree they gave
women the chance to enter the public spheres (Vervenioti 2000a: 107). Like elsewhere in occupied Europe, antifascist solidarity in Greece drew together groups of women who until the war had little engagement with politics (Poulos 2017: 66). Greek women could finally express their opinions about local issues and men seemed to acknowledge women’s capacity to be involved in the community life (Vervenioti 2000a: 107).

By joining the EAM, Greek women entered the public sphere en masse for the first time (Vervenioti 2016: 105). EAM leaders promoted female liberation and death of fascism (Chimbos 2003: 30). They also emphasized on the sexual violence perpetrated by the Axis troops and their Greek collaborators (Chimbos 2003: 31). Nevertheless, as the hardships of the struggle aroused, women were given the opportunity to act in ‘male’ roles, thus women’s groups and platoons (military units) of ELAS/EPON were created. More specifically, in 1943 in the liberated area (Free Greece), ELAS was in need of fighters and called for women’s participation in the Resistance (Vervenioti 2000a: 105). As one can see, the war and the harsh living conditions presented the opportunity for social change. For women, this social change could also mark the expansion and improvement of their social status (Vervenioti 2000a: 104). In 1944, the EAM founded the Political Committee of National Liberation (PEEA), which announced elections all over Greece (Free and Occupied Greece) and that was the first time women could vote in general elections (Vervenioti 2000a: 107). According to PEEA this was accomplished since “the women of Greece participated so actively in the struggle against fascism, and so they won by themselves the right to debate and manage communal affairs” (Vervenioti 2000a: 107).

According to Poulos (2009: 94) joining ELAS forces was the greatest expression of political empowerment for many women. The participation of women in ELAS had to do with their fight for personal liberation and the shift of their social acceptable role. In ELAS, most of the women fighters were girls, aged 14-18 years old, who had the chance to undertake activities and initiatives outside fixed gender frames (Vervenioti 2000a: 114). Thanks to their young age and the radical spirit of the Resistance, these young girls did not have the time to assimilate traditional gender roles (Vervenioti 2000a: 114). “Yet even today women members of EAM or the KKE feel that they acted as historical subjects and gained self-confidence, equality, and esteem through their resistance activity” as Vervenioti remarks (2016: 105).
The Greek Civil War

There have been hundreds of intrastate wars since the end of WWII, of all sorts of death tolls. Referring to a survey conducted from the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) of the Uppsala University, the Greek civil war ranks among the deadliest of 250 conflicts by number of combatant deaths (The Economist 2013). These deaths refer to government troops and troops of politically organized rebels; 77,000 total deaths during the Greek civil war, not taking into account the many more civilians who died, when according to Vervenioti (2003: 42) the majority of victims in the Greek civil war were civilians. Lacina and Gleditsch (2005: 154), in their study on ‘Monitoring Trends in Global Combat’, created a database of battle deaths where the Greek civil war had the grim rank of 154,000 battle deaths.

The Greek civil war was fought between the Left and the Right, at the aftermath of WWII and in the framework of the Cold War; the Left was supported by the Soviet Block and the Right by the British and from 1947 and on by the USA. There are different doctrines concerning the periodization of the Greek civil war. According to Vervenioti (2000a: 111), in the civil war two stages can be noted. The first was the battle of Athens in December 1944 (Dekemvriana) between the Communists dominated EAM/ELAS and the conservative Greek government supported by British troops. As Poulos (2000: 421) and Vervenioti (2000a: 111) both argue, this period is followed by the “white terror” persecution campaign (tortures, murders, exiles and incarcerations of EAM followers), which was facilitated later on by the disarmament and surrender of ELAS on February 1945, also known as the Varkiza Treaty. The guerillas took to the mountains after the “white-terror” period (Siani-Davies & Katsikas 2009: 562). In March 1946, the KKE and parties of the political Centre and Left boycotted the first post-war elections (Vervenioti 2000a: 114). The second stage was the armed conflict (1946-1949) which ended in the defeat of the DSE by the Greek Government Army (GGA) in Grammos and Vitsi. However, there is a new theory that the Greek civil war actually started in 1943 with the formation of the first ‘Tagmata Asfaleias’ (Security Battalions) (Iatrides 2002: 31-32). Demertzis also refers to the civil conflicts among ELAS, EDES and the Security Battalions during the widely ignored – by historians and the collective memory - period of 1943-1944 (2012: 97).
In 1946 the Greek Parliament voted «emergency measures» directed against the fighters of the Resistance, that were all considered Communists (Vervenioti 2000a: 114-115). One the one hand, the fighters of EAM argued that all their sacrifices during the occupation were made for the nation’s liberation (Vervenioti 2000a: 115). They considered their political opponents as collaborators of the British and Americans, supporters of the “monarchic-fascist” government. On the other hand, the political opponents regarded the members of EAM as Communists, enemies of the nation. They went along to characterize them as non-Greeks and “Bulgarians” that wanted to give part of Greece to Bulgaria (Vervenioti 2000a: 115). As Vervenioti (2000a: 115-116) points out, EAM women were not only “Bulgarians” but also “whores, prostitutes, dishonored and immoral”. This was due to the fact that their role in the Resistance gave them the opportunity to act in the public spheres and relate to men outside their families (Vervenioti 2000a: 116; 2016: 112). Through propaganda but also through raw violence, these women were forced to return to their ‘traditional duties’ and submit themselves to the rules of the patriarchal society (Vervenioti 2000a: 115-116). The women who were exiled during the civil war are estimated up to 3,000 (Vervenioti 1992: 53-54). They are sent mostly to the islands of Chios, Trikeri and Makronisos. Violence was carried out by right-wing gangs, policemen and soldiers of the GGA who tortured women of the Resistance by “tonsure and public ridicule” and rapes (Vervenioti 2000a: 116). The number of rape victims during this period is unknown to us and it will remain so (Van Boeschoten 2003: 43). Besides when it comes to rape in wartime, it is often overlooked or folded into a larger category of crimes against civilians (Niarchos 1995: 651). In most of the wars it is “the forgotten crime”, mostly due to the silence of the victims and perhaps due to the fact that there is no physical evidence, as for example countable bodies. Particularly in the ‘40s war rape was considered to be a “normal” by-product of war operations (Van Boeschoten 2003: 42).

According to Close (1995: 52), the fatigue of the Left, the efficiency of the United States and Stalin’s view of Greece as a country beyond its control, resulted in the defeat of the DSE. Chimbos (2003: 34) placed emphasis on the determination and ability of England and USA to sustain a pro-monarchist conservative government in Greece so as to limit the expansion of Stalin as well as protect their geopolitical interests.
Women in DSE

The DSE was the KKE’s army that acted from the years 1946-1949. One of the particularities of the participation of women in the DSE according to Vervenioti (2002a: 127; 2006: 164) is its size since women constituted nearly half of the army’s dynamic (30% fighters and 70% in auxiliary services). As mentioned by Vervenioti the number of women in insurgent armies is directly proportional to the army’s weaknesses. If it rises, the number of women increases too. In contrast to ELAS, there were not separate female combat units in the DSE. During the year 1948 the DSE started also the recruitment of women mostly from areas under its control. These women were confronted with three options: join the DSE, flee back home at the first opportunity or surrender to the government forces (Vervenioti 2016: 116). Women’s involvement in the struggle was mainly due to two reasons: a) the persecution of women during the “white terror” period and b) a critical reserve shortage in the KKE (Poulos 2000: 421-422). According to Poulos (2000: 420) the engagement of female fighters during the civil war was far more crucial and inclusive than the Resistance that had a propaganda symbolic character.

For the Right, the handling of weapons by women indicated the destruction of the society’s order, the start of sexual promiscuity and enunciated a new era of licentiousness and dreary indifference for everything the religion stood for (Kassianou 2006: 167). Within the outset of the Cold War, the history of the partisan struggle was twisted, trivialized and marginalized and that goes twice as much for the partisan women in the DSE (Poulos 2000: 419). The conservative press depicted these women as “blood-thirsty hyenas” and “traitors of the nation, of the family and their sex”, whereas the communist literature portrayed them as martyrs, heroines and patriots (Poulos 2000: 421).

Social and legal status of women

In the period prior to the Second World War, Greek women were afforded very little personal freedom in a society influenced by sexist cultural notions originating from mythology, tradition and Greek Orthodox religion (Hart 1996: 99). Women, especially in the rural areas of Greece, were restricted to the private sphere, as a
means of ensuring family structure, continuity, and stability. Modesty and virginity, but especially the moral code of honor, were the means of this restriction (Stefatos 2011: 253). Traditionally the autonomy space of a woman of the countryside was limited in the house and the fields, where she worked along her husband and/or other women (Van Boeschoten 1997: 181). Women were illustrated as mothers and housewives with a passive role in the family and the society. This reproduction of the conceptualization of the family as patriarchal was apparent in the Greek society of that time. Young women were depending on their morality and virginity in order to find a husband through “proksenio”, an arranged marriage, a very popular way of matchmaking where the bride and groom were selected by family members. Before the war, nobody disputed that a woman’s place was in the home and her destiny was to marry and to nurture children.

Socio-economic changes caused by wartime breached the ideology of the patriarchal family. In many cases the male members of a family were in prisons, exile or hiding due to their communist or leftist ideology while the female members had to support their family. Adding up to this, the loss of properties and dowries due to anti-guerrilla retaliation in rural areas weakened the role of the family (Vervenioti 2016: 107-109). In 1944 women voted for the first time in the elections organized by the Political Committee of National Liberation (PEEA). PEEA - commonly known as the "Kyvernisi tou Vounou" - was a Communist Party-dominated government established during the same year. All these components allowed women to enter the public sphere. After the Varkiza Treaty, women’s unions and associations started mushrooming all over Greece having as their main demand the right to vote (Vervenioti 2016: 118). As a result the Panhellenic Union of Women was established in 1945 by female members of ELAS and one year later the Panhellenic Federation of Women was formed by women with different political orientations (Samiou 1992: 62). Peace and the protection of mothers and children became the main demands of the women’s movement. From the year 1948 and onwards the leftist women’s organizations were declared illegal and are violently dissolved in a climate of political terrorism (Samiou 1992: 63).
Life stories

In this chapter, some basic important data of the interviewees’ personal narratives will be presented briefly. In this way, the reader can have a first acquaintance with the women, aiming at a better comprehension of their stories. The short life stories will be introduced according to the chronological sequence the women were interviewed.

Marika Della is the first interviewee and also the oldest one. She was born in 1924 in the village of Gorgopi, Kilkis. Her parents owned a grocery store but she had to work in the tobacco fields from the age of nine, along with her four sisters and one brother. She was a talented knitter from a young age. She finished the primary school and became a member in EPON. Her father was murdered on the day of her sister’s marriage. Not long after, one of her sisters and her only brother passed away from typhus when Marika was sixteen. She joined the DSE in 1946. She fought in Kaimaktsalan, Paiko and Tzena. Later she became a nurse and a second lieutenant. She found political refuge in Czechoslovakia where she got married and had three children. She worked there in a textile factory. Marika is currently living in Thessaloniki; her husband and one of her sons are deceased.

Maria Karanika was born in Thessaloniki, in 1927. Her parents were refugees from Istanbul and owners of a popular cafeteria in the city. She is the only one that grew up in a city, since all the other women came from small villages. Also she is the only one that did not work as a child. Her father was a supporter of Venizelos and she had two siblings. She attended the primary school and became a member of EPON in 1943. During the Nazi occupation she recalls hiding Jews in her house. In 1945 she escaped to Yugoslavia. She was married there and had a daughter but was forced to abandon her as they had to return in Greece and fight. After a while her first husband took his life with a grenade in a clash in Thessaloniki. She was a member of Popular Civil Guard and in 1948 she joined the DSE. Her pseudonym was ‘Liuba’. Maria fought in Vitsi and Grammos. In Vitsi she met her second future husband. After the civil war she remained for 22 years in the 4th of the 14 Greek districts in soviet Tashkent, Uzbekistan where she gave birth to two sons, studied Journalism, worked in a factory.
and as a teacher. She was also reunited with her daughter from her first marriage. Eventually she moved to Bulgaria in 1972. In 1982 she was repatriated in Greece. Three months after her interview she passed away in her house in Thessaloniki, in the same place she was born in.

*Katerina Papadimitriou* was born in 1930 in the village of Sitochori, Serres. Her father already had two sons from his first marriage and along with her mother they had six children, Katerina included. Both of her parents’ origins were indigenous and they had a left-oriented political identity. While she was attending primary school, she also had to work in the wheat and corn fields in order to help her family. In 1940 her father and one of her half-brothers died from typhus. She joined EPON in the age of fifteen and two years later she joined the DSE. Katerina’s pseudonym as a fighter was “Immortal”. She fought in the area of Lailias, was wounded and sent to Yugoslavia where she stayed until 1949. Then she was transferred to Czechoslovakia as a political refugee and worked in a textile factory. She didn’t want to get married but eventually did. She returned in Greece in 1982. She is now a widow with three children and lives in Thessaloniki.

*Triantafyllia Akritidou* was born in the small village of Lefkimi in Evros, in 1927. She is the older sister of Chrysoula Kariofylli, one of the next interviewees. Their parents were refugees from Turkey and worked as agricultural peasants. Their father was executed by the Germans in 1943 or 1944 while he was at prison in Soufli. They had two more brothers, one of them also a fighter. Their mother also joined the DSE as a cook but also carried a gun. Triantafyllia finished the primary school in Lefkimi. In 1947 she joined the DSE. She fought in the area of Rodhopi and on her way to Grammos - Vitsi she was wounded and sent to Yugoslavia in 1948. After the final phase of the civil war in 1949, she participated in a hunger strike in order to leave from Tito’s Yugoslavia and move to the Soviet Union or the People’s Republics. Triantafyllia was sent to Czechoslovakia eventually where she stayed until 1981. She worked in a textile factory, got married and had two sons. She is now a widow, living in Thessaloniki.

*Maria Evaggelidou* was born in Einochori, another small village of Evros. She was born in the year 1929, her parents were farmers but her mother died by pneumonia when she was three, leaving her alone with her younger brother. Her father was remarried to another woman with two children and together had two
more. She attended elementary school until the third grade. Maria’s father was left-oriented politically and as a result she was imprisoned as a child in Alexandroupoli. In 1947 he joined the DSE. Her father and one of her brothers died fighting as partisans. She fought in Grammos and Vitsi where she was wounded. She was sent to recover in Yugoslavia and later returned and attended an Officer’s School. Maria was a political refugee in Hungary where she worked in several factories. She openly speaks about her desire not to get married. Nevertheless she did. She had three children. She returned in 1984 and now she is a widow living in Thessaloniki.

Chrysoula Kariofylli is the younger sister of Triantafyllia Akritidou. She was born in 1929 in Lefkimi, Evros. She was recruited in the DSE in 1947. In 1949, after fighting for two years in the mountains, she was sent to Albania where she was disarmed along with other comrades. One week later they were sent back to Grammos. Although she met her husband in the mountains, she married him later with an arranged marriage. Her husband had already one son from his first marriage. Chrysoula lived in the 12th Greek district of Tashkent, in soviet Uzbekistan where she worked in a textile factory. She is now a widow and has one daughter and one son with mental disability who still lives with her in Thessaloniki.

Zoe Anastasiadou was born in 1930 in the village of Lachanas, Serres. Her parents were refugees from Caucasus and she grew up with her two sisters and one brother. She managed to attend primary school until the third grade as she had to help her parents in the tobacco and corn fields. Her father was in exile during the civil war. She became a fighter when she was 18. Contrary to all the other cases, Zoe along with the above interviewee Chrysoula, are the only ones that were not injured during their time as fighters. She fought in Mpeles. Zoe worked in the textile factory ‘ISKRA’ in Sofia, Bulgaria where she stayed as a political refugee until the year 1984. Her first daughter died at the age of one by meningitis. She is now a widow with two sons, living in Lachanas. She prides herself in being a true communist.

Eleni Kourou was born in 1929 in another small village of Evros, Kanadas. Her parents’ origin was from Andrianoupoli and they were cultivators of wheat. She had four more siblings and managed to finish primary school. Her father was a fighter in ELAS and Eleni joined the DSE in 1947 out of fear of being killed since there were many threats. Her pseudonym was “Victory”. During the civil war, she was injured.
irreversibly in the eyes and was totally blinded in a battle in Kerdyllia. In Romania, where she stayed as a political refugee, she studied accordion in a Music Academy and also worked as a masseur and in a factory of brushes. Her first husband died during the first year of their marriage so she was re-married and had three sons. After her repatriation in 1989, she was settled in the city of Veroia where one of her sons was murdered under mysterious circumstances in 1991. Eleni believes the killers were fascists. Shortly afterwards her other son and her husband also died. She is now a widow living in Veroia with her one remaining son and her only grandson. To date she is a passionate supporter of the KKE.

Athanasia Tsikoula comes from the village Emmanouil Pappa – Dovitsa in Serres and was born in 1927. She finished elementary school and her parents were cultivators of tobacco. She had three siblings but her youngest sister died from starvation during the Nazi occupation. She became a member of EPON when she was fifteen and joined the DSE with her sister in 1948. She fought in Lailias, Serres and her pseudonym as a fighter was “Immortal”. She was wounded and sent to the hospital where she first saw her future husband. She stayed in Bulgaria as a political refugee where she got married and had two daughters. She studied Agriculture in the university and worked as an agronomist. Athanasia had a forced abortion in Bulgaria since she was still breastfeeding her first nine-month daughter. She came back in Greece in 1981. She is living now with one of her daughters in Polygyros, Chalkidiki.

Athanasia Mpazi was born in 1931, in the village of Sitaria Didymoteicho, Evros. She is the youngest of the interviewees. Her father was a refugee elementary teacher from Turkey but worked eventually in the wheat agriculture. Athanasia’s mother was a widow with three children when she met her husband – Athanasia’s father – who also was a widower with three children. Athanasia was the only offspring of this marriage. Shortly afterwards her mother died when she drugged herself trying to have an abortion. Later her father got married again to a woman with three more children. Together they became parents of four children! She went to school until the fifth grade of elementary. She was imprisoned in Alexandroupoli during the occupation. She joined the DSE with two of her sisters due to fear of rape. She was located in the area of Thrace during her time as fighter and later in Grammos - Vitsi where she was severely wounded. In the hospital she met her future husband. Later, she was a
political refugee in Poland and Bulgaria where she worked in factories. Before her return in Greece in 1974, she stayed for a small period in West Germany. Athanasia is now a widow with two children, living in Athens.

*Sofia Gavriilidou* was born in 1929 in the village of Asvestades, Evros. Her father was a refugee but her mother belonged to the native population of the area. Sofia’s parents were agriculture workers and she had three more siblings. After the occupation, her father was exiled in Samothrace with one of her brothers. Sofia attended school on and off since she passed most of her childhood in and out prisons following her mother. In 1948 she joined the DSE. During that period her younger brother died as a fighter as well as her father from the hardships he endured. She fought and was wounded in Vitsi where she also met her future husband. After the retreat of the DSE she lived in Romania as a political refugee where she worked in a textile factory. She got married and gave birth to two children, one of whom is deceased. She was repatriated in 1986. Sofia is now a widow living in Athens.

*Efpraksia Thomou* is the last interviewee. She was born in 1929 but she doesn’t know exactly where. Both of her parents were from Distrato, Ioannina. They were dairy and sheep farmers and as a result her family moved a lot all year long. For the same reason she didn’t go to school. She had four brothers and three sisters. During the occupation, she went to prison in Ioannina, Athens and Peloponnesus and was exiled in Sikinos in 1946. She went by herself and all alone to join the DSE when she was eighteen. She fought in Metsovo where she was wounded. She met her husband in the mountains. She was politically exiled first in the Soviet Union, then in Czechoslovakia and finally in Romania. She worked in factories and in the fruit industry, got married and gave birth to three daughters. Efpraksia is the only one that got a divorce from her husband due to allegations of adultery. She was the first to return in Greece in 1966. She lives in Florina now with one of her daughters.
Life before the civil war

It is well-known that the backbone of DSE fighters was farmers and villagers. The majority of partisan women and fighters belonged to rural families and many of them were illiterate, according to Vervenioti (2006: 170). It is worth noting that most of them descended from small mountainous villages (Vervenioti 2000a: 107). All the women of the present study originated from rural areas, small villages of North Greece and one of Epirus, except Maria Karanika that was from the city of Thessaloniki. Maria Karanika was also the only one that did not work during her childhood and belonged to the middle class. All the other women belonged to the lower middle class, were working as children, helping their parents in agriculture or farming. Notwithstanding the conditions they were raised in, none of the women were especially poor in terms of the Greek society; all of them growing up had their own houses and they say that they never experienced famine. Yet, on the whole, none of the narrators attended secondary education while in Greece, whereas most of them did not even manage to finish primary school. This was mainly due to the war and the occupation but also due to the labor in order to help their parents. Most of their parents were refugees from Asia Minor, Pontus and Thrace.

Childhood memories

‘They punished us, they burned our house and we were not able to go anywhere. When we left from the prison and returned to the village, after granting us amnesty, we did not have a house. The state gave amnesty and when we returned to the village we were staying in the place where we kept the animals’. (S Gavriliidou 2018, interview 7 March)

‘The first time they took us in prison was when my father left. They had us locked up for one month in a junkyard in the city. We were sleeping on the ground, didn’t have anything to eat, no nothing [...] Then somebody came, I don’t know who was it, from the big fascists, and told us “You will go home
and tell your fathers, brothers, husbands, whoever, to come and surrender. We will not hurt them”. (M Evangelidou 2017, interview 1 December)

The feelings of terrorization and intimidation were articulated in the childhood experiences mentioned above by the two interviewees. Sofia Gavriilidou was imprisoned at the age of fourteen in 1943 in the warehouses of Alexandroupoli and later in the military prisons of Thessaloniki. Her mother did not have anywhere else to leave her so she took her along in prison. Maria Evangelidou spent one month with her siblings in the prison of Alexandroupoli. The reason behind her arrest was that her father was a leftish and he was hiding. She recalls Germans coming at their home and asking for her father. These children arrests were precautionary and they aimed at avenging the leftish. The arrests were not based on the children’s actions or acts of resistance but most of the times they were justified based on the past or present actions of their family members and relatives. The Germans were blackmailing and threatening the children in order to reveal the whereabouts of their leftish family members. These retaliation practices were a common practice that the civilians suffered due to establishment of the joint responsibility (Vervenioti 2003a: 31). These practices applied not only to the institution of family - every member of a family is responsible for the acts of even one of its members – but to the population of villages as well. Villagers supporting the DSE fighters were not seen as civilians, since they did not remain neutral or uninvolved but actively helped the DSE (Vervenioti 2003a: 31).

Katerina Papadimitriou, in her interview conducted on 16 November 2017, presented her own narrative concerning terrorization, intimidation and vengeance:

‘Life was very difficult. We were leftists so there was a lot of persecution. [...] When we were living at the village my mother was hiding us, as we were orphans and young, because she was afraid the partisans would take us from her. My two sisters were already living in Serres, as they wanted to avoid the policemen and the all things they were doing to us and the all the pursuit [...] They were coming in our houses, swearing us in Turkish, stealing us, stealing anything they could find. They took my sister’s best dowry that she had woven with so much effort, threatening her with a gun. Those kinds of things, so bad...
And it was not only that... They had put landmines in our yard because we were giving some bread to the partisans. For revenge... And we couldn’t go out’. (K Papadimitriou 2017, interview 16 November)

As one can notice from the aforesaid case, the mother was afraid both of the Left partisans but also the Right policemen for different reasons. Katerina Papadimitriou probably refers to the “white terror” period when she talks about the stealing and the landmines. The three aforementioned cases have one thing in common; the leftish political identity of the family. Since the narrators were only children and had not formed their own political identity, family intersected in its formation, thus politicization came from an early age.

‘The Germans came to our village the third day of Easter in 1943 […] They gathered the people in the church during the daylight and when the night came they took three people: they took my father and two more’. (C Kariofylli 2017, interview 1 December)

Apart from commonalities the previous narrations share, such as the political identity of the family (in most cases that of a male member), the majority of the young girls were being raised in a single parent family, usually with their mother. Women of that time became unwittingly the leaders of the family (Van Boeschoten 1997: 182). Most of the times their husband and/or their sons were hiding, fighting, incarcerated, exiled or killed. As a consequence women had to become the breadwinners of their families.

A common practice during the triple occupation was hiding from the Germans or the paramilitary gangs and the police, the individuals who were at risk. Among the interviews four cases refer to this aspect. All cases are describing different individuals or groups that needed a shelter. The first case is about Triantafyllia Akritidou and her fellow-villager friend that belonged to the opposite political side (the Right). They used to hide alternately, the one in the other’s house. Here the word ‘harm’ probably refers to rape, as will be discussed later on. During her interview, conducted on 23 November 2018, she stated:
‘We were afraid. We had to go (to join the DSE). We were hiding all the time inside our village [...] When the ‘mpourantades’ (armed paramilitary gangs) came to do their damage, a female neighbor was knocking on my window and I was going to her house. And I was going to her. But when the partisans were coming, she would come knocking in my door and stayed at my place, in order to not be harmed. She belonged to the opposite... But we were pretty close to each other. We had a very good relationship’.

Katerina Papadimitriou recalled in her interview conducted on 16 November 2017, the hiding of Jewish students from Serres in her house:

‘[...] they were two sisters and a boy. They were afraid. We accommodated them, we had an extra room. Then things calmed down and they left. Their passports were left in our house because the Germans took them. Now, I don’t know what they did to them. Did they burn them, what did they do to them? They never showed any sign of life...’

The two last cases describe the hiding of partisans and two ELAS girls, as well as Eleni’s Kourou role as a guardian, keeping watch for the protection of the partisans:

‘We were playing... The Germans came and we were secretly accommodating partisans in the villages. As children we were informing the partisans when the Germans had left from or arrived at the village, so as not to be captured in the courtyards and give themselves away’. (E Kourou 2018, interview 2 February)

‘So, in our own house, how can I put it? We were hiding two girls.. [...] it seemed that they belonged to ELAS. Now I can understand this, back then I was not able to understand anything’. (C Kariofylli 2017, interview 1 December)

Within the narratives of the women, a common characterization of their villages was the description of “little Moscow”. The “little Moscows” of wartime Greece were villages that supported the ELAS/EAM partisans and the fighters of DSE
(Van Boeschoten 2000: 122). It seems that the so-called “little Moscows” were brought up in three narratives. The interviewees proudly referred to this description of their villages. Athanasia Tsikoula remembered: ‘Nigrita was called “little Moscow”. That was where I was organized’ (interview 14 February 2018).

AthanasiaMpazi, in her interview conducted on 4 March 2018 recalled:

‘All the refugee population in the village was leftist, except two families that were policemen. Only them... All the other villagers were ‘leftists’. The fascists called our village ‘little Moscow’. [...] The Germans burned the houses of the partisan families in our village, seven houses’.

And Chryssoula Kariofylli added up:

‘The partisans came frequently in our village. Here I have to say to you that it was named “little Moscow” since it was true that the partisans came to our village’ (interview 1 December 2017).

Maria Karanika was organized in EPON in 1943 and then the Popular Civil Guard. She escaped to Yugoslavia in 1945 as she stated in her interview, conducted on 1 November 2017:

‘During the occupation in 1943, the day of the celebration of the Red Army, I was organized in EPON. There were some older companions and I was organized in EPON [...] I was in the Popular Civil Guard. And because our actions were very vivid, the party gave the order to help us escape abroad. And we went in Novisad, Yugoslavia and after that they took us in Bulges. In Novisad, women and men stayed separately but when we arrived in Bulges we even had families. [...] My parents helped me escape because the police was chasing me, so as not to go to exile. They told me to go wherever the party will send me’ (M Karanika 2017, interview 1 November)

Maria Karanika was the only one that was located outside the borders of Greece prior to the civil war. Also she was radically politicized and seemed to be far
more active politically than the rest of the women of the present thesis. Her father, a supporter of Venizelos, seemed to trust the party for his daughter’s well-being. Maria Karanika then described her return back in Greece and gave her own account of motherhood and marriage from her personal experience:

‘With my first husband we were married in Bulges and had a little girl. [...] I was married to the man I was in love with in Thessaloniki. And we got married there (in Bulges), we had a festive table, anyways… I had a little girl and I was obliged to leave her when she was nine months old and return back to Greece. Do you understand? She was nine month when I left her. But the party said “Don’t worry; the party will take after the children. Nothing will happen to them”. And they put them in recovery camps and they sent us back to Greece (in order to fight). Of course this was very difficult… When we arrived, they separated us in different places. And he was killed. My husband was sent to Greece but they didn’t arrange for him a place to stay, a safe house. And he was compelled to go to his house, to his mother. So it was one of his mother’s cousins who betrayed him. They were four young men hiding in the house’s basement and the other (the cousin) betrayed them. There was a battle inside the house, there was a battle down in the basement because the policemen surrounded the house and they couldn’t go anywhere. In the end they threw a grenade and all four of the boys suicided’. (M Karanika 2017, interview 1 November)

With her narrative Maria Karanika shares her trauma just in the beginning of the civil war. She was forced to abandon her child and return to Greece, not knowing if she could ever see her daughter again. She was sent to the general headquarters in Vitsi. Her husband was sent elsewhere since couples did not stay together, so as not to get both killed. He then found himself in a situation with no option but to commit suicide.
Politicization

‘My father was in ELAS. In ELAS was my sister, my brother and my other younger brother was in EPON. He was an officer in the village, those kinds of things... I was in “Aetopoula”. I remember when the Germans left and we went in Didymoteicho to greet the partisans. We were all children in my age and walked for three hours to Didymoteicho to greet the partisans that defeated the Germans. And we saw on our way one or two Germans killed. I was then ten or eleven years old...’ (A Mpazi 2018, interview 4 March)

For the majority of the women under examination, their politicization came during their childhood. Most of these women’s fathers, brothers or relatives were exiled, imprisoned or killed during Metaxas’ dictatorship, the triple occupation and the “white terror” period. The formation of their political identity seems to have been created as a result of the leftish political stance of their family. The political actions of their family members played a significant role in their subjectivities. These family members were usually males, indicating an active gendered hierarchy within the family.

‘We were organized. Our brother had brainwashed us: “A day will come that we will be fine; we will have electricity and a good life.” We were hearing about these from an early age. As a result we liked the so-called socialism. So we were not afraid’. (K Papadimitriou 2017, interview 16 November)

‘My friends’ uncles were partisans so they were closely linked to them. They started organizing girls and I went with them to a meeting. I went there and liked what they said. A girl and a man talked to us. They told us that we should have the same rights as men’. (M Della 2017, interview 26 September)

As shown above, women’s politicization was influenced by male family members and friends. At this point one can witness the shifting from traditional female
roles of that time to more radical ones. The women were encouraged by males to be involved in politics and seemed interested in acquiring a voice of their own, gaining gender equality, social justice and autonomy of action.

‘When we were in EPON, we were dancing; we were going to the coffee shops. I told my mother ‘Mom you should cook one big pot of ‘sarmadakia’ (stuffed grape leaves with rice) because we are a lot’. And every one of us took food from their house; we bought only alcohol from the coffee shop. ‘You bring that’. Every girl brought a different food, bread, everything. Only the alcohol... We were drinking a few beers. Back then the girls didn’t drink a lot.’ (M Della 2017, interview 26 September)

In the above mentioned narration of Marika Della, one can notice the perspective of that time that girls didn’t drink a lot, as opposed to men presumably. This aspect of withholding to an extent the alcohol from women can portray the inferior status of women in a male-dominated society.

All in all, these women had a specific conceptualization of the Left since they were born inside this period of turmoil. The family’s political identity and past, along with their aforementioned childhood memories from the Metaxa’s regime and the Nazi occupation, seemed to play a significant role in their politicization. In a way their political identity was imposed on them by their societal and family background.

**Volunteers or Recruited?**

Women fighters in the DSE can be distinguished in volunteers and recruited. The volunteers usually supported proudly their personal desire to join the DSE and fight with a gun (Vervenioti 2002a: 137). As reflected in the three following narratives, these women could be motivated by a sense of freedom and camaraderie:

‘We were 14 women that night and 50 men. The partisans came but they didn’t take us, they escorted us, showing us where to go. And we were so
happy because we wanted to be partisans’. (E Kourou 2018, interview 2 February)

‘I was, how many years old? I was fifteen years old. But I grew up there (in the mountain). I could go to Bulgaria back then as a child, the borders were close by. But I wanted to go to the mountain and fight.’ (A Mpazi 2018, interview 4 March)

‘When I decided to join the DSE my mother with my sister hugged me and said to me “Where are you going my girl?” And I responded “don’t worry mom, I will return”. My sister was crying “I will also come, I will also come”. And my mother said “No you will not go because if you both leave I will lose my mind”. (M Della 2017, interview 26 September)

All of the three forenamed cases have in common the willpower and exhilaration of the women to join the DSE. It is impressive to see the dynamic way in which their personal agency was expressed. Their narratives indicate that they acted independently and made their own free choices. Notwithstanding, as shown by recent scholarship, archival material, and the present interviewed women that follow, voluntarism was often a life-or-death matter. Primarily the participation of women from northern Greece in the DSE was out of fear of being exiled, imprisoned or executed, and not merely out of their ideological beliefs (Gritzonas 2001: 34-38; Verenioti 2002a: 137; Van Boeschoten 2003: 43; Stefatos 2011: 262). The atrocities of the armed paramilitary gangs and the policemen that roamed the countryside were another propulsive factor for joining the DSE (Verenioti 2002a: 18). For most of the women it was the fear of rape that prevailed in their narrations. The interviewees used different verbs as synonyms to describe the act of rape, as “atimazo” (dishonour), “xalao” (break), “peirazo” (harm). Van Boeschoten (2003: 48-49) refers to the 1947 Memorandum of the DSE in order to address the embarrassment of the same people that wanted to expose rape as a war crime. The document uses puritan language and avoids using the verb ‘rape’. Instead it speaks about “atimazo” (dishonour),
“diapompevo” (ridicule by exposure), “vasanizo” (torture) or even “ekviazó” (blackmail) (Van Boeschoten (2003: 48-49).

Eleni Kourou in the earlier mentioned narratives expressed her will to become a partisan. In her interview, conducted on 2 February 2018, she narrated her will to leave from her village:

‘Yes, I wanted to leave because they were oppressing us all the time, they didn’t leave us alone. We were working during the day and during the night they kept knocking on our doors, wanting to come inside. It was them, the paramilitary forces and they could do anything and my mother was so scared. [...] And mostly she was afraid for us because they were dishonoring girls.[...] The police itself allegedly took testimonies from the girls and they raped one of the girls because her father was collaborating with the partisans. It was one girl, bleeding and unable to walk. They informed her father and went to take her with the cart. Bleeding... When my mother was hearing those kind of things she was saying “You have to leave my girls, to leave, I would not like to see you like that”.

And Athanasia Mpazi who also expressed that she wanted to fight as a partisan, stated in her interview, conducted on 4 March 2018:

‘[...] that is why my mother sent us to the mountain. She said “go away girls because one day they will come”. We saw them because our village was in a hill and we were hiding, going to the mountains. But for how long could this continue? Eventually they were going to catch us. And that is why my mother said to my father “Come and take them”. And he came and took us and then we were on the mountain’.

The mothers of the young girls appeared to prompt their daughters to join the DSE due to fear of rape. In the women’s narration the sense of everyday fear prevails. The stories that the young girls were hearing all the time, were inscribed in their memories, resulting in a type of “forced voluntarism”. During periods of crisis, the
limits between voluntarism and recruitment are not so distinct but are rather fluid since decisions are being made under the pressure of necessity (Vervenioti 2002a:127). The desire to join a partisan movement may differ from the actual decision that is finally taken during the ferocity of a civil war (Vervenioti 2002a:127). Sofia Gavriilidou, in her interview conducted on 7 March 2018 describes the inevitability of her participation in the DSE:

‘We didn’t become partisans because we wanted to. They made us, the state. If you have your son and your husband in exile, you go to the mountain to die. What else can you do?’

Her case depicts a sense of fear and dead end. It also shows that during wartime and especially during a civil war, it is extremely difficult to maintain a neutral stance, especially in rural areas, even if you belong to the civilians (Gritzonas 2001: 34-38). The same view is expressed below:

‘They came and took us. If you wanted you didn’t go with them. Either you had to go with the ‘Right’ people or the others. It was like that’. (M Della 2017, interview 26 September)

‘As soon as I went to the mountain, I was given a gun. I was fifteen years old when I went there. We couldn’t stay in the village, they were chasing us. What could we do? You know people turned into dogs’. (S Gavriilidou 2018, interview 7 March)

Danforth and Van Boeschoten, in their book ‘Children of the Greek Civil War. Refugees and the Politics of Memory’ (2012), point out that in cases of war there is little room for free choice and as far as the children’s evacuation is concerned they suggest a “spectrum of coercion”. Specifically they explain that between the voluntary and forced children’s evacuation, there is a variety of cases in which parents had literally no choice at all (Danforth & Van Boeschoten 2012). Maybe this ‘spectrum of coercion’ can be applied to the DSE women that voluntarily joined the DSE or were recruited.
Besides the reality of women taking up arms for survival or ideological reasons (Coulter, Persson & Utas 2008: 10) there are also incidents of recruiting women in the DSE. An interesting fact, as mentioned by Vervenioti (2002a:137) is that most of the women troops in the DSE were recruited and did not voluntarily joined the DSE. This comes in contrast with the voluntary participation of women in partisan, state and liberation armies during the Second World War and the Cold War period (Vervenioti 2002a: 137). However, the recruited female fighters were most of the times inhabitants of villages friendly to the fighters of the DSE (Vervenioti 2002a: 18; 2003a: 70-72).

‘We went to hide in the school but the partisans came and took me and my sister. [...] I didn’t want to go because as orphans we had to be together and work so as to help our siblings and our mother that was old’. (K Papadimitriou 2017, interview 16 November)

Their origin from villages in patriarchal rural areas was a promotional factor for the smooth transition and assimilation of the recruited women in the DSE. Their obedience and discipline to male power was one of the characteristics of their identity, one other was that they were accustomed to living near nature and its difficulties (Vervenioti 2003a: 71). In the book of Van Boeschoten ‘Ανάποδα Χρονιά. Συλλογική μνήμη και ιστορία στο Ζιάκα Γρεβενών 1900-1950’ (1997: 185), most of the women of the village of Ziakas are unwillingly recruited in the DSE after a dynamic resistance. Later on, however, they do not speak about their experiences in a negative way. These women managed to expand their autonomy under unfavorable and hazardous circumstances, while their self-esteem was reinforced and gender equality was achieved to an extent. Sometimes women join a war in order to protect themselves from the increasing gender violence and by doing so, they are exposed to various kinds of liberation ideologies (Mazurana 2010: 19).
Life as fighters

The activities of the female fighters in the DSE were in many ways common to that of men. The Greek society of that time could not easily accept the symbiosis of women and men, especially when these women were fighting and wearing pants, thus breaking completely free from their social defined role. Political opponents considered these women ‘courageous’ whores (Vervenioti 2006: 174). DSE female fighters managed to adapt to the particularly adverse circumstances of the armed struggle despite the given greater and more demanding biological needs of the female body compared to that of the male. The traditional female virtues seem to match the ones of a good soldier (Vervenioti 2003a: 70-72; 2006: 175). They were marching through the night in rough paths demolishing the myth of female weakness (Vervenioti 2016: 116). Many times barefoot, sleeping in the snow or passing through iced rivers with the minimum sleep (Vervenioti 2002a: 19). Having been raised in patriarchal societies and families, they were able to endure easier than men the hardships, hunger and thirst (Vervenioti 2006: 175).

‘It was not the hunger, it was the thirst. [...] I wrote two or three articles during the Resistance, ‘It was not the lack of bread but that of the water’. We were drinking water from everywhere, from the animals’ footprints. They do form a little puddle, right? I drank water from there. It was not just me. We found a petroleum container; our military unit always had ropes with them. We tied the ropes and there was a little well. I don’t recall where we were. And we extracted water from there and it was mixed with the petroleum. You see oil goes to the surface. Petroleum has colors: purple, blue, colors like these. We drank water from there. (A Tsikoula 2018, interview 14 February)

Not a single one of the twelve interviewees of this present study ever got sick or got a cold during their time in the mountains, yet several of them were injured fighting in a battle. Only one of them had her period during her time in the mountain. For all the others their period stopped and returned after the end of the war. One of the questions that caused the most laughter to the women was where they were
taking a bath, since most of the times they would take a bath once in three to six months. Most of the narrators had to cut their long hair for practical reasons: lice and snagging in the bushes. Normally the village women used to plaid their hair since short hair was popular among city women and symbolized emancipation and loose morals (Vervenioti 2016: 113).

It was the first time that these women put on trousers. The men’s army trousers was not only considered a precautionary measure from the rough climatological conditions but it also constituted a dress code that gave women a fighter’s psychology. The pants also served as a revolutionary representation towards the traditional female norms and patterns of femininity (Karagiorgis 1949: 179). Only one of the narrators had tried to put on pants prior to her joining the DSE. Athanasia Mpazi in her interview, conducted on 4 March 2018, described with enthusiasm her first experience wearing pants:

‘The first time I wore pants, was in the house before the mountain. All day long I was putting them on and off in order to learn... It was a pair of pants that a neighbor gave me - her husband was a partisan. He would not come to take it and she told me “You wear it”. And she gave it to me and I wore it. And a leash, it was a male’s pants. After that, on the mountain, they gave me a female’s pants.’

All of the women of the present thesis recall singing partisan, folk, Slavo-Macedonian and Russian songs and dancing before or after a battle. The very substance of women along with their youth and their collectivity seemed to help them overcome the sufferings. Group singing was one of the core elements of the DSE (Vervenioti 2003a: 70). Despite the tribulations and deprivations these young fighters were singing and dancing, dreaming of a different, better society (Vervenioti 2002a: 18). Singing could help them give hope to each other. The partisan songs had a heroic character that could boost the morale, especially before a battle. Female fighters recalled:
‘When it came to dancing and singing I did everything, otherwise I could not endure it. That’s the worse. You had so much misery in the forest, how could it be that we sang and danced?’ (S Gavriilidou 2018, interview 7 March)

‘I was young back then and my head was up in the clouds. I wasn’t even thinking that I will die, I wasn’t thinking anything. We were dancing there ‘Ante giuria, giuria, the war needs songs’. (K Papadimitriou 2017, interview 16 November)

‘Oh songs and dances a lot! I for one thought that war was a game; I was singing and everything.’ (K Papadimitriou 2017, interview 16 November)

‘We went to places and once we knew that nobody listened we sang, we danced... We wanted to cast away the pain. We were young’. (C Kariofylli 2017, interview 1 December)

On the other hand, there existed women in the DSE that did not want to be there, recruited or not. Marika Della, in her interview conducted on 26 September 2018, said about these women that they slowly got used to the situation and realized they should not complain about it. She continued:

‘The partisans went to the villages and they wanted to take people. They said whoever comes will have a job, even if it is only baking the bread. And whoever they find, they would take girls and bring them. In the beginning it was difficult for them. I told them “Do not worry, you will get used to it as we did. Here it is better that being in the front line. It is more difficult there”. (M Della 2017, interview 26 September)

**Gender relations**

When the question came to the relationships with the men, the use of the phrase “We were like brothers and sisters” was the first thing the women answered. As Vervenioti also points out (2003a: 78) this phrase is the “refrain” of both partisans and fighters. Possibly it is a phrase used and encouraged by the party. According to
Halbwachs (1992) individual memory is engrossed by the collective memory. Any group of people has its own memories that its members have constructed. Nevertheless, the DSE seemed like a safe environment for these young women. Maybe this can attributed to the KKE’s ideological commitment to gender equality. According to Wood (2009: 134), some insurgent groups, such as Marxist-Leninist groups, although they engage in many forms of violence against civilians, they rarely engage in sexual violence.

‘[…] nobody showed their emotions. We didn’t have an order to be engaged with each other or marry. And that is why nobody dared to say “I love you”…’ (E Kourou 2018, interview 2 February)

Some women chose to postpone any thoughts of sexual relations or marriage and pursued only sibling and companion relations with their fellow male comrades (Van Boeschoten 1997: 187). According to Vervenioti (2016: 114), the slogan of the time was: “It is not the time for all this. When the war is over…” They chose this survival strategy with a view to addressing the breach in traditional family relations and the dominant propaganda for their loose ethics (Van Boeschoten 1997: 187). Moreover, this common narrative the interviewees share about the relations between men and women, may describe a sense of gender equality in the DSE. The effort for the balance between the social acceptable female role and the role of the fighter was being facilitated by the fact that women were being employed in auxiliary services but also in the front line with what was considered to be ‘female chores’ (Vervenioti 2002a: 11). Nevertheless there were women that did not want to engage in traditional female roles such was cleaning. According to Vervenioti (2002a: 14) some male fighters used to say to the female “Do you want equal rights? Then carry the same burden”. And the narrators of the present study stated:

‘The same chores… And the burden we were carrying in our back was again the same’. (M Karanika 2017, interview 1 November)
‘There was equality there. You were a partisan and a liberator of your country. You were fighting for your country’. (A Tsikoula 2018, interview 14 February)

In the above cited narratives the act of fighting was used to equalize the two genders. Van Boeschoten (1997: 185) attributes the sense of gender equality to the fact that women and men dealt with the same dangers when fighting and their engaging with the other gender was considered natural. Yet, it is only reasonable if one assumes that these women had to demonstrate competence and excellence in order to take over fighting or administrative positions, since they probably had to deal with the depreciation or negativism of their fellow male comrades.

‘We did whatever we could as women. Men differ from women. Nevertheless, we tried to fight along men. What could we do?’ (C Kariofylli 2017, interview 1 December)

‘Men were the cooks most of the times. Because it was a difficult job, don’t you think that women could do it’. (A Mpazi 2018, interview 4 March)

In the two aforesaid cases, there is an underestimation of the woman’s role by women themselves. According to traditional gender roles the nature of women as fighters cannot compete with the deeply rooted male power in society and the asymmetry between the two prevailing genders (Tsekou 2005: 176). The two women were raised with conservative and patriarchal values in farmer’s villages. Their narrations are stereotypical perceptions on women’s roles and not of emancipated women. This raises questions about existing gender discrimination in the mountain regarding fighting and other activities as cooking.

**Sexual relations**

Regarding sexual relations, KKE had to change its stance towards the sexual relations in the DSE (Van Boeschoten 1997: 186-187). This came in contrast with what
applied for the partisans of EAM/ELAS. In ELAS sexual relationships between the partisans were forbidden since it was considered that they would harm and ‘contaminate’ the struggle. According to Vervenioti (2016: 109) KKE banned any sexual affair for the partisans of ELAS, since it depended on their morality as the guardians of the nation’s honor. All of this changed during the civil war as the party emphasized in non-exploitative relations between the sexes. Those relationships were often formalized through the validation of an informal marriage from a military commander of the DSE (Van Boeschoten 1997: 186-187). Referring to sexual relations, the women recalled:

‘If there was a couple engaged from their village in the past, they could live as a couple. It was a mountain, you could sleep anywhere. In the center, on the grass, wherever you wanted...’ (S Gavriilidou 2018, interview 7 March)

‘That was free because they both wanted it. It was happening’. (referring to the sexual relations) (K Papadimitriou 2017, interview 16 November)

‘If the girl wanted and they would go to let the battalion know, they would say “Ok. But you are not going to stay together in the group. One of you will go elsewhere and the other elsewhere”. Because it was not allowed... If there was a battle, maybe she would have been killed, maybe he, and in this way they were affecting each other’. (M Evangelidou 2017, interview 1 December)

‘They married them right there, their fellow companions: the platoon or the military unit. But after that they separated them. Because of the fear of pregnancy... They separated the couple for avoiding both of them being killed and for fear of pregnancy. But the mother of Vasilis gave birth to him during her time in the mountain. [...] They always separated them. Because they didn’t want both of them to be killed. The one who should remain, had to suffer’. (A Tsikoula 2018, interview 14 February)
‘[...] she was pregnant. It is forbidden. If you love someone you can love him but relationships with children were forbidden’. (M Della 2017, interview 26 December)

‘They didn’t let them because if someone started then everyone would follow. And it wouldn’t have been a partisan movement, it would be something else. So they were pretty strict when it came to that subject’. (M Karanika 2017, interview 1 November)

As one can conclude by the earlier mentioned narrations, fighters of the DSE could have sexual relations and could also ask their military commander to formalize their marriage. Yet, when it came to children the case was different. The party discouraged pregnancies, due to the war’s unrest and environment’s unsuitability to raise a child. The fighters that were impregnated were sent to give birth ‘outside’. Usually they would leave their infants there and return to the battlefield since a psychological climate was created that favored this action (Vervenioti 2006: 174).

‘My mother’s daughter Stavroula in Czechoslovakia (she is referred to her stepmother) was conceived during their time in the mountain with my father. [...] It seems they were close by and were seeing each other. And then she came to Bulgaria to give birth and then my father came also. Later they were sent to Czechoslovakia’. (A Mpazi 2018, interview 4 March)

‘We had pregnant partisans what could they do? Not give birth to their children? They were giving births. There were also doctors in the mountains, not just simple people. [...] There were many who had their babies in the mountain. Everything happened.’ (S Gavriilidou 2018, interview 7 March)

‘If both of them wanted, it could happen but secretly. They would sleep with the one or the other. As did one of my friends, she had a child, she fell in love in the mountain, she did what she did and then he was killed’. (T Akritidou 2017, interview 23 November)
The above mentioned cases indicate that female fighters were giving birth not only ‘outside’ but also in the Greek mountains where they fought. There also existed mothers carrying their babies with them, confronted with all the hardships of life in the mountain. An emotional account was given by Maria Karanika, in her interview, conducted on 1 November 2017:

‘We had one friend, she had five children. The last one was very young and when she came to the mountain - she was from Aridaia - she took the little baby in her arms. Her other children had left with their father abroad. But she couldn't leave this baby and she took it in her arms and came to the mountain. But she was forced to leave the baby in a bush and move on because she was afraid that if it cried it would betray us to the fascists. They were telling to her “Leave the baby, it will betray us”. She left it, she walked like 100 meters but couldn’t bear it and returned back crying, she hugged it and we continue the march with the baby. It was really moving […] She had special treatment; she was given a second blanket, a little more food’.

One of most sensitive and difficult topics is gender violence. Both parts, the researcher and the interviewee, may feel uncomfortable when it is brought up. The vulnerability of women to sexual violence is one of the many dangers women face as civilians but also as fighters during civil wars (Walker 2009: 19). The leadership of the DSE established a sum of written and spoken rules of behavior concerning women, based on equality and respect whereas offending behaviors towards the female fighters were dealt with severity (Karagiorgis 1949: 179)

‘No man attacked any woman. If the woman didn’t do the first move... He would find himself in a very bad situation if he harmed a woman. His life would come to an end’. (S Gavriilidou 2018, interview 7 March)

‘Men were like our brothers. They did not harm you. Once someone tried to harm a girl and they almost killed him. He said he loved her but can’t you see
that she didn’t want? She didn’t want. You are in war, how could you love? I didn’t love anyone during the war’. (A Mpazi 2018, interview 4 March)

A commonality in the two aforementioned cases, as well as in the one that follows, is the use of the word ‘harm’ to describe the act of rape. The use of a puritan word and the avoidance of the word ‘rape’ is not a harmless coincidence. Language reflects culture, and this is a culture in which talking about rape is made difficult and confusing. What is more, in the second foregoing narrative the procrastination for sexual desire is again present.

‘Sometimes you could find a bad man. But they were afraid. Because they told them “If you do something, no good will come. You shall not harm the girls, you can talk to them, laugh, love. But no children... Because then, what will we do?”’ (M Della 2017, interview 26 September)

‘No, they didn’t kick him out (the rapist). They laid him in discipline. She was alone and killed herself. She was from Notia. Do you know it? Notia is really high. [...] Something happened with this girl. We couldn’t understand exactly because they were afraid and kept secrets. This girl committed suicide. And from then and forwards, the men were afraid and everybody was afraid. [...] They said that they will move him to another division. Now only God knows what really happened to him. [...] Yes that must have been the case (responding to the question if he raped her). And she told someone and her friend told another friend and then the ‘upper people’ found out’. (M Della 2017, interview 26 September)

If there is an issue capable of raising silence, it is rape. The aforesaid narrative of Marika Della described a case of rape and the subsequent suicide of the victim. Perhaps the victim resulted in taking her life, unable to seek help or feeling ashamed since those in the higher level of power found out. As Van Boeschoten pointed out, rape destroys the woman’s body and mind, and the community to which she belonged (2003: 51). In the narrative the punishment for the rapist seemed to be his transfer to
another division. This practice comes in disagreement with the collective narrative of ‘six meters’. When the discussion was about gender violence, the most popular punishment was the execution with gunfire from six meters distance. The next four narratives refer to this form of punishment:

‘They put these men in six meters distance’. (Referring to the execution of rapists) (A Tsikoula 2018, interview 14 February)

‘Whoever harms a girl goes to six meters. That means they would kill him. And everybody kept that in mind and they didn’t dare to act’. (E Kouro 2018, interview 2 February)

‘There was a law, if I can say it... If a partisan harms a girl who doesn’t want to have any contact with him, he will be shot. So they didn’t dare. Once, someone came to me and I told him, I will report you. And he said I am sorry and he left’. (K Papadimitriou 2017, interview 16 November)

‘[…] things were really strict. They could put you in six meters. You couldn’t do this kind of things. […] We would call him in the morning debrief. Every day we had the debriefing of the group. If somebody did something illegal we would call him them and interrogate him. He couldn’t do it for a second time’. (M Karanika 2017, interview 1 November)

**Women in the battlefield**

In the armed units these young women had to learn how to dismantle and reassemble weapons, use firearms, fight the enemy and live under unfriendly conditions. In accordance with traditional perceptions, women as a social group could not be related to war or the handling of weapons in an expanded and massive level. Beside the practical dispute of these perceptions from EAM, they remained influential for a long period of time (Vervenioti 2003a: 153-159).
‘What was there to be afraid of? We were waking up in the morning to wash our faces and we were dancing... [...] The partisan songs... When we had to go to a battle, initially we were dancing and singing a lot and then we departed. Life was different back then. I don’t know how we were facing it. We saw what was happening in the cities, all the destructions and killings and that is why we felt better in the mountains. [...] You don’t feel afraid. Either you kill either you get killed. There was nothing more’. (T Akritidou 2017, interview 23 November)

‘When we returned from the battlefield, we had one or two corpses, we buried them, singing and dancing. What could you do? Sit there and cry? You didn’t know if the next one was going to be you, who knew that he would stay alive? We were living among the bullets’. (E Kourou 2018, interview 2 February)

A connection between death, music and fear is found in the two forenamed narrations. Every one of the women of the present thesis answered the question “Were you afraid?” and all of them answered negatively. Is this the truth? It could be the interviewees’ need to portray themselves as fearless heroines. It could be a constructed narrative that the KKE tried to create for its female fighters of the DSE. Or maybe they simply felt safe considering what they had been through (occupation and “white terror”). It may be the sense of belonging to a group with more socialist - communist characteristics that helped them feel at safe.

Eleni Kourou, in her interview conducted on 2 February 2018 described the dramatic event on how she lost her vision during a fight in Kerdyllia on January 10, 1949:

‘One of us had no more ammunition; another’s gun was jammed, as was my Steyr. I was about to get another gun - from the dead person next to me - when the bullet went through my eyes and injured me. And I heard him later, they came above me. One of them picked me up by my head...[...] They surrounded us there, someone was wounded, another was killed, I don’t know if anybody left, if somebody escaped. From this platoon I am the only one alive. No one else has been found alive. And then he shouts... I heard from
him how I was injured, I didn’t know and I couldn’t see. And I didn’t know where... [...] He grabbed me by my hair and said “The bullet entered from her right eye and came out from the left eye”. And I was bleeding from my nose, from my mouth, from everywhere. And they saw me bleeding, I lied down, I fell and they started kicking me in the head with their combat boots, they rubbed my head in the ground and the blood started to run from my head. I still have the scar in my head from the beating. They didn’t pity anyone. And then their automatic firearm was jammed and they were trying to fix it. And when they fixed it, one of them said “Let’s try it on her”, in order to kill me. But there was one of them that didn’t let him “It’s a pity, she is going to die anyways. Can’t you see the blood? Is she going to leave? Leave her like this and she would die”. And they didn’t kill me, let’s say... Meanwhile one of them shouted “Chief Captain, come to see, we captured one filthy Bulgarian”, that’s how they called us, Bulgarians. “We took captive a filthy Bulgarian”... And... (pause, sigh) [...] I don’t know whether he came or not. As I was lying in my military coat, I had a grenade. I pulled it out and even disarmed it and I said if he comes now, we will die together. I will just leave it here and it will explode. The grenade was used for a distance up to 40 meters. So he will be killed and I will be killed and it will all come to an end. But I will take revenge for my own blood. It was our way of thinking, do you understand? We had faith... Meanwhile he didn’t come and my hand was getting cold and numb and I was thinking that the grenade will fall from my hands and I would be the only one dying. But they were still fixing the automatic firearm, so I threw the grenade between them and me, so that we all die. And it explodes but I don’t know if they died, I couldn’t see. I wasn’t killed, I stayed alive. And now what? What am I doing now? I was calculating that the night had fallen since the attack was in the afternoon. And I decided to leave that place. But where should I go? Nobody knew. Meanwhile, there were some barking dogs across the village where they attacked us... [...] I said now I will stand up. If somebody says to me “Stop!” I will not stop, he will fire at me and kill me. I believed that I will be killed. So I started falling, rolling, crawling, standing up again, and where to go? To the direction of the dogs because our people had sent assistance.
in the meantime and there was another battle behind me. I heard the firing
behind me, I heard the dogs barking in front of me and I was reaching to the
dogs. I even passed through a small river... [...] No one else was there. How can
you possibly understand how I was feeling at that time? Bleeding and crawling
in the night, wounded. Isn’t it a miracle how I survived? And I was waiting for a
gunshot to kill me but nothing. I walked towards the dogs, I fell, I slept, I got up,
I didn’t even know what was happening to me. Was I sleeping? Was I fainting?
There was no one there to tell me how I was. And this is how I approached a
house that night and three dogs came near me. And I thought now they are
going to eat me. Three dogs came, smelled the blood and they left. They left
because I didn’t hear them again, I slept there, I fainted, don’t know what I was
doing. It happened three times until I entered this hut. It wasn’t a hut, it was a
barn and on top of it a house. [...] And I stayed there for three days and nights.
Lying down... I crawled on my belly and I stayed there for three whole days. [...] 
So I go out from the barn and I find the other door. I was hearing every day the
animals getting out from that door. I knock on the door and he doesn’t come to
open, he is afraid. “Who are you?” he asks, but my voice can’t come out. What
could I say? I can’t speak. And he opens the door and he sees a bloody ghost
with a bloody towel on the head and full of straw. The straw was stuck to the
blood... I was a ghost... I say to him “Catch me, catch me, catch me” and he
responds “Are you a man or woman? What are you? Who are you? Where are
you from?” I started talking slowly-slowly and I said “Sir, a battle occurred
near here six days ago, I was wounded there and two persons that know you,
brought me in your barn”. “Who are they? Do you know anyone?” he
responds. “Yes, there are both fellow villagers”. That was a lie... But I knew
two of his fellow villagers, only two from this village that fought with us. He
then started to believe that I was a partisan and said “Don’t you worry; you
are in a good house. Do you know I have two partisan children?” And I took
some courage. Was it a lie? Was it the truth? We were children and we
believed whatever the people were telling us’.
The narrative of Eleni Kourou was deployed with a feeling of heroism and as she had told the story many times before, it was a very detailed and rather quick narration in proportion to its length. The traumatic event of her injury was the core of her narration. In it, there exists the phrase “filthy Bulgarian”. The identification of the female fighters of the DSE as Bulgarian prostitutes was the most common conceptualization of the Greek civil war. The women were either virtuous mothers of the nation or “Bulgarian whores” (Vervenioti 2000b: 112–113; Van Boeschoten 2003: 45). For her opponents a woman that lived among so many men that did not belong to her family could be nothing more than a prostitute. The characterization as a “Bulgarian” was an attack at her ideology (Vervenioti 2003a: 75-76). According to the official rhetoric of the “Right”, fighters of DSE and members-supporters of KKE were not Greeks but they were traitors of their nation, impelled by foreign powers to extort a part of Macedonia and surrender it to the Bulgarians.
‘Yperoria’

‘Yperoria’ is a term used by the partisans and fighters themselves - but also by the party - in order to describe their forced deportation or exile for evident political reasons. All of the narrators of this dissertation spent time as political refugees in the Soviet Union and the People’s Republics. Some of them stayed in exile for more than 30 years. As far as the Greek case is concerned, the artificial term ‘political refugees’ can also be used, a term that was never recognized by the UNO, the Greek State or the host ‘eastern countries’ (Tsekou 2016: 7).

The biggest ‘exodus’ of people from Greece for evident political reasons was the emigration to the People’s Republics and the USSR, during (1946-1949) and after the Greek civil war (Chasiotis 2006: 24). This political immigration was the result of KKE’s long-lasting strategy to create military and political connections with these communist countries from the early 40’s, but also through the sending of wounded or sick combatants and impregnated women during the course of the civil war (Tsekou 2016: 1-2). The number of the political refugees is not clear. It is estimated that 75,000 to 100,000 people settled in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Michailidis, 2005). Other estimations speak of 130,000 people that were settled in the People’s Republics and the USSR, 25,000 of whom were fighters of the DSE (Vergeti 1993: 23).

As Tsekou points out in her book ‘Greek political refugees in Eastern Europe’: “they were forced to adjust to new cultural, social, labor (even climatological) environments, managing the sorrow and bitterness from the defeat and their personal drama, the uncertainty from their status as refugees and also their growing, as time passed, homesickness” (2016: 11). During their time in the eastern countries these women had to reconstruct their collective and personal identities. A factor that interposed itself between the community and individual families was the Stalinist regime with the Greek Communist Party as its intermediary (Van Boeschoten 2000: 129).
Marriage

All of the women of the present study were married to fighters of the DSE, most of who were heavily wounded. Some of the women had already met their future husbands in the mountain, whereas most of them met them in nursing and recovery camps. In the narratives that follow a first resistance to marriage is evident. None of the women chose her future husband or married a native in the countries they lived in for almost thirty years. Political identity and having fought in the DSE were the impediments for their marriage. These cases are an example of loyalty to the party. But don’t they constitute a certain type of social oppression for the emancipated female fighters? Especially when some of them articulate the view that they had no interest in getting married.

‘When we went inside (USSR) they told us that we should arrange to get married with each other [...] Someone would marry somebody from his platoon, someone else from his military unit’. (Z Anastasiadou 2018, interview 26 January)

The narrator implies that the party urged them to marry to each other. The concept of ethnic endogamy was a widespread practice among the Greeks that married to each other in order to maintain the Greek identity, a practice that was embraced by the Party (Tsekou & Chatzianastasiou 2015: 35). The KKE organized dance nights and theatrical performances in order for the fighters to get to know each other. The higher purpose behind these tactics could be the marriage. As Tsekou (2010: 463-464) underlines in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria political refugees were motivated to participate in the ‘Lesxi’ (Greek association of political refugees) in order to have the opportunity to make new acquaintances and perhaps start a love affair. As claimed by Mazurana and Cole (2013: 209) many women ex-combatants find it difficult to get married and adjust to traditional gender norms in societies where marriage is the expected norm. The following narratives are about women that did not have any interest in getting married but may have felt the pressure of the party and of their milieu’s gossiping:
'Petros was telling me “You should marry, time goes by”. What time? I was 20 years old. But when you are single they are always gossiping. And those from Thessaly were so bigmouths but not all of them. They were pushing me to marry a boy that we were together in Kolkhoz. I didn’t have such a purpose’ (M Evangelidou 2017, 1 December).

‘Look he had sent me a photograph of him [...] and as I was reading his letter when someone passed by - that stayed there, from Serres - and said; “Let’s see who is he”. I say “Do you want to see him? Here you go”, “Oh” he says, “I know this man”. “Where do you know him from?” I say to him. “In Bulgaria”, he says, “he had a Bulgarian woman”. When he told me about the Bulgarian woman, I was frozen... [...] It was lies, he didn’t have any woman. He was engaged with one woman in Bulgaria but she left for the mountain and was killed. He didn’t even see her or even touched her hand. But I didn’t want to get married. But there were other guys that wanted me. When I said that I am not getting married, it stopped. And then they were saying, a guy named Giorgos, “She has someone that “ksefournizei” her, (used metaphorically for the sexual act) that’s why she doesn’t want”. Who could I have? And then by obstinacy, I said I will marry him and let it be. [...] He seemed to me very fat and also dark-skinned. He was a Pontic Greek (her husband)’. (M Evangelidou 2017, 1 December).

In the earlier mentioned narratives, one can locate the indifference of Maria Evangelidou towards matrimony. When the narrators joined the DSE they were all young women and had not yet completely accepted the gender norms of the Greek society of that time. After defying their traditional acceptable roles as fighters they did not feel the need to return back to domesticity. In addition, the cases address the issue of gossiping, which probably is the reason that led her eventually to marriage. More specifically, in the second case, a man initially spreads rumors about a non-existing wife of her future husband and later a man named Giorgos makes unfounded speculations that she is having a sexual relationship with someone. According to the
opinion of Giorgos the status of a woman can only be defined by having a sexual relationship with a man. This insult to her morality degraded the young woman’s subjectivity and may have resulted in her getting married to a man she hardly liked.

‘If your mother offers you for marriage... Back then you didn’t marry with your own will. The two mothers had to agree and then they told you “Ok, he is good, marry him. He is an only child...” You know... Fairytales... He was good...’ (S Gavirolidou 2018, interview 7 March)

‘My mother said “Look at this boy, he has good qualities and he loves you a lot”. “I don’t want anyone” I used to say. “When the struggle is over, I will marry”. To date, the struggle hasn’t finished, nonetheless I got married, I had children and I lost them and that’s it...’ (E Kourou 2018, interview 2 February)

The two mentioned above cases refer to a conservative type of marriage that was perceived as a negotiation between the families. The arranged marriage or marriage of convenience was a popular way of matching a couple, especially in the rural areas of Greece at that time. Most of the narrators in this thesis had an arranged marriage. In the second case, the postponement of sexual relations until the end of the war appears again. This is also depicted in the following narration, together with a justification based on the young age:

‘Once a man came and asked me to marry him but I said to him “I am not getting married. We still have war”. If I didn’t like someone, what could I say? That I don’t like you? I had an excuse; I was not getting married because I was young’. (K Papadimitriou 2017, interview 16 November).

Katerina Papadimitriou who eventually married with an arranged marriage, described her encounter with her future husband in her interview, conducted on 16 November 2018:
‘And you know the men, those who were in a good shape, but more the guy from Thessaloniki, Alekos... He was saying to me “You are so beautiful, your cheeks are so red”. I was turning more red, poppy flower. [...] And the doctor sees me in the corridor, all red, and he says to me “What happened to you?” and I respond “Doctor, the guys are teasing me” and he says “Do you want me to send to the women’s department?” “Sure”, I respond. And so I went to the women’s department. And one nurse comes and says to me “Katerina you will go to the heavily wounded to keep them company”. And I said ok, I was wandering, wandering and I met my future husband. He was the most heavily wounded, he had one cut leg and the other was broken. Both of his legs, a disaster... And they had already told me that he didn’t speak for 40 days, he was in aphasia and he was muttering. Such a heavy incident... That was when he noticed me; “What’s your name, where are you from?”, etc.. And I was feeling so bad; I didn’t like that he asked so many questions [...] But I didn’t want. If it wasn’t for the arranged marriage, it would not have happened’. (K Papadimitriou 2017, interview 16 November)

In her interviewee Katerina Papadimitriou speaks with pity and regret for her future husband. The first time she saw him, she felt sorry for his bad condition. The assignment of nursing to the young woman indicates the attribution of a female role. The interviewee admits that this would not have been the husband of their choice but the strong social construct of the arranged marriage prevails. In the beginning of her narration a candidate groom, Alekos, appears, flirting with her but she complains about him at the doctor in charge. As soon as the doctor offers to transfer her in another department, she agrees. This act of complaining may symbolize her resistance to marriage.

‘There were a lot of women that did not give birth to children. They caught a cold; we were passing through rivers, the cold... And fast because we were passing them during nighttime, we were tying a rope and catching it. [...] We were wet and staying wet. We were from villages and were stronger. The
others that were from the cities were weaker and there were many women that did not have children’. (A Mpazi 2018, interview 4 March).

Athanasia Mpazi gave her own interpretation on the childless mothers; it was the cold, the wetness, the hardships, considerably harder conditions for city-women. Interesting as it may seem all the women of this study managed to give birth to children. Only one of them stated that she continued to have her period during her time in the mountains. All the others recall that their period stopped from one to three years and returned when they found themselves in the hospitals of the People’s Republics and the USSR.

Last but not least, Maria Karanika in her interview, conducted on 1 November 2017, revealed the reunion with her daughter from her first late husband:

‘When we arrived in Tashkent, the party started to ask for the children we had left. They were divided in different countries; Romania, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria. Several children were coming but not mine. A teacher, Triantafyllidis, says to me; “Marika, Liuba - Liuba was my pseudonym - there is a girl here with no parents but they call him Liubaki (small Liuba). Maybe is it yours?” And that’s the way I found my child’. (M Karanika 2017, interview 1 November)

_Nostalgia and repatriation_

Political refugees succeeded in maintaining their ‘Greek identity’ through individual and collective memory strategies (Tsekou 2016: 16). The Greek language and the preservation of the Greek identity, was highly ranked in the political agenda of the KKE that wanted to educate the children in order to become good communist Greeks (Patelakis & Vasileiadis 2015: 10-11). Their desire to return to their homeland as soon as the adequate circumstances and conditions would cultivate and grow was always
present (Tsekou 2005: 169). The following narrations reflect their wish and alertness to return:

‘For one or two years we were with ta opla epi podas, ready to return’ (M Karanika 2017, interview 1 November)

‘In 1972 I left the Soviet Union and I went to Bulgaria. (We went) in Bulgaria in 1952 because nostalgia was so great, that we were thinking that maybe if we were closer to Greece, then we could illegally cross the borders and enter Greece. Did you understand?’ (M Karanika 2017, interview 1 November)

‘Every time we ate and we made a proposal with the wine, we said “Next year to our homeland”. We had this. We were Greeks. We wanted to return’. (M Della 2017, interview 26 September)

The Greek political refugees were experiencing a prolonged and long termed situation of temporariness (Tsekou 2010: 295). Despite the fact that the living conditions in the People’s Republics and the Soviet Union were satisfactory, their nostalgia for Greece and the yearning to return were very much kept alive. The renunciation of the KKE’s legacy would be equivalent to the denial of their self, their role in history and their own past (Van Boeschoten 1997: 229).

‘We had faith. We believed in our struggle because we were right. We were right. They chased us like we were thieves whereas we loved Greece so much’. (A Mpazi 2018, interview 4 March)

‘No I don’t regret anything. Only I am sorry for the young boys and girls that were killed. If only I had more injuries but...’ (A Tsikoula 2018, interview 14 February)

‘We had a good time sincerely. I don’t have any regrets. I f I could be there now, I would’. (M Della 2017, interview 26 September)
‘We didn’t commit any crime. We didn’t commit a crime because we went to the mountain. We did not kill anyone for no reason, unlike them (the Right)’.

(A Mpazi 2018, interview 4 March)

‘We had so many victims, we suffered so much and our struggle was lost. We had traitors’. (Z Anastasiadou 2018, interview 26 January)

Marika Della in her interview, conducted on 26 September 2017, recalled a funny memory about her mother’s first visit to Czechoslovakia related to the propaganda in Greece regarding the political refugees:

‘My mother came to see me. She said “I want to see her and then I can die”. They were lying to her... We were wearing our everyday clothes and I was sending photographs (her mother). And the ‘Rights’ were saying “they are dressed with clothes from strangers and they take photographs and they send them to you. They do not have clothes to wear, they have nothing”. And my mother said “I just want to go to see if the clothes are theirs and if they eat what they say to me”. I told her “Mom we have everything”. When my mom came the first thing she did was to open the fridge’ [laughter]

Besides the fact that the ‘eastern countries’ provided shelter to the DSE fighters for ideological and political reasons, there was also a great demand for workforce (Tsekou 2005: 158; 2016: 6). Most of the women in this study worked in factories since the ‘eastern’ countries needed working force. One the one hand it was this need in production but on the other it was the rationale that the political refugees will obtain a proletarian consciousness by working in factories (Tsekou 2010: 266). These women coming from villages, with few opportunities to acknowledge their role in society, were forced to adjust into new working conditions; to the new industrialized economies. After PASOK won the elections in 1981, political refugees were repatriated massively in Greece and the civil war was now seen as the outcome of mainly British and US intervention in Greek politics (Marantzidis & Antoniou 2004: 225). Yet, this
imputation of the civil war’s accountability exclusively to the British and US intervention can be viewed as a classic widespread example of conspiracy theory, as far as the political populist discourse - of both the Left and the Right - is concerned (Demertzis 2012: 98). It constructs a type of ‘remission of sins’ when it comes to the Greeks’ involvement in the civil war. According to the aforementioned view, the Greeks always fall victims to foreign external powers, and this is a commonality that the civil war and the current economic crisis share. In the first case the blame was put on British and Americans, whereas in the second case on Germans and the International Monetary Fund.
Conclusions

Over the past few decades several academic works, concerning female fighters in the Greek civil war have been published and discussed. The findings of this study appear to be consistent with the existing literature concerning women fighters of DSE. So what do these twelve interviews have to offer? Do they present something new to what is already discussed concerning women in the Greek civil war? The twelve interviews of this thesis establish an actual ‘history from below’ and can assist towards the promotion and restoration of women fighters of the DSE. Within the academic and the public history the narratives of these women can form their own “community of memory”, putting an end to their status as “voiceless” historical subjects, as it is suggested by Dalkavoukis for several other voiceless groups (2018: 163). The civil war was experienced by its anonymous protagonists with many different ways and the promotion of their experiences can lead to a better historical awareness of the past (Dalkavoukis 2018: 164). The interviews can also help towards the understanding of the collective trauma and transcend it through a therapeutic public discussion and repositioning (Dalkavoukis 2018: 164).

The present master thesis used an oral history approach with a view to address the experiences and memories of the “ordinary women” that happened to find themselves in the turmoil of the Greek civil war. According to Vervenioti (2002b: 176), when it comes to a civil war, the historian cannot be uninvolved or unbiased. With that in mind, the purpose is not to construct heroines or conform to any socio-political standards. Its purpose was to display the experiences and the subjective truths of the women as they remember the events during their narration. In accordance with their narratives these women collectively and wholeheartedly gave themselves to the struggle for women’s struggle for peace, democracy, liberation and gender equality. Most of them are now on the verge of death. They are connected to each other through gender, political beliefs, the generation in which they belonged to, their armed participation in the DSE, political exile, motherhood and even through their status as widows. All of the aforementioned characteristics constitute their collective
identity. Their subjective truths and individual remembrances can reflect the collective memory of DSE women fighters.

The main aim of the current study was to examine the gendered dimension of the Greek civil war through analyzing the experiences and choices of the female fighters in the DSE. Any war experience of the individual woman is significant and this singular experience shares commonalities with the experiences of other women (Rooney 1995: 46). The dogma that all women face the same form of oppression is according to Rooney (1995: 46) an insightful realization made by a plethora of women in conflict zones. This thesis tried to address female memory and lived experience (first-hand accounts and impressions) of the female survivors. The experiences of females provided this research with a representative picture of life in the DSE. These stories have been shared by women partisans who experienced the effects of war at close range and their testimonies may contribute to shape how the Greek civil war is collectively remembered. The participation of women in the DSE contributed in the surpassing of die-hard perceptions and deeply rooted mentalities. According to Vervenioti (2002a: 142; 2003: 73) sacrifice is what constitutes the hard core of women’s role. These poorly educated women from small villages were so brave that they were ready to sacrifice themselves even before learning how to fight.

There never exists a single unique truth in history, but every period has its own ‘thruths’ that are reinterpreted from future generations under the prism of present (Van Boeschoten 1998: 30). Social and collective commonalities, changes in the gender relations and the shifts in the women’s social roles - before, during and after the civil war - were found in the present study. For all the women of the current thesis, their politicization before the civil war but most importantly their participation in the DSE, was the point at which their horizons expanded beyond their domestic worlds. They had the chance to act against gender stereotyping and masculinities and challenge the existing norms. Yet, the women of the present study have constructed a version of the ‘self’ in a shape that the KKE is acknowledging; their narrations have been shaped in accordance with the dominant perceptions on how they should look like.

The armed participation of these women in the DSE allowed them to grow dynamic elements of politicization and emancipation. Women went against their traditional social acceptable roles. Nevertheless, according to Vervenioti (2016: 105) in
postwar Greece women returned back to their traditional gender roles, through a process of forced domestication. There exist also objections on whether these dynamic elements actually followed the women in the ‘yperoria’. Some academics claim that the anticipated new identity was not assimilated and that the abolition of gender segregation was not forwarded in the political area or even in everyday life (Bontila 2005: 177-178). This case is verified in the present study since none of the twelve women continued being active or interested in politics. On the contrary they returned back to the traditional gender roles, as housewives and mothers. The identification of woman with domesticity and motherhood as part of her ‘nature’ restricts her to the private sphere (Avdela & Psarra 2005: 68). Their participation in the DSE influenced their perception of gender roles during their time in the mountains and maybe during the first period in ‘yperoria’, when they were expressing a first resistance to marriage.

Women’s History, History of Gender, Gendered History or Feminist History are the same aspects of a historical practice that has a political point of view according to Avdela and Psarra (1997: 82-83). According to a widespread perception, feminism lends a political and ideological nature to women’s history, depriving it from the necessary objectivity in order for someone to engage scientifically with history (Avdela 1997: 225). The question according to Avdela (1997: 226) is; is scientific/historical knowledge pure or political beliefs inevitably permeate it? Scientific/historical knowledge contains power relations; scientific certainties are displayed as universal and valid in favor of individuals of specific gender, social class or race. So the accusation that feminism has a political substance and lacks scientific validity is yet another expression of power relations and their production and legitimization of knowledge. History had always a gender (Avdela 1997: 227). There is a growing need for a more gendered understanding on how and why civil wars are developing, what happens to the people involved in them, where the different poles of power lie, and who and what moves them. Even to date there seems to be a ‘gender blindness’ referring to the Greek civil war. Hopefully this thesis can help even vaguely to a more universal approach on the perspectives of the Greek civil war on the part of the women. It can help to a greater understanding of the relationship and power balance between men and women.
Except the need for a more gendered understanding of the Greek civil war, a gap exists in the study of the trauma of the Greek civil war and its intergenerational transmission. Especially in the course of the economic crisis, no matter how cautious the political parties were in avoiding the invocation of the civil war in their public discourse, the ghost of the civil war returns through people’s conversations, academic works, in the mass media, even in slogans that are shout during protests or are written on walls, like “Βάρκιζα τέλος” (not another Varkiza). The study of the Greek civil war has yet a lot to offer scientifically and culturally, especially when one observes the polarization between the Left and the Right in Greece nowadays and the rebirth of irredentism with respect to the Macedonian naming dispute and the ongoing Cyprus dispute. In addition to irredentism, the number of racist hate crimes in Greece has increased. From the 90’s and onwards, exploitation, racist attacks and assassinations of immigrants are mounting. The targets were initially the Albanians and the immigrants that came to Greece after the collapse of the ‘real socialism’, followed by immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East. All the above, along with the nearly 500,000 votes of the neo-fascist Golden Dawn party in 2012, could be examined and analyzed through the civil war prism in future studies. The study of the Greek civil war is only at the beginning and we have only a first understanding on why and how the war trauma affected the next generations and to what extent this trauma influences the current socio-political situation.

All in all, this master thesis was a demanding task and a venture into a less conventional way of “doing history”. When in the dawn of 21st century we witness the emergence of fascist movements and governments all across the world, every attempt to give voice to the women that fought for a better future, every attempt to break down oblivion, concealment or distortion of their memories, is not ‘digging up’ the past; it is a tool and an inspiration for the overturn of the authoritative controlling monologue.
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ΔΕΛΤΙΟ ΠΛΗΡΟΦΟΡΗΤΗ

ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΑ ΠΑ ΤΗ ΣΥΝΕΝΤΕΥΞΗ
ΠΛΗΡΟΦΟΡΗΤΗΣ/ΠΛΗΡΟΦΟΡΗΤΡΙΑ:
ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΣΗ ΚΑΤΟΙΚΙΑΣ:
ΤΗΛΕΦΩΝΟ:
ΠΟΙΟΣ ΠΗΡΕ ΤΗ ΣΥΝΕΝΤΕΥΞΗ:
ΗΜΕΡΟΜΗΝΙΑ ΣΥΝΕΝΤΕΥΞΗΣ:
ΤΟΠΟΣ ΣΥΝΕΝΤΕΥΞΗΣ:
ΔΙΑΡΚΕΙΑ ΣΥΝΕΝΤΕΥΞΗΣ:
ΣΕ ΤΙ ΜΕΣΟ ΓΡΑΦΤΗΚΕ Η ΣΥΝΕΝΤΕΥΞΗ:
ΚΥΡΙΟ ΘΕΜΑ:
ΠΑΡΑΧΩΡΗΤΗΡΙΟ: ΝΑΙ/ΟΧΙ
ΠΑΡΑΤΗΡΗΣΕΙΣ:

ΒΙΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΑ ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΑ
ΕΤΟΣ ΓΕΝΝΗΣΕΩΣ:
ΤΟΠΟΣ ΓΕΝΝΗΣΕΩΣ:
ΦΥΛΟ:
ΕΠΑΓΓΕΛΜΑ: ΤΩΡΑ Η/ΚΑΙ ΣΤΟ ΠΑΡΕΛΘΟΝ
ΕΠΑΓΓΕΛΜΑ ΓΟΝΙΩΝ:
ΜΟΡΦΩΤΙΚΟ ΕΠΙΠΕΔΟ:
ΜΟΡΦΩΤΙΚΟ ΕΠΙΠΕΔΟ ΓΟΝΙΩΝ:
ΟΙΚΟΓΕΝΕΙΑΚΗ ΚΑΤΑΣΤΑΣΗ:
Το ημερολόγιο

Το ημερολόγιο συντάσσεται αμέσως μετά τη συνέντευξη. Σε αυτό ο ερευνητής καταχωρεί τις πρώτες του εντυπώσεις για τη συνέντευξη. Στο αρχείο συνοδεύει την περιλήψη ή/και την απομαγγελτοφώνηση. Χρησιμεύει στους χρήστες του αρχείου να καταλάβουν το πλαίσιο και τη διαδικασία της συνέντευξης, διάλεξη και επιπλέον στοιχεία για την ερμηνεία της αφήγησης.

Επικεφαλίδα – Το ονοματεπώνυμο του πληροφορητή και του συντάκτη, ημερομηνία συνέντευξης

I Το πλαίσιο της συνέντευξης
- Πώς ήρθατε σε επαφή με τον πληροφορητή (ήτριας); Σε ποιό μέρος έγινε η συνέντευξη; Περιγράψτε το χώρο.
- Μια περιγραφή του πληροφορητή (εμφάνιση, φυσιογνωμία, ντύσιμο, χαρακτήρας)
- Ποιες ήταν οι αρχικές αντιδράσεις του πληροφορητή
- Ήταν πρόθυμος(η) να μιλήσει; Εξέφρασε επιθυμία να μείνει ανώνυμος;
- Παραβρέθηκαν και άλλα άτομα στη συνέντευξη;

II Η διαδικασία της συνέντευξης
- Περιγράψτε τη σχέση που αναπτύχθηκε μεταξύ σας στη διάρκεια της συνέντευξης; Σημειώθηκε μεταβολή αυτής της σχέσης από την αρχή ως το τέλος της συνέντευξης; Έχετε την εντύπωση ότι ορισμένα στοιχεία της ταυτότητας σας επέδρασαν αρνητικά ή θετικά στη συνέντευξη;
- Υπήρχαν σημεία του οδηγού για τα οποία δεν ήθελε να μιλήσει ο πληροφορητής;
- Για ποιά σημεία ήταν πιο πρόθυμος να μιλήσει;
- Υπήρχαν σημεία έντασης, αμηχανίας, συγκίνησης; Πως αντιδράσατε;
- Σε ποιά σημεία σκέφτεστε εκ των υστέρων ότι θα έπρεπε να είχατε χειριστεί τη συνέντευξη διαφορετικά;
- Τι μάθατε προσωπικά από τη διεξαγωγή αυτής της συνέντευξης;

III Το περιεχόμενο της συνέντευξης
- Ποιά θέματα δεσπόζουν στη μνήμη του αφηγητή;
- Ποιά θέματα της συνέντευξης φωτίζουν ιδιαίτερα το υπό έρευνας θέμα;
- Ποιά άλλα σημεία της συνέντευξης σας φαίνονται ιδιαίτερα σημαντικά.;
ΠΑΡΑΧΩΡΗΤΗΡΙΟ

Διά του παρόντος παραχωρώ στην Αγγελική Πετρίδου, μεταπτυχιακή φοιτήτρια του προγράμματος Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean Studies του Τμήματος Humanities του Διεθνούς Πανεπιστημίου Ελλάδος την ηχογραφημένη/βιντεοσκοπημένη μαρτυρία μου και τα συνοδευτικά τεκμήρια. Η ερευνήτρια μπορεί να χρησιμοποιήσει το υλικό για ερευνητικούς και εκπαιδευτικούς σκοπούς, σε έντυπες και ηλεκτρονικές δημοσιεύσεις (συμπεριλαμβανομένου και σε CD και στο Διαδίκτυο), σε διαλέξεις, σε ραδιοφωνικές και τηλεοπτικές εκπομπές, στην παραγωγή ντοκιμαντέρ/ταινίας και σε μουσειακές εκθέσεις.

Περιορισμοί
☐ Επιθυμώ να διασφαλιστεί η ανωνυμία μου
☐ Επιτρέπω τη χρήση της συνέντευξής μου μόνο ύστερα από ..... χρόνια
☐ Άλλο

Όνομα της αφηγήτριας:
Διεύθυνση και τηλέφωνο της αφηγήτριας:
Ημερομηνία:
Υπογραφή

Εκ μέρους της ερευνήτριας,
Αγγελικής Πετρίδου
Abbreviations

DSE  *Dimokratikos Stratos Elladas*
    Democratic Army of Greece

EAM  *Ethniko Apeleftherotiko Metopo*
    National Liberation Front

EDES *Ethnikos Dimokratikos Ellinikos Sindesmos*
    National Republican Greek League

ELAS  *Ellinikos Laikos Apeleftherotikos Stratos*
    Greek People's Liberation Army

EPON  *Eniaia Panelladiki Organosi Neon*
    United Panhellenic Organization of Youth

KE  *Kentriki Epitropi*
    Central Committee

KKE  *Kommounistiko Komma Ellados*
    Communist Party of Greece

KNE  *Omospondia Kommounistikon Neoleon Elladas*
    Federation of Communist Youth of Greece

KOB  *Kentriki Organosi Vasis*
    Central Organizing Base

PASOK  *Panellinio Sosialistiko Komma*
    Panhellenic Socialist Movement
PEEA  \textit{Politiki Epitropi Ethnikis Apeleftheros}

Political Committee of National Liberation

PDK  \textit{Prostorini Dimokratiki Kivernisi}

 Provisional Democratic Government

PSAEA  \textit{Panellinios Sindemos Anapiron – Thimaton Polemou kai Ethnikis Antistasis}

Panhellenic Association of the Disabled – Victims of War and National Resistance

SYRIZA  \textit{Sinaspismos Rizospastikis Aristeras}

Coalition of the Radical Left

USSR  United Soviet Socialist Republics