

EDITED BY ROSEMARY RIDD
AND HELEN CALLAWAY

WOMEN &
POLITICAL
CONFLICT

PORTRAITS OF STRUGGLE
IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Women and Political Conflict

Portraits of Struggle in Times of Crisis

Edited by

Rosemary Ridd
and
Helen Callaway



NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS
Washington Square, New York

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
<i>Notes on the Contributors</i>	ix
1 Powers of the Powerless	1
<i>Rosemary Ridd</i>	
Women's powers, men's power	1
In times of conflict	3
Living with conflict	8
In Western Europe and the Middle East	11
Powerlessness and power	12
Power relations	19
2 War in Cyprus: Patriarchy and the Penelope Myth	25
<i>Maria Roussou</i>	
History of patriarchy and conflict	28
Women as reproducers of society	30
War and its aftermath for women	32
The social negation of 'false widows'	36
Penelope in the present	43
3 Women: the Damned of the Iranian Revolution	45
<i>Homa Nategh</i>	
The Islam of the people	
and the Islam of those in power	45
Lost illusions	49
Moral conflict	53
Women faced with war and economic crisis	57

4 Public Protest, Domestic Acquiescence: Women in Northern Ireland	61
<i>Lynda Edgerton</i>	
The social construction of gender	61
Acting for civil rights	63
'Armoured cars and tanks and guns – came to take away our sons'	64
New experiences	69
Women leading campaigns	71
Republican and Loyalist women	73
Living in an 'armed patriarchy'	76
Awaiting reciprocal action	79
5 The Coal War: Women's Struggle during the British Miner's Strike	84
<i>Moiram Ali</i>	
Why women took up the strike	85
Women's support groups	87
Hidden hardships	91
Women on the picket line	92
Women move ahead	94
Defending a way of life	97
A feminist struggle?	102
6 Between Two Fires: Palestinian Women in Lebanon	106
<i>Rosemary Sayigh and Julie Petee</i>	
Exile and resistance in Lebanon: 1948 to 1982	108
The uprooting	108
Homes violated	111
Supporting the resistance	113
Dropping out of the revolution	116
'Land before honour'	117
Um Khalid, an active housewife	118
Mothers of martyrs	121
Aftermath: from 1982	123
The new repression	125
Coping with chaos	126
Um Fady, a new widow	128
Return to protest	131
Some questions	133

7 Israeli Kibbutz Women: Conflict in Utopia	138
<i>Alison M. Bowes</i>	
The early days	139
The contemporary kibbutz	140
Return to familism?	146
'The problem of the woman'	148
The Israeli context	150
Labour and Likud	157
8 Brittany: Politics and Women in a Minority World	163
<i>Maryon McDonald</i>	
Ethnicity and women	163
The French context	164
Two worlds	166
Femininity	167
A political femininity	167
Women and education	170
From cow-shit to finery	173
Feminism	178
The mother-tongue	184
9 Refusing to be Invisible: Turkish Women in West Berlin	193
<i>Clare Krojzl</i>	
Turkish migration to West Berlin	195
Patterns of migrant response	197
Resistance to education policy	203
The personal becomes political	204
Women's refuges and advisory centres	206
Conflicting perceptions	210
10 Survival and Support: Women's Forms of Political Action	214
<i>Helen Callaway</i>	
Women's active involvement	215
Violence against women	216
Classifications and control	218
Women's forms of action	221
Gender polarity and cultural identity	226
<i>Index</i>	231

2 War in Cyprus: Patriarchy and the Penelope Myth

MARIA ROUSSOU

'My daughter', scolded her husband's grandmother, 'Penelope waited for Odysseus for twenty years. Have you lost your patience after only five?'

In the summer of 1974, the Turkish army invaded Cyprus. Among politicians there had been fears of this eventuality for some years (Hunţ, 1975), but the experience was nonetheless abrupt and devastating. Under the Makarios regime, the Turkish Cypriot population was becoming restive as its representatives in government were edged out of cabinet decision-making. Archbishop Makarios himself was under pressure from both Greek Cypriot and from Greece to wrest more control of the island for the Greek Cypriot majority. On 15 July, he was temporarily ousted in a coup engineered by the Greek military junta, and Nicos Sampson, a tough EOKA guerrilla fighter, became Head of State. Five days later, Turkey responded with an invading force of an estimated 40 000 troops which landed on the coast of Kyrenia in the north of Cyprus.

Along with Greece and Britain, Turkey was a guarantor of the island's independence and, acting without reference to the other two powers, invoked this status as a pretext for action: 'We came as peacemakers to save the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Cyprus.' This was the public declaration justifying military invasion. But having achieved its avowed purpose of overthrowing the dictator, the Turkish army did not withdraw from Cyprus. Instead, it advanced south, driving Greek Cypriots from their homes and ultimately establishing Turkish control over the territory

of nearly forty per cent of the island, north of the Atilla line.

Greek Cypriots living in this northern section fled for their lives – on foot, in cars, in tractors, or by whatever means of transport they could find. Over 200 000 became refugees. The 20 000 left behind – mainly women, children and the elderly – found themselves ‘enclaved’ (the official term used by the Greek Cypriot government to describe those Greek Cypriots who remained or were forced to remain in the Turkish-controlled area) at the mercy of the Turkish soldiers.

One evening five years later, I sat with Maria, a young Greek Cypriot woman, on the veranda of her home in Nicosia. The tranquil atmosphere seemed far removed from the war, but her words show how much it remained with her:

Where are they now? What can we do after five years of waiting for them? They are not coming back, are they? I was married for two months before the war started. He had to join the army to ‘save the country’. The country wasn’t saved, and he’s lost. . . .

Maria is one of over three hundred Greek Cypriot women whose husbands did not return from the war but were never listed as dead. Wives of these missing men are informally called ‘false widows’ (*pseftohires*). They are expected to wait for their husbands to come home, even though for many it is a lost hope.

One of the consequences of the 1974 war was the creation of categories of ‘problem’ women: raped, refugees, enclaved, war widows, wives of missing persons. While women were not directly involved in fighting and, compared with the men, few were killed, some were subjected to the violence of the enemy who attacked women ‘belonging’ to other men, women who thereby lost the purity and innocence considered in their cultural values to be the essence of their womanhood. Many lost their homes and many, too, were deprived of the male protection on which they were totally dependent.

Even during peacetime in Cyprus, women who lose their husbands, fathers, brothers, or other male kin protectors, find life difficult. The women who suffered directly during the 1974 war are now, more than a decade later, suffering in different ways. Those who were physically violated are rejected by their own people, since

they are no longer ‘pure’. Those who were widowed are expected to remain in mourning for the rest of their lives. But the ‘false widows’ are in the most difficult position: just as, in the Homeric poem, Penelope patiently tended her loom for the twenty years it took Odysseus to make his way home from the Trojan war, they are expected to wait indefinitely for the return of their men. Indeed, the story of Penelope has been revived among the Greek population in Cyprus to bring home to the ‘false widows’ their duty to wait quietly for their missing husbands and thus maintain the cultural standards set by Penelope thousands of years ago. Where these women cannot live alone, they seek the protection of their relatives, but some of them receive little understanding or help from them or old friends. The state, too, has been slow to support them.

The plight of these wives of missing persons forms the starting point of this chapter. Although the problems of this group are particularly severe, I argue that even in normal times in Cyprus cultural conventions restrict the patterns of women’s lives. My thesis is that Greek Cypriot society requires certain forms of social control or moral regulation of women in order to maintain existing power structures. Cypriot women are brought up to depend upon male ‘protection’; they are seen as pure and innocent, therefore to be kept away from the ugliness of public affairs. Women’s compliance in this need for ‘protection’ entails their acceptance of a socially subordinate position.

The difficulties of these ‘false widows’ reveal the ideologies and practices that sustain women in their subordinate position. In the aftermath of the 1974 war, the Greek Cypriot women who had suffered during that war were used as an example to maintain control over all women. They served as an object lesson to all other women in the message communicated and occasionally made explicit: ‘If you do not appreciate and assent to what you have now, with your husband or father protector to take care of you, look what will happen to you’. These unfortunate women had done nothing to bring their fate upon themselves, but were deliberately defined outside the boundaries of active social life to show the value of life under existing structures of male power. If they were to be ‘rehabilitated’ and their position redefined, this would involve a serious disruption of the patriarchal order. In short, the 1974 war brought to the surface problems derived from the patriarchal ideologies of state and church – ideologies firmly set against social change.

History of patriarchy and conflict

When the Republic of Cyprus was created in 1960, its sovereignty had to be guaranteed by three interested parties: Greece, Turkey and Britain. Unlike most former British colonies, Cyprus was not regaining for its people a self-determination lost during British rule: the history of the island had been one of successive military conquests and foreign domination over the last 2000 years, a history of men in action as invaders and rulers. And for the women of both the Greek and Turkish-speaking populations that settled there, patriarchy was entrenched through their own community structures in the Greek Orthodox Church and Islamic institutions respectively.

The third largest island in the Mediterranean (with an area of 3572 square miles, just a little larger than Ulster), Cyprus lies only 40 miles south of Turkey and about 500 miles to the east of mainland Greece, at the junction of three continents. It is the strategic importance attached to this position that has made it so vulnerable to empire-builders, although, as Brian Lapping (1985, p.311) points out, 'Cyprus has always proved a strategic disappointment' to those who have sought to control the island.

Greek, Turkish and British cultures have each left their imprint, the first two representing the major population groupings. The *official census* of 1973 gives the total population as 634 000, divided as follows: Greek Cypriots 77 per cent; Turkish Cypriots 18.3 per cent; other minorities (including Maronites, Armenians and Latins) 4.7 per cent. But after the war and the partition of Cyprus, the Turkish-speaking population increased from 115 758 in 1974 to 150 000 by 1980 as a result of the Turkish government's settlement policy in the occupied section of the island.¹

Although the prehistory of the island goes back as far as the beginning of the sixth millennium, it was not until the second millennium that Achaean Greeks founded city kingdoms there on the Mycenaean model and introduced the Greek language, religion and way of life. The wealth of the island, derived from its copper mines and forests, made it the object of successive conquests until eventually it was incorporated into the Roman Empire. With the transfer of the capital of that empire from Rome to Constantinople, in AD 330, and the adoption of Christianity as the official religion, Cyprus shared in the fortunes of the rest of the Greek Orthodox

world. Further conquests placed it in the hands of Richard *Coeur de Lion* of England, the *Knights Templar*, the *Lusignans*, and the Republic of Venice. Then, in 1571 it was taken by the Ottoman Turks, the ancestors of the present Turkish Cypriot population. The Ottoman occupation lasted until 1878, when fear of Russian expansion led the Sultan to hand over the administration of Cyprus to Great Britain in return for British support in the event of a Russian attack.

The British administered the island in the name of the Sultan until 1914, when they annexed it upon the entry of the Ottoman Empire into the *Great War on the side of the Central Powers*. Cyprus was finally declared a Crown Colony in 1925. Britain used Cyprus as a military base to protect its route to India and the Far East via Suez; by the Second World War the island was considered indispensable to the protection of British interests abroad. In 1954, as the empire receded, Britain said, 'Never', to independence for Cyprus. The House of Commons burst into uproar but, more important, this one word triggered off the independence struggle, with five years of guerrilla activity from EOKA (The National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters) and a severe clampdown by the British authorities.

In all the years of British rule, *enosis*, union with Greece, had been preached by the Greek Orthodox church and taught in Greek-medium schools. The expectation of this eventual outcome for Cyprus was now dashed. EOKA stepped up its action, with Colonel George Grivas coordinating guerrilla operations in the mountains and Archbishop Makarios stretching out negotiations with the British.

By 1957, Britain was prepared to give independence to Cyprus, retaining two naval bases, because military technology now enabled it to operate effectively from these bases without maintaining the rest of the island. By this time it had stocked the police force with loyal Turkish Cypriots, who had thus become EOKA targets and had alerted Turkey to the dangers of *enosis*. Britain left Cyprus in 1960, as it had left Palestine in 1948, with the havoc of inter-communal violence impending.

Archbishop Makarios, the Ethnarch of the Greek Cypriot people, now became President of the new Republic of Cyprus. But the anti-colonial struggle unleashed in 1955 had ended in the Zurich-London agreements in 1959 with a constitution virtually

imposed upon the people of Cyprus and including features leading towards the subsequent partition of the island (Polyviou, 1975; Hunt, 1982). Greek Cypriots considered that their Turkish compatriots had been given too much representation in government in proportion to their number. And for Turkish Cypriots the fear of *enosis* continued, for although it was formally rejected by the Makarios government, the idea remained active in the minds of former EOKA members. The Greek and Turkish Cypriot armies fought each other sporadically from 1963 until 1967, when Ankara sent an ultimatum to Athens threatening to invade the island unless these clashes ceased – a graphic illustration of the role of the mainland governments in Cypriot affairs. The dictatorship that had recently seized power in Athens responded by bringing pressure on the Greek Cypriot forces through the Makarios government, and the fighting stopped.

Opposition to the government line among EOKA supporters increased and, in 1971, George Grivas returned to Cyprus secretly to create the second fighting force for *enosis*, EOKA B. Even the three bishops in Cyprus, though they did not actively support EOKA B, adopted the extreme nationalist stance and opposed Makarios. In Greece, the right-wing junta actively supported Grivas. The climax came on 15 July 1974, with the military coup aimed at assassinating Makarios and finally solving the 'Cyprus problem'. The result of this action was to provoke the Turkish invasion of the island, leading to the occupation of the northern part of Cyprus by Turkish troops from the mainland.

Women as reproducers of society

Writing of women in Israel, Nira Yuval-Davis (1979) argues that women are very important for the nation by reproducing the collective in the 'legitimate manner' and thus ensuring the continuity of its specific character and belief; they are used and controlled by the collective while being excluded from important positions and decision making. She observes that in all countries formerly under Ottoman occupation there is a particularly close cooperation between the state and the religious authority: between Judaism and the State of Israel, for example; between Islam and the various states of the Arab world; and between the autocephalus

Orthodox Church of Cyprus and the newly established Cypriot state.

A prominent feature of such a relationship is that religious laws coexist with secular laws in some areas and supersede them in others. Family law tends to be left to the religious authorities. Even those countries that have modernised their legal system, modelling it on those of the West, have incorporated religious laws in the area of family law, particularly pertaining to marriage and divorce. In Cyprus, all matters related to marriage and family cycle rituals have been left to the church, with the exception of questions relating to the custody of children and family property in the hands of the state. These laws exercise rigid control over women, the 'reproducers', so as to enable the Greek Cypriot society, the 'collective', to replicate itself in the traditional ways which exclude women from equal participation in social and political life.

Cypriot women are encouraged to follow the example of the *Panagia*, the mother of Christ, and other female saints such as Helen and Marina, who symbolise women as chaste, loving, and invariably sacrificing themselves to their husbands, their children, to God and society. The reverence attached to the Virgin Mary serves as an instrument for the inculcation in women of humility, patience and subservience. She is the archetypal mother created and sustained for centuries by the church (cf. Warner, 1976). Teaching resignation as a paramount female virtue, the church in Cyprus has always found it easy to cultivate this attitude, especially among the less educated section of the population.

During the Ottoman occupation of Cyprus, and later the British, Orthodoxy was fused with Greek nationalism into a formidable ideology. Over the centuries the church acquired a prominent and revered position, respected by politicians and laity alike. Since statements emanating from the hierarchy on social and moral issues are rarely ignored, the church holds considerable influence in swaying attitudes in favour of or against social reform. It is important to note that most of the Greek Cypriot population does not resent this kind of hegemonic power, but accepts it as an established part of life. The relation between church and state in modern Cyprus is apparently peaceful and mutually supportive, ensuring the credibility of both in periods of crisis.

The church nowadays exerts its influence in the political arena while standing discreetly in the background. It is confident in its

firm grip on the island, having become the largest landlord on Cyprus as well as the centre of nationalist activity (Sant Cassia, 1981). During the period from 1960 to 1977, the church's position was strengthened as a result of the double role of Makarios as head of state and head of the church. The hierarchy successfully supervised the evolution of the nation state with considerable flexibility, diplomacy and determination.

War and its aftermath for women

During the fighting in 1974, over three thousand Greek Cypriots lost their lives. Of these, four hundred Greek women were killed and a further 152 listed as missing. The Red Cross has estimated that one in every 150 married women lost a husband, while one in every hundred has a son or daughter missing. Given the importance of the extended family in Cypriot society and the value given to sharing problems among family members, it is clear that most Cypriot women experienced bereavement within their own families. Of the women whose husbands were missing or dead, an estimated 25 per cent had dependent children under the age of eighteen. Many of these women lived in tents for two years or more.

Greek women living in the north of the island were raped by Turkish soldiers during the invasion, in some cases repeatedly. These women suffered the worst possible humiliation – 'worse than death' – of having been sexually abused by the enemy. The Report of the Commission of the Council of Europe on Human Rights in Cyprus 1974 attests: 'The evidence concerning allegations of rape is voluminous' (1976, p. 120). The text states:

The applicant Government [Cyprus] complained of 'wholesale and repeated rapes of women of all ages from 12 to 71, sometimes to such an extent that the victims suffered haemorrhages or became mental wrecks. In some areas enforced prostitution was practised, all women and girls of a village being collected and put into separate rooms in empty houses, where they were raped repeatedly by the Turkish troops.' In certain cases, 'members of the same family were repeatedly raped, some of them in front of their own children. In other cases, women were brutally raped in public. Rapes were on many occasions accompanied by brutal-

ities such as violent biting of the victims, to the extent of severe wounding, hitting their heads on the floor and wringing their throats to the point of suffocation.' In some cases, 'attempts to rape were followed by the stabbing or killing of the victim. Victims of rape included pregnant and mentally retarded women'. (*Ibid.*)

One woman related her experience:

I saw him (the Turkish soldier) still over me and I noticed others showing that they approved of what he had done to me. . . . Then he took my watch and engagement ring. Immediately afterwards another threw me to the ground and started to undress me, with the same intention as the first. . . . I staggered in the direction of the other women, and caught up with them. I saw a two year old boy and took him in my arms, even though I was losing my strength, hoping this would save my life. While I was holding the little boy, some Turks surrounded us again, and one of them started pulling me. . . . As we were walking towards Six Mile Beach, we found some charcoal and I used it to make my face black, to look old, hoping to avoid being raped again. (*Ibid.*)

The detailed evidence includes the following statements:

~ a man (whose name was stated) reported his wife had been stabbed in the neck whilst resisting rape and his granddaughter aged six had been stabbed and killed by Turkish soldiers attempting to rape.

~ a girl of 15½ years who had been raped, was delivered to the Red Cross.

~ the witness had to take care of 38 women released from the Voni and Gypsou Camps, all of whom had been raped, some of them in front of their husbands and children; others had been raped repeatedly, or put in the houses frequented by the Turkish soldiers. The women were taken to Akrotiri hospital in the sovereign base where they were treated. Three of them were found to be pregnant. (*Ibid.*, p. 123)

In terms of numbers, the European Commission took into account 'written statements of 41 alleged victims of rape, of four alleged eye-

witnesses of rape, and 24 hearsay witnesses of rape' (*ibid.*). Those Cypriot women who survived these dreadful experiences, particularly those who did not become pregnant, hid their 'painful secret' deep within themselves and tried to start a new life. It was difficult to trace these women who were scattered throughout the south of the island. Although the whole question received extensive press coverage, this gave no numbers, names or detailed descriptions.

This press interest, in fact, brought into the open the hitherto taboo issue of Cypriot women and sexuality. Cypriot men showed their obsession with the code of honour and shame by expressing, both verbally and through the press, that their women had been made impure by the enemy. They were concerned with the presence of enemy blood in 'their' women and the consequent impurity of 'their' nation. The strong feeling came through that these children should not be born. In consequence, the abortion law was changed overnight and the rape victims were provided with terminations through the Red Cross and the health authorities at the British bases.

The girls and women who had been raped, and who made their statements as soon as they arrived at the Red Cross, tried at the same time to convey and to conceal the unbearable memories that kept unfolding before them. There was more suffering to come, however, and this time it was inflicted by their own men.

The Nicosia press reported in November 1974 that some of the husbands and fiancés of rape victims had applied to the church for divorce or for dissolution of the engagement contract. These initial reports aroused much public discussion. Subsequent articles and letters provide ample evidence of men who did not want to take back their wives. Typical of the views expressed: 'They just do not want them,' or, 'It's not easy for a man to be attracted to his wife again if he knows what has happened.' Most people in such a male-oriented culture 'understood' the men's view and excused them. Nobody spoke for the women. Nobody considered their psychological needs for love and acceptance. Those who were the abused victims of the male invaders were now to be rejected by their supposed male protectors.

As the only institution with the legal power to grant a divorce, the church was involved. Even in the case of engaged couples, where the priest had blessed the rings and signed a dowry contract, it was necessary to seek the approval of the church in order not to proceed

with the marriage, since vows had been exchanged and the engagement had received the blessing of a church ceremony.

Of the Greek refugee population of 200 000 scattered over the south of the island, almost half are women. The military occupation by a conquering nation led to social reform in allowing women to involve themselves more in activities outside the home: work in factories, participation in political life such as demonstrations and other gatherings. Close contacts in everyday matters developed between refugee and non-refugee women, affecting both groups in their attitudes towards each other. The experience of war politicised some women, first by making them aware that their passive stance towards the political problems of Cyprus was as harmful as that of those who acted wrongly and brought the enemy to the island, then by making them realise that violence and war created more problems for women than for men and that the men did not care about solving women's problems. As a 65 year old woman, resettled at Horio, put it:

We left these things (politics and war) to the men, and we had faith in them. They were our husbands, who talked for hours in the coffee shops about this or that politician, about the English, the Americans and the Turks. . . . We just used to listen to them and hope for the best. . . . They made a mess. We women shouldn't leave everything to them. Men don't give birth and don't care much about killing people. We know now what peace is and what war is.

The dowry system plays an important role in Cypriot society. In most cases the wife brings to the marriage a house, or a plot of land, as her economic contribution to the newly established household. *The Cypriot women refugees have lost these houses and with them the thing they valued most: their homes.* The majority of those who came from rural areas also lost the land bequeathed them by their fathers, land on which they had worked for years to make productive. Their flight from the bombing and the fighting was so sudden that none was able to take even their moveable possessions. Deprived overnight of their entire material world, they also have to adjust to the new social environment and the new people in the neighbourhood or refugee camp where they were resettled.

Some of the population, however – mainly women, children and

the elderly – were unable to flee and, at the end of the invasion, found themselves cut off in the occupied areas. These Greek Cypriots, as noted above, are officially referred to as ‘enclaved’. Women in this group, particularly those whose husbands were serving in the army across the divide, often had to care for their children and elderly parents, as well as cope with the occupying forces. Many were under the added psychological stress of not knowing whether their husbands were dead or alive. No research could be carried out in the occupied area; thus no evidence is available on the social degradation to which they were subjected.

Although it is true that more men were killed during the war than women and that men lost more property and money because they owned more, the consequences of the war were borne more heavily by women than by men. For almost every man lost, a dependent woman – a wife, sister or mother – has been left behind without male protection in a society that makes integration very difficult for the woman who does not have a man through whom her place in the social world is defined.

The social negation of ‘false widows’

Five years after the Turkish invasion, the fate of 2197 Greek Cypriot men (including both military and civilian) still remained unknown. Photographs and other documentation in the hands of the Red Cross and the UN affords irrefutable evidence that at least some of these were captured by the Turkish forces, not only during the hostilities, but also afterwards. The official Turkish attitude is that they have given back all the declared prisoners and that no Greek Cypriot is detained as an undeclared prisoner of war. Having repulsed a number of initiatives between 1974 and 1979, the Turkish side still refused to allow any investigation by the Red Cross or UN forces. A UN resolution, expressing regret that two previous resolutions had not been implemented, called for immediate establishment of an investigative body which would function impartially, effectively and speedily. Although a commission was eventually set up, it was unable to carry out its purpose. Talks between the two interested parties held in May 1979 with the mediation of the UN Secretary General resulted in a report stating that one of the parties was not prepared to appoint representatives

to the investigative body. The talks thus came to a standstill and the thousands of relatives of missing persons even today do not know whether they are dead or alive.

In 1979, as part of a wider study on the position of women in Cyprus, I interviewed 27 women married and three engaged to missing persons at some length and a wide range of subjects including family history, marriage, child-bearing, their experiences of the war, economic position, health, involvement with the social services, their aspirations for the future, relations with the church and official government bodies. The sample consisted of women of various ages, but slightly over three quarters of these women were between 21 and 40, since this group faces greater social problems because they are of an age when remarriage might be considered a possibility. The sample also covered a range of educational levels (from illiterate to university graduates); jobs (housewives and women in full-time and part-time employment); and domestic situations (women living alone, with parents, with in-laws, or with other relatives).

Five years after the end of the war, the experiences of these women were still vividly alive in their memories. They all complained of sleepless nights reflecting on their cruel fate. They clearly felt a sense of permanent loss and uncertainty about the future, living as they do in a social limbo. Anna, a 28 year old university graduate with no children, told of feeling ill:

I went to the doctor with various symptoms, and I often needed tablets for loss of appetite, to make me sleep, for my nerves, for my stomach and so on. I wasn't very keen on taking the tablets but I saw it as the only solution left to me. I feel like a volcano erupting from time to time.

And Nitsa, aged 24, said:

I'm suffering from depression, tension and nerves. Before, I was a calm and sociable character. Now I don't want to mix with people. I feel as if my bleeding wound is wide open to them.

Two of the university graduates, discussing the political situation in Cyprus and internationally, concluded that they and the other wives of missing persons were the most oppressed group in Cypriot

society. All the women expressed distress at the way they were treated by the special committees that had been set up and by government authorities in general. In the first years after the war, all of them had devoted much time to the appropriate committee for missing persons, participating in demonstrations and all-night prayers, but they have now lost hope after so many disappointments and do not even open the newsletter published by this committee.

They felt let down, too, by the welfare services. Of the 30 women interviewed, 25 claimed that they had been disappointed on their first visit and did not want to see the welfare officers. According to Roula, a 27-year-old mother of a girl aged five and a half, the social worker was interested more in finding out about her economic position than her emotional condition or her relationship with her relatives. Another of these women stated: 'We needed them in our loneliness to speak to about our problems and to advise us on serious matters, not to comment on how few possessions we had.' This questioning on their economic status was so insistent that many of the women asked: 'Were the Social Services so keen to reduce the £12 a month we were given by the government?'

In the period immediately after the war, the families of missing persons were not regarded by the government as families that had lost their male breadwinner forever; therefore, they were not given a monthly pension. Marina, 29 years old, had this experience:

Soon after the war the social worker visited us in my parents' home and asked about my economic problems. Two months passed and then they decided to give us free tinned milk for the child and a few pounds in cash for my immediate needs.

Two thirds of those interviewed had been compelled, mainly for socio-economic reasons, to move into their parents' home or into a refugee camp close to their next of kin. Katina, aged 26, told me:

I stayed close to my family. My grief was so great that I couldn't move from my chair next to the radio. I used to cry all day. My mother took over all responsibility for the baby, who was then two months old. All my relatives helped me but, of course, nobody could understand my loneliness, nobody could identify with all my problems. Living in a small village with so much

gossiping around, my parents became stricter and stricter towards me.

Many of the women could not go out to work because they had babies or young children or because they were physically and emotionally drained. The resulting psychological and economic dependence on relatives had an adverse effect on their powers of decision making and their freedom of movement. The father usually became even stricter with his daughter than he had been before her marriage. He now felt doubly responsible for her honour and wished to protect her from other males who might treat her offensively. The daughter was expected to behave correctly and to respect the 'name' of her parents, her husband and her children. In short, she had to keep herself in isolation. As one said, 'People soon gossip about the wife of a man who is away from home.'

Five of the women interviewed complained bitterly about bad relations with their fathers, leading to trouble at home, nervous tension in the children and a generally unhappy atmosphere. They felt strong social pressure and regarded themselves as imprisoned in their own homes by their own relatives. A 29-year-old mother said:

When my husband was lost. I worked in my parents' home, sewing. It was a very difficult time for me because I was imprisoned day and night with the same people talking about my problem over and over again. I fought a real battle to persuade my parents to let me go out and work in a factory.

In some cases, these women reported supportive and harmonious relations with affines. Helena, who was 35 years old and had two children, lived a long distance from her husband's parents:

I have a very good relationship with my mother- and father-in-law. They live in Larnaca in a house let to them by their brother from Australia. They are refugees too. They love my two children and visit us every Sunday. Sometimes they take them out. I look forward to their company.

But others told of problems with affines who regard their young daughter-in-law as their property and want to control her. Margarita,

a woman of 35 originally trapped in the Turkish-controlled area and now a refugee in the south, told me her story:

Soon after we were released by the Turks and became refugees, we were given second-hand clothes by the Red Cross. A red skirt happened to be my size, so I put it on because I had nothing better to wear, and went to Nicosia, where one of my husband's sisters had a clothes shop. I had only one pound in cash on me and I intended to buy a cheap dress in a dark colour. My sister-in-law embarrassed me with her comments on the colour of the skirt. She said that I ought to be ashamed to walk around without wearing dark colours because my husband was away. 'Do you want to attract the attention of other men? That's what people are saying. Red is only for the insane.' My in-laws don't think about me or my two children any more, except to criticise. The old saying is true in my case: 'The ox has died, so our cooperation is over.'

In some cases, the woman's relations with her affines were the source of her most upsetting problems. In the absence of the husband, who was the link between them, relations deteriorated and the wife lost the support of her kin, especially when her own family lived at a distance. Some of these women had to fight against the traditional image of the dependent wife and assert themselves in order to get control of the family and establish that they were the rightful legal representatives of their husbands.

Legal issues formed the basis for many problems. Since their husbands had not been declared dead or lost forever, they did not enjoy the rights of a widow with regard to the property of the children or the husband. If the husband had a bank account in his name, the wife could not make any withdrawals, however great the needs of herself or her children. If the family car was in the husband's name, the wife could not sell or exchange it without a lengthy court procedure. Five of the women who decided to go to the district courts felt guilty. Myrto put it like this:

I feel that I have done, or am doing, something wrong in having to deal with judges and the courts. I have to depend on the court's humanitarian feelings to allow me to sell the old car and buy a new one, which is in the interests of the family.

Some women commented that special provisions should have been made in the case of the wives of missing persons to establish these women as the legal representatives of the families.

In one case, the wife found herself in a serious conflict between her affines and her own family over the property of her lost husband:

About a year after he was lost, and my father-in-law and I had enquired everywhere, my relationship with his family started to deteriorate. My dowry had just been built on my husband's land and I moved in near my in-laws. I've been here for four years now, but they've turned against me and say that I usurped the land and that I'm not their own any more. My mother- and sister-in-law insult me and my parents whenever we meet.

The subject of divorce and the possibility of a second marriage was naturally very sensitive. Even when the woman being interviewed trusted me completely, she found it hard to discuss her real needs and feelings. One 24-year-old woman who had been engaged to a missing person confessed:

My parents put pressure on me to get engaged again, but I know how hard it will be for me to get any proposals. I think that I'll need a matchmaker to make the arrangements for me. I can't look for a husband myself, and although my parents want me to get married soon, they can't help through their network.

Of the women interviewed, I was sure that most had not had any sexual relationship since they were parted from their husbands. I could not, of course, enquire about extramarital affairs as this would have caused great offence. Some of these women, especially those without children, were considering a second marriage, but were waiting for action from the church or state to grant them all a divorce, or to issue a declaration to the effect that after five years without the return of their husbands they were free of their first marriage. They felt that with a group ruling they could take steps to get married for the second time without feeling guilty. Alexandra, aged 29, said:

If I go as an individual to ask for a divorce so that I can remarry, my in-laws and my husband's friends will be outraged that I have forgotten him so easily. The church objects and, if I do manage to get a divorce in the end, it will be on my conscience that I caused trouble by marrying again for selfish reasons. And how will this second husband behave towards me and my children? How will his parents treat me since, in crude terms, they will regard me as a 'second-hand' woman?

A representative of the church, who wished to remain anonymous, told me that only a few divorces had been granted and these in cases where the woman was already living with another man and had children from this union. Neither the church nor the state are prepared openly to assist the women on this matter but, on the contrary, allow restrictive attitudes towards them to persist, making it unlikely that they will be married again. To re-define these women as 'widows' and allow them back into the social world would seem to undermine the existing male-oriented social patterns. A young woman gave her view: 'Even if I were only engaged and he was lost, I would never consider marrying someone else. I would always remember him as my man husband. But I don't blame other young women who have different characters and want to remarry.' Another told me: 'Yes, I'll support them in every way, They must get a divorce and remarry. It's a pity for them to spend all their lives in misery.'

Two-thirds of the women interviewed referred to the role played by the church in their lives during the early days of their problems. For the women who did not work, visits to monasteries and churches and involvement in charitable work or the rituals of the Orthodox church formed the only publicity acceptable social outlet. Some of the young wives became involved in religious activities not because they felt the need, but because they felt obliged to accompany their mothers or mothers-in-laws to church ceremonies and all-night vigils. In this there was at least the solace that the tiredness induced by long hours of prayer would help them to sleep. Very few of these young women took their religion seriously; from deep in their hearts they complained that God did not help them. Disillusion and disbelief in God succeeded the illusory comfort offered them by the church and religious ritual.

Penelope in the present

The problems faced by the wives of missing persons are caused by the absence of their husbands, whose presence would give them a place in the social structure. The fact that their difficulties derive from being defined outside the boundaries of the social world, almost as non-persons, suggests that the normal state of affairs for women is acceptable; but, in fact, the common situation of women also involves pain and denial, albeit to a lesser degree. A mere restoration of the accepted forms is not the solution. The lack of the husband-protector, under the specific conditions of the aftermath of 1974, calls attention to a general series of constraints upon women in normal times. And it becomes more clearly apparent that the concepts of honour and prestige are really the bars of a prison for women. This does not, of course, make the sufferings of the wives of missing persons any less real. The point is that as yet no identity has been made available to them in their society. They are denied re-entry into social life.

A second important point to emerge is that religion forms part of the secular identity, whether personal or collective: being a Greek Orthodox Cypriot woman involves behaving in a certain manner and failure to do so risks ostracism from the community. Religion and ritual establish certain values and examples for the way women live. Women act as a kind of moral litmus test of the authenticity of a culture: customs, folklore, religion and rituals are all condensed in the prescription of how women should be as an expression of 'our way of life' or 'the way of life of the nation'. In other words, in Cyprus, women express the social values. To challenge the dense substratum of norms is almost to challenge the very notion of being human and to become monstrous, unreal, animal-like. The rarer alternative is to become an angel, holy, godlike and special: hence the Penelope myth.

Note

1. The number counted by Turkish authorities in October 1974 and signed by the Minister of Interior and Justice, Mr Ahmet Sami.

References and further reading

- Alastos, Doros (1975) *Cyprus in History* (London: Zeno).
- Attalides, Michael (1981) *Social Change and Urbanization in Cyprus* (Nicosia: Social Research Centre).
- Campbell, John K. (1964) *Honour, Family and Patronage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Council of Europe (1976) 'European Commission on Human Rights Report: Cyprus vs. Turkey', Application No. 6780/74 and 6950/75.
- Hunt, Sir David (1975) *On the Spot* (London: Trigraph).
- Hunt, Sir David (ed.) (1982) *Footprints in Cyprus. An Illustrated History* (London: Trigraph).
- Lapping, Brian (1985) *End of Empire* (London: Granada).
- Loizos, Peter (1972) 'Aspects of Pluralism in Cyprus', *New Community*, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 298–304.
- Loizos, Peter (1975) *The Greek Gift: Politics in a Cypriot Village* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell).
- Loizos, Peter (1981) *The Heart Grown Bitter. A Chronicle of Cypriot War Refugees* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Peristiany, John (1974) 'Honour and Shame in a Cypriot Highland Village', in *Honour and Shame: the Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Polyviou, Polyvios (1975) *Cyprus, the Tragedy and the Challenge* (London: Jonn Swain and Son).
- Sant Cassia, Paul (1981) 'Patterns of Politics and Kinship in a Greek Cypriot (1920–80)', unpublished PhD dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Cambridge.
- Stravrinides, Zenon (1976) *The Cyprus Conflict. National Identity and Satehood* (Nicosia).
- Warner, Marina (1976) *Alone of All her Sex. The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson).
- Yuval-Davis, Nira (1980) 'The Bearers of the Collective: Women and Religious Legislation in Israel' *Feminist Review* no. 4, pp. 15–27.