

The unseen struggle of women. Gender violence and state power in historical time

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Summary

The aim of this paper is to capture the image of women and the multiple roles they took on in the years from 1923 to 1974, documenting visible and invisible violence and its impact on their lives during a long and turbulent historical period through their own narrative. Given that their actions entailed the orderly and dynamic functioning of groups, communities or collective forms of action and resistance, through contemporary literature, historical sources, and the qualitative recording of their experiences, we aim to highlight their own voices and record the women's narrative in historical paths.

Keyword

Resistance, occupation, civil war, dictatorship, women's struggles, gender violence, state violence

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Introduction

When national histories included women in their narratives, the gender dimension concerned them only in the areas where they were visible as acting subjects, i.e. gender relations within societies where men had the first say and absolute control or in their role as family members and especially as breadwinners of children. Women's role as mothers and homemakers primarily involved reproduction, production, but also the proper functioning and management of relations within the family (1). However, a prerequisite for ensuring the recording of an equal and properly democratic history is clearly the presence of women, describing its dimensions as a whole. Obviously there are experiences and memories that will never become narratives, but the history of everyday people, women, families, and movements is part of a larger effort to incorporate 'lost' stories into the historical narrative.

Oral testimonies may reflect women's experiences drawn from memory, but looking to the past carries methodological dangers. Sufficient time, serious social, economic and political changes are needed for the wounds to heal and the stories to become manageable to tell. On this basis, the individual and collective web of memory is formed and interpreted differently, but the subjects are ready to express their experiences and lived experiences within a framework of neutrality and security. According to Verveniotis (1), in her book "The Civilian Civilians of the Greek Civil War", the research interviews were conducted at the end of the 20th century and not in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s or 1980s, because "the wounds of the civil war were still fresh and the subject was a taboo, but also a serious trauma for society".

Beyond the fact of women's invisibility in history, therefore, oral testimonies and memories raise a number of issues regarding the use and constitution of sources. These relate to temporal and emotional distance, the conceptualisation of objectivity and its interpretation, and the recognition of the research subject as both active and acting. All the more so when the narratives of women's stories are drawn from the long and turbulent times that people lived in our country, as time smoothes the traumas, but in addition, it erases individual memory, transforming it into individual truth, a personal narrative, which usually coincides with the collective reality (2).

In many cases, the records and collective testimonies emerge from the 'network of relationships', which can be a conceptual tool that highlights small environments (such as that of the family) as living organisms rather than passive recipients of any external changes (3). Besides, the behaviour by and towards women in any society depends largely on their role and their participation in the family and in the productive process. It is therefore useful in conjunction with personal narratives to highlight issues such as attitudes, power relations between family members, the interplay of individual and collective projects within the family, but also the redefinition of the concept of the individual in the context of the critique of the individual-society dimension and in the construction of memory in later years (4).

Thus, a variety of important dimensions emerge through the women's stories, which are not solely concerned with the

mere recording and juxtaposition of historical events. The depiction of women's history and everyday life is captured in a process of subverting marginalization and invisibility that is systematically pursued and largely achieved. Moreover, the study of women's history brings to the surface social and cultural issues related to the gender dimension in their lives and actions, as most of the time the law and state power become the main instruments of enforcing moral norms. A representative example is that of the study of sexual violence against women, the methodological shift to the analysis of narrative sources and testimonies of women who suffered it, which gave the violence of rape historical substance (5,6).

Approaches to the above issues, methodological and otherwise, which seek to approach the issues through a gender perspective, as well as the practice of state violence and crimes, have met with resistance and many of the studies remain marginalized or addressed to a 'special' audience, which is identified with the feminist circle. On this basis, great care is required in recording and capturing individual personal events, as well as contextualizing and situating them in time through the study of historical sources, archives, research and collective narratives, in order to bring out the dimensions of the subject under study with clarity, accuracy, objectivity and the necessary respect.

Aim of research

The purpose of this research is to highlight the women's narrative through the action and presence of the women in the sample, in the historical period from 1923 to 1974, in order to document their experiences, personal testimonies and experiences, as well as the effects of trauma and violence, especially state violence, at various levels of their lives. The working hypotheses of the study, are formulated as follows:

The narrative of women over historical time remains invisible as their struggle at many levels and its impact on their personal, family, professional, economic and social lives are silenced, marginalized or even replaced by the record of historical, political and military events and achievements.

Individual memory and testimony and the recording of these in the present day contributes to the healing of trauma, as well as to the democratisation of history, the restoration of the status and struggle of women and the reshaping of the collective memory and history of a people, regardless of different beliefs, ideas and perceptions.

Gender-based violence and the torture of women, due to the intense social stigma, remain uncharted territories, at the initiative of women themselves who wish not to verbalise their experiences even today.

The extreme expression of state violence and organised attempts to subjugate power through state crimes and torture, includes a range of gendered practices to control women's sexuality and reproductive capacity.

Methodology

The processing of personal narratives is based on thematic analysis (7, 8). Based on this method, predefined categories were constructed to group the data according to the axes of the semi-structured interview research tool. The main objective was to detect through the interviews behaviours, experiences, beliefs and facts in order to then draw conclusions about the research dimensions under study.

Data collection tool

Data collection was carried out through the tool of individual interviews, which is a source of data collection in qualitative research and contributes to an in-depth approach to the research dimensions (9, 10). The interviews were semi-structured, lasting 1 ½ - 2 ½ hours.

Sample

The sample consisted of 10 women who, through the multifaceted roles they adopted, experienced state violence and the violation of their rights and the consequences on their own lives and the lives of other intimate persons. The sample was found using the snowball technique, mainly through the Society of Friends of the Memorial Site of the Anti-Dictatorial Resistance, in Thessaloniki and the Association of Imprisoned and Exiled Resistance Members 1967-1974 (SFEA), in Athens, in order to be representative of the characteristics of the population under study.

Data processing and analysis

The aim of the analysis in this research work was to structure and organize an analytical record of codes and themes emerging from the interviews to generate new knowledge through primary data (10). On this basis, the analysis and processing of the data was carried out with the software program NVivo14, used in data analysis in qualitative research.

Conclusions

The purpose of this research is to highlight the political, social and personal struggle of women in a broad time frame, from 1923 to 1974. In the light of women's personal testimonies as lived experiences and the study from existing archival material, we aimed to identify the 'myths' and 'silences', both in the testimonies and in aspects of public history and life concerning the impact on all levels of their lives, given the subjective element in the narratives. After all, the processing of collective memory begins with the recall of experiences at the moment they occurred and then individual memory modifies, selects, revises or even erases.

The women in the sample, aged 71 to 100, were born and raised in Greece (Athens, Thessaloniki and provincial cities) in turbulent and difficult times. However, they received a remarkable education (almost all university degrees) and worked in prestigious professions, producing remarkable scientific work. One woman did not manage to study (she attended a domestic science school) because of the mentality that girls do not get an education and the problems of survival, and one did not pursue her profession because she had the exclusive care of the home and children. Almost all of them stressed the prioritization of education and training in their parental family and indicated that even if their parents did not practice high-profile professions, their thinking was imbued with progressiveness, democratic and humanitarian values. The paternal family also served as a starting point for their later actions, as all families had a past with similar experiences... struggles, persecution, exile, imprisonment and serious loss of human lives, but also through strong emotional ties that still exist.

Of the ten women, seven had families and children of their own (an average of two). One woman reported divorce without subsequent marriage and two reported cohabitation or cohabitation. Of the seven married women, only three have their husbands alive. All of them were distinguished by intellectual clarity and clarity of thought and speech and remain very active in their daily lives or in public life, or are developing research or writing work.

The women in their stories place themselves and their actions in time, mainly from the Occupation onwards, growing up and gradually entering the years that brought the dictatorship in Greece and the Polytechnic. They recounted experiences as they all directly or indirectly (through their spouses) were active. The reason why two of the ten did not come forward themselves was that their husbands were leading figures in the anti-dictatorship struggle and post-independence. Each one describes her own story, experience, important moment, great fear or her own trauma that still accompanies her. To these must be added the pre-existing memories of childhood with persecution and imprisonment of their parents or relatives. In describing their experiences, they speak of the difficult conditions in their daily lives, the removal from their homes or their studies, the deprivation of loved ones, poverty, hunger and the general difficulty of survival.

The tracing and study of historical texts, archives, recorded sources from personal records and testimonies, the autobiographical texts, and the literature review of concepts and approaches around the research questions for the study's objective, combined with the recording and processing of the records of the sample's personal narratives, lead us to specific research conclusions. In addition, the research hypotheses, as formulated within the research objective, appear to be verified as a whole and correspond to the purpose and research methodology followed to confirm or refute them. On this basis, the following general and specific conclusions are drawn as a result of the theoretical and research approach to the subject matter:

- The literature on the specific historical periods examined remains scanty and covers mainly historical and martial as-

- pects in the subjects, with almost no focus on the impact of historical developments on people's lives and views and how they experienced the social and divisive consequences of the events. All the more so when these elements concern women or other smaller groups who participated and contributed, in an obvious or not so obvious way, to the struggles of each era.
- The women's narrative, for which very little space and time has been devoted over the years, is important to highlight because of its specificity and gender characteristics, as it is significantly differentiated from the recording of events, situations and experiences of those of male (co-)fighters or the analysis and simple quotation of facts about the political, national/patriotic or historical context in question.
 - The women's struggle, as it has been examined from different angles, both documented and unseen, has been multifaceted, complex, multidimensional and extremely challenging.
 - Each woman, as a fighter in every multifaceted role (mother, companion, wife, warrior, spy, helper, housewife, etc.) in her own environment, paid a heavy price at the personal, family, professional, economic, social and political levels.
 - Women's participation in the struggles marked to a certain extent the overthrow of dominant gender relations and roles and, more importantly, the emancipation of women.
 - Women demanded and claimed a role and space in the struggles, as they felt that they themselves had very good reasons to become fighters and not just watch their husbands, children, loved ones and their entire lives disappear.
 - The family environment has a prominent role in the growth, development and later career of women, the loving, caring and respectful relationships that women experienced largely determined their personalities, choices, opinions and later their careers.
 - Regardless of the external circumstances, if there are stable caring and attachment figures in a family, children are firmly attached to them with bonds of security and love, obstacles are overcome and people receive resources that they retain throughout their lives. No trauma in childhood surpasses the total loss of the family.
 - The transfer of knowledge, ideology, philosophy of life with an emphasis on the collective rather than the individual, patriotic outlook on national issues and democratic concepts of freedom and human welfare seem to be transferred almost exclusively from the early years of life by a powerful learning mechanism, with a cognitive and social background, through life patterns and attitudes of parents and women's caregivers.
 - The absence of one parent, either permanently or temporarily, seems to have stigmatized the women who have experienced it to date, but due to the extended form of families, this person has been "replaced" by very close relatives and the children continued to grow up in a close-knit family environment.
 - The structure of the Greek family and the small communities, either in the villages or at the neighbourhood level in the larger cities and in Athens, acted as a protective net in the safety and support of the women throughout their journey and was the main protective net in their struggle even to stay alive in some cases. Otherwise things were very difficult, as the women fighters had no help and support, both mental and material.
 - The acceptance and respect women also experienced within their microcosm from their male friends, comrades and (fellow) fighters. The struggle, in every era, gave them a platform, a public voice, respect and status and they all worked with the common cause and the high democratic ideals they were fighting for as their main axis, beyond discrimination and inequalities in terms of gender. Women stood alongside men, fought deservedly and distinguished themselves many times more than the male warriors in order to prove their worth and usefulness.
 - Especially in later years, everyone participated equally in the proceedings and on a basis of respect, acceptance and contribution, regardless of gender characteristics.
 - Torture is the extreme form of state violence and refers to a premeditated manifestation of violent behaviour against a person or groups, which causes visible physical harm. Direct, structural and cultural violence, in the eras we have explored, has been varied and multidimensional and has been inflicted by a person or persons legitimised in the role of representatives of state power and always with the aim of subjugating, humiliating and exterminating, physically and mentally, the victim.
 - According to gendered memories of torture, in addition to common torture practices, the regime of terrorism in each era has formed a specific mechanism of interrogation and psychological violence derived from their gender characteristics and their maternal role.
 - Women were subjected to sexual methods of torture, degrading practices centred on female functions, exposure of the female body and mockery of its parts, insult to reproductive capacity, psychological pressure in an offensive and vulgar manner, as female resistance, anti-regime action and participation in any form of struggle were absolutely intertwined with immorality and debauchery.
 - Many testimonies and torture remain unseen by women's choice, as even today they carry a strong social stigma and are not easy to capture, both because of their cruelty and the need for distance and protection from the emotional burden they carry.
 - Through the gendered practices of torture, the patriarchal male power over the female existence becomes apparent, while the process of cohabitation and subjugation has a dual role, as it concerns the extraction of information and punishment, but also seeks to impose absolute domination over the female body, reproductive functions and sexuality.
 - The revival of traumatic events in nightmares, with images or even in hearing present events is strong, especially at the sight of people who caused the torture, which shows that despite the long time distance from the events, post-traumatic stress and fear remain active and are revisited with relevant stimuli.
 - The revival of traumatic events and their effects seem to be largely related to the women's personality and their degree

of psychological resilience, the acceptance and help from their supportive and especially family network, and whether they were exposed for a short or long period of time to extreme forms of violence and torture.

- Torturers were described as inhuman and ruthless beings, capable of anything and specifically selected and trained for this purpose, who were joy and pleasure from the pain, fear and suffering of others. Especially when these others were women, as a particular hatred and an attempt to devalue and subjugate them was recorded, which they tried to cover up by legitimizing their actions, in the context of institutionalizing and legitimizing violence, under the pretext of the national good and the interest of the homeland.
- Some fighters who denounced others or signed declarations in exile, were recruited and became torturers themselves with unparalleled hatred and lack of mercy in relation to the others, acting not only as instruments of violence and enforcement of state power and security, but also as healers of their own trauma, trying to bend any resistance to justify in their minds their own admission.
- The struggle for survival in every era and in every situation had its own characteristics. In prisons and interrogations there was ‘the rule of silence’, as a method of protection from the rage of the torturers; in exile, women recalled all possible and unlikely methods of survival and problem-solving to cope with the daily abnormal living conditions, with whatever spiritual or material resources each one had. All depending on their social, professional and educational backgrounds had organized themselves into self-help, support, entertainment and daily needs groups.
- The women’s greatest shield of protection was their social and friendship network, which acted as a lifesaver during arrests, interrogations, illegality, imprisonment and exile, both for themselves and their families. And in many cases, in addition to providing material and moral support, it saved them from torture and death and offered them life-long relationships that have lasted over time.
- The effects of torture in the immediate future and over time are many. Pain, fear, (post)trauma and their consequences, especially psychological ones, persist and reappear, with serious physical health problems, but also with psychological implications with serious impact on their family, professional, mental and social life.
- The impact on families was equally severe, either because women experienced a very difficult situation very early in their lives as children, with severe deprivation and suffering in their daily lives with extreme poverty, uncertainty, and health problems, and even more so with temporary or long-term absence of one parent, or because in the following years in their own families they had to manage to balance physically and psychologically and cope with multiple roles in order to survive themselves and their children in an ecologically sustainable way.
- The impact on women and the family in no way leaves children unaffected, regardless of their age. Parental deprivation, whether temporary or permanent, violent practices, survival difficulties, insecurity, living in inappropriate conditions,

extreme poverty, war and civil conflict have been major sources of trauma, stress and difficulties, both practical and psychological, for young children.

- The mixture of fear, terrorism and threats seems to work in reverse in times of severe crisis and shock or loss of basic freedoms and important possessions to people, and in some/some people, in the context of the primary need for survival of living beings, creates a protective matrix, activating a high degree of resilience and psychological resilience as a coping mechanism to withstand inhumane conditions.
- In situations of crisis and deviation, human endurance is tested, but it seems that in specific generations, above and beyond physical and psychological torture, there is a sense of duty, the duty that each generation is called upon to fulfil, ideology, values and democratic ideals, with a just and democratic society as the overriding goal.
- Despite the enormous personal, economic and social costs, women remain active, dynamic and with great intellectual clarity in the present day, giving their own analyses of contemporary conditions and with serious concern, as they foresee repetitiveness in events that can lead to serious social unrest and lawlessness.
- State violence has been a means for the conformity and cooperation of populations in all the historical periods under study, turning a large part of the population into an unwilling and passive group that aligns itself with the most powerful.
- The depiction of the events through the eyes of the women is captured in the now, with everything new intruding on their thoughts, with distance and time neutrality from the events, with a cool and clear view of the present, beyond the fear and trauma of loss and violence, as this is how the interpretive framework of the writing penetrates the memory and records it, in order to transform the individual experience into a collective property.
- The historical era that spans the years under study seems to have caused an unalterable trauma that has yet to heal sufficiently, as the years that have passed are insufficient to transform the original messages through the processes of selection, forgetting and transformation.
- The long turbulent history of the Greek nation, the long periods of instability, insecurity, lawlessness and violence have caused serious setbacks in the economic, political, social and cultural life of the country, but also a huge loss in human potential that remains alive and negative to this day.

Discussion

This article is part of a post-doctoral study and focuses primarily on the women’s narrative and the emergence through it of women’s lived experience and the consequences of violence and subordination to the authority in question. The interaction of the past self as the acting subject transforms women into narrators with their unique individual, social, political, cultural and psychological identities, given the risk

of transforming or reconfiguring the then experience in the present. Narratives, as Van Boeschoten (3) says, "are ongoing mental processes, conscious or not, involving defence mechanisms and survival strategies, symbolic representations of reference points and the structuring of past experiences into a collective memory that is constantly renewed by the impact of present events". The above process is also about people trying to understand what happened to them in a past period, in a process of rationalisation and assimilation of events, especially traumatic ones.

The female narrative presents important differences compared to the male narrative or the recording of historical events in general. In addition, for years it was not expressed. Due to social and political conditions, women's roles and struggles were not highlighted or were obscured in the shadow of male or war narratives and heroic acts. History has systematically marginalized women's stories, especially the issues of their sexual victimization and gender-based political violence. However, the women's dimension in history contributes to democratization and the proper portrayal of all its dimensions. As Verveniotis (11,1) confirms in her research, the struggle for freedom especially in earlier years, during the Resistance and the Civil War, gave women a platform, took them out of the homes, made them equal and "useful". According to Baron-Vassar (12), the social dimension of this experience had a special weight for young women, different from that of their young male peers. They stood for the first time on the side of men as equals, as they felt that there was much they were in danger of losing, first and foremost their dignity, freedom and family.

Of course, "looking backwards" carries methodological risks. Beyond the problem of the invisibility of women in history, oral testimonies and memories raise a number of more general issues concerning the use and construction of historical sources. These concern the conceptualisation of objectivity and its interpretation, but also the recognition of the research subject as an active and acting subject. All the more so when the narratives of women's stories are drawn from long and turbulent times, as time not only smoothes the traumas but also erases individual memory, transforming it into individual truth and personal narrative, which usually coincides with the collective reality (2). On the other hand, it takes sufficient time, serious social, economic and political changes for the traumas to heal, the events to be verbalized and become manageable for narrative (1). On this basis, the individual and collective context of memory is formed and interpreted differently, but subjects can express their experiences and memory within a framework of neutrality and safety. A representative example is that of the study of sexual violence against women, as the methodological shift to the analysis of narrative sources and victims' testimonies gave rape violence a historical status (13, 6).

Regarding the impact on women's lives, many narratives show the longevity of the trauma over time, i.e. the persistence of mainly the psychological over time (14). The consequences of psychological violence are much longer lasting than those of physical and sexual violence, even when they cease

to exist, even though they do not involve visible after-effects, i.e. trauma or injuries, etc. Despite the severe effects on all levels of their lives, women possessed psychological resilience, which they attributed either to their close family and social environment, to their relationships with their partners then and now, to their own individual characteristics and, of course, to the imperative need for survival.

Women's identity, in all its dimensions, is a sufficient condition for ensuring an equal and correct democratic history. The depiction of women's history and everyday life is about a process of overthrowing marginalization and invisibility that is systematically pursued and largely achieved. Women's participation in the struggles furthermore marked to a certain extent the overthrow of dominant gender relations and roles and much more, the empowerment of women. Obviously there are experiences and memories that will never become narratives, but women's history is an important piece in the puzzle of capturing the 'lost' stories in the historical narrative and the multiple impacts on their lives and those of their environment. However, women's narrative, for which very little space and time has been devoted over the years, is important to highlight because of its specificity and gender characteristics, as it differs significantly from the recording of events, situations and experiences of those of male (co-)combatants or the analysis and simple quotation of facts about the political, national/patriotic or historical context at hand.

The historical memory of a people and its preservation are key elements of its national, political and cultural identity. The study of this dimension has highlighted the great need for further research activity on many aspects of our recent history that have not been sufficiently illuminated or even researched. Moreover, many historians now realize the necessity of studying historical memory. Yet few studies are available on the memory of these times and even fewer studies using oral history.

It is important to study many additional topics and thematic areas concerning the silencing of issues such as the cooperation of parts of the population with the conquerors, the attitude of minority populations in the struggles and their contribution, the extermination of the Greek Jews, aspects that are still considered traumatic today and certainly in their time and place were disruptive to the national and unifying form of the Greek state. In addition, it is important to highlight the issues of gender and especially in more specific issues which research has not been developed to a great extent, these include the position of women within the organs of administration and self-government that were formed in various historical periods, the coming of age of children who lived in families that suffered serious forms of regime violence, the history and life of anti-heroines of those years and their position in society and finally the phenomenon of violence as a total phenomenon and the strong symbolism it carries especially in the female population.

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