Engendering the Nation: political persecution and terrorisation against women dissidents during the Greek military dictatorship (1967-1974)

Abstract
The Greek military dictatorship (1967-1974) is closely connected to the Civil War period and to the socio-political unrest that followed. The 1967 coup d’etat resulted to a prolonged period of political persecution, banishment and extreme terrorisation. The ‘Revolution to Save the Nation’ (Ethnosotirios Epanastasi), as the dictators used to call it, was a supposedly necessary action in order to protect the country from the ‘communist conspiracy’ that had taken over the public sector. During the military junta, a highly nationalist and militaristic regime was set in place against the democratic and politically active citizens. For women especially, the Colonels’ regime, as a civil war residuum, reinforced a mechanism of persecution and terror that was based on patriarchal and nationalistic narratives, carrying gender specific markers.

As traditional assumptions concerning family, gender and sexuality, were introduced, women were projected as the guardians of the ethnos (nation) that was under threat. This paper will try to delineate the gender dynamics of violence and the micro technologies of power and terror mainly within the prison communities and interrogation centres of the junta period through the prism of nationalist ideology. It was especially in the interrogation and police centres that this militaristic system of power relations and nationalist ideology was effectuated. The gender and political identity of the female detainees was violated, along with their body and psyche, in order to materialise the national triptych of patris, thriskeia, oikogeneia (homeland, religion, family). Following this rationale, the paper will follow the traumatic histories of women dissidents through oral testimonies and memoirs, archival and secondary sources in order to re-approach and contextualise a period of extreme political terror and gender abuse against its active female population.

Keywords: women dissidents, torture, terrorisation, gender relations, nationalist ideology, military dictatorship, Greece.

The 1967 coup was tightly connected to the politically turbulent period of the 1950s and 1960s. Even though as Poulantzas suggests, the Greek dictatorship was a military regime (as was Spain and Portugal) and not a fascist one, narrowly defined, the apparatus, however, was authoritarian based on police and military forces.\(^1\) Even though the 1967 military coup was the outcome of a long period of political instability and turmoil, as well as persecution and oppression of the leftist citizens, the democratic and leftist forces were caught off guard at the dawn of April 21\(^{st}\), 1967. Within a few hours the majority of the leaders of the Left, the Centre, even the Right were arrested as well as members of the Greek intelligentsia. In the first few hours’ 8,000 people - among them the Prime Minister - were arrested and on the first day of the dictatorship 6,844 people, mostly political dissidents and well-known members of the Centre and the Left, were deported to the exile island of Yiaros. More than 80,000 citizens were arrested for political purposes in the 1967-1974 period.\(^2\) The coup was ‘justified’ by the supposed long-standing Communist threat. In a few hours the civil war (1946-1949) legal and constitutional framework was re-activated. As the historian Kyriaki Kamarinou argues, the re-activation of Law 509/1947 was not only targeting the Communist sympathizers, but also any citizen who could be opposed to the junta; the dissidents were simultaneously objectors to the social order and not only to the dictatorship (2005: 266). The Palace also seemed unprepared and despite the supposed initial discontent it adopted a neutral stance.

In the question who carried out the ‘National Revolution’ of April 21\(^{st}\), 1967, the official response by the Colonels, was the Army and the reasons were grounded on Communist danger. The coup was instrumented by a group of mid-ranking officers who were preparing the overthrow of the state since the early 1950s.\(^3\) As Papadopoulos, the leader of the military government, was looking for some sort of social consent, he soon turned to the Greek people, and the instigators of the coup

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\(^1\) See Poulantzas (1977).
\(^3\) In fact General Karanikos during the Dictatorship Trials testified that the initial coup took place in 1951 and was linked to the secret military organization ‘IDEA’. See Karagiorgas (2003: 261-263).
were attributed to ‘the People and the Army.’ The supposed Communist danger was soon abandoned in the official rhetoric of the dictatorship. The Colonels realised that the supposed Communist insurgency would not provide a “sufficient justification for the indefinite prolongation of the dictatorship” (Clogg, 1972: 114). Junta’s repressive apparatus was based on the beliefs of the ‘Greek-Christian’ West, and at the same time, Papadopoulos proclaimed that Communism is incompatible with the Greco-Christian spirit.

In relation to the nature of the regime, Poulantzas (1977) has described the Greek *junta* as authoritarian, but historians have also compared the regime with the Latin American dictatorships. Recent studies, however, suggest, that the regime was not bureaucratic-authoritarian as the Latin-American dictatorships, nor fascist, due to the absence of organised corporatist institutions. Nevertheless, in contrast to other dictatorships (Latin American) the police enjoyed unrestricted authority over the Greek population. Even though officially denied, there has been a link between the dictatorial regime and former Nazi collaborators, who managed to obtain important posts under the regime (Clogg, 1972: 118).

In the seven years of dictatorship that followed the military coup of 1967, democratic activists and protesters, as well as former (from the Civil War period) political prisoners and exiles, were once again persecuted, imprisoned, and terrorised. According to the American attorney James Beckett, who was representing Amnesty International in Greece, at least two thousand people were tortured. The Colonels’ Dictatorship was an oppressive regime that carried out, through the Security Police and the Greek Military Police, deliberate and well-calculated practices to suppress the civil rights of the citizens. Male and female dissidents, political opponents and ordinary citizens were systematically beaten, maltreated and harassed. This led to a ‘psychology of fear’ that was reactivated immediately after the coup and affected both men and women. During the military dictatorship, female participation in the anti-

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4 See Clogg (1972:114).
6 Poulantzas (1977) characterises the Greek dictatorship as an authoritarian regime, but the historian Kyriaki Kamarinou describes it as a Latin-American dictatorship (2005:266).
7 Tzortzis (2003).
8 This is a conservative estimate, see Becket (1997: 31).
junta movement and political activism were intense, as were in particular the mechanisms of political terrorisation and suppression used against them. Greece’s repressive post-civil war socio-political system almost came to a halt in 1973 (Kassimeris, 2005: 745). In March and November of that year, the dictatorial regime was challenged by the mass demonstrations and protests of the Department of Law and the Polytechnic School of the University of Athens. Even though the events lasted only a few days, the revolt managed to challenge the military regime and catalysed popular mobilisation within Greek society. It also mobilised thousands of workers and students in a student protest against an authoritarian educational system and rapidly escalated into a general political uprising against the junta.9

2. The political persecution and confinement of women dissidents: statistics, legal framework and sites of internment

According to Amnesty International and the British Organisation League for Democracy in Greece, 8,270 citizens were detained and at the Yiaros camp the political exiles were 6,138, among them more than 200 women.10 Besides the political exiles, a significant number of dissidents were imprisoned and detained without a trial, interrogated and tortured by the military and police forces. Even though, there are no official statistics in relation to the total number of the detained (imprisoned and exiled), interrogated and tortured citizens, historians and researchers of the period provide the number of 80,000 citizens as a realistic one.11 The Colonels’ Regime announced that in the first few days, 6,509 citizens were detained, and Pattakos as the Minister of Interior in December 1969 proclaimed that the government, which was never referred to as a dictatorship, was human, liberal and democratic.12 He added that “it is true that we arrest those who agitate too much but we do not interfere with their liberty” (Clogg, 1972: 116).

10 The numbers are provided by Koundouros, who is based on Amnesty International and the League for Democracy in Greece (1978). Also see Kamarinou (2005).

11 Koundouros (1978) also agrees that there are no general official statistics in relation to the detainees. However, there are a few governmental sources and information from international and humanitarian organisations, where numbers are included and some conclusions can be drawn. See Koundouros (1978: 24). Also See Alivizatos (1995).

Roussos Koundouros (1978:23) provides a useful classification of the types of internment for the 1967-1974 period. The first one consists of the political exiles that were arrested in the first days or months of the *junta* and were massively deported to the exile camps of Yiaros, Leros, Oropos and to other exile sites. There was also a significant number of arrests that took place without any charge, resulting to the indefinite detention (from days to months) and interrogation of the arrested political dissidents. Lastly, there were approximately 2,000 people sentenced by a Court Martial based on the compulsory Law 509/1947.

As there were no legal boundaries, the political repression of the 1967 regime was unauthorised. The police practices entailed arrests, followed by deportation or detainment without a warrant of arrest (Alivizatos, 1995: 603). The Colonels in order to maintain a human face, covered their repressive practices under the preface of legality. The Colonels’ dictatorship, as other dictatorial regimes, also during the Greek Civil War, equated the ‘ethnos’ (nation) to themselves; they were the projection of the nation (Koundouros, 1978: 21). In this framework, Compulsory Law 509 of 1947 was deliberately interpreted as an attempt to overthrow not only the *junta*, but mainly the existing social order. At the same time, it provided the legal basis for the persecution of Communists, communist sympathisers and of all the democratic citizens who could be opposing to the regime.

What is significantly different during the 1967-1974 period is the fact that in opposition to the Greek Civil War, the dissidents of the *junta* period were mostly students, workers and members of the middle class; resulting to a noteworthy differentiation in terms of stratum and level of education. The imprisonment or exile, was the result of a long lasting and painful interrogation and detention in isolation that usually lasted for several months without a charge or trial of the accused.

According to the Report on the “Situation in Greece” submitted by Amnesty International, at the end of January 1968, 240 women were detained at the Yiaros

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13 Law 509 was ratified on December 1947 in order to dissolve the Communist Party and it entailed the “imposition of ideas whose avowed aim is the overthrow by violence of the existing constitutional or social order or the cession of any part of the national territory or who by any means advocates the implementation of such ideas” (1973: 12) Amnesty International Report “Human Rights in Greece 1973”, *League for Democracy in Greece*.


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camp. The same report argues that the majority of the political detainees was kept without a trial and was arrested based on security files that were prepared twenty years ago; as most of the dissidents refused to sign the loyalty oaths, they were also deprived of their political and civil rights.\textsuperscript{16}

Yiaros was used as an exile island from the Byzantine period and it was one of the notorious camps of the Greek Civil War until 1953. It also operated in the early 1960s and was the main exile site of the \textit{junta}. Women stayed at the Yiaros concentration camp for 16 months and due to the Red Cross appeals and the overall international outcry, the camp closed down but re-opened in 1973 and operated until the fall of the dictatorship in the summer of 1974.\textsuperscript{17} The living conditions were extremely harsh in this arid and windy island, so were the repressive mechanisms employed against the political exiles, such as propaganda, censorship and strict surveillance. In fact, Eleutheria Ganiti who was a political exile at Yiaros, recalls the loudspeakers that were used throughout the day for national(ist) indoctrination.\textsuperscript{18} Approximately 168 women were then transferred to the Alikarnassos Prison camp in Crete, where they stayed for more than 2 years.\textsuperscript{19} However, the Alikarnassos camp was a regular prison, where women were detained in cells, in complete isolation and with new strict regulations.

In relation to the legal status of the deportees, the legislation went back as far as 1929 (Law for robbery and animal theft). Additionally, the new Compulsory Law 165/1967 established that the deportations were under the jurisdiction of the Security Committees ‘Epitropes Asfaleias’ that could arrest suspected citizens and deport them without a specific charge or try them as dangerous for public order and security.\textsuperscript{20} The practice of administrative deportation ended after the official closure of the concentration camps under public and international pressure, but was re-activated in a smaller scale after November 1973, with the Polytechnic Movement, when 100 dissidents were sent to Yiaros until the fall of the regime in July 1974. The majority of the political exiles were officially based on administrative deportation and not on a

\textsuperscript{16} See Amnesty International Report “Human Rights in Greece”, \textit{League for Democracy in Greece}.\textsuperscript{17} Also see Koundouros (1978).\textsuperscript{18} Interview granted September 26\textsuperscript{th}, 2009, Yiaros island.\textsuperscript{19} For more on Alikarnassos Prison, see the \textit{Black Book} (1971:161-165) and the memoirs written by former political exiles Margarita Kotsaki (1987) and Anna Solomou-Teriaki (2004).\textsuperscript{20} See Koundouros (1978: 25).
court decision.\textsuperscript{21} Besides the political exiles we need to keep in mind the significant and unspecified number of the detained and interrogated dissidents in the police stations and interrogation units, such as the notorious EAT/ESA.

When it comes to the imprisonment of women, the detainees ‘welcomed’ the transfer from the security and military police centres to prisons, as it was portrayed as a way-out from the torture and terrorisation that was taking place during the interrogation (1972: 19). The main female prisons of the \textit{junta}, were the Averof and Korydallos Prisons. The Central Women’s Prison of Averof in Athens operated during the Metaxas Dictatorship and the Civil War, but was considered unsuitable and officially closed down in September 1971. The Averof political prisoners, both men and women, were transferred to the newly built Korydallos Prisons. In the Korydallos Prisons, the 130 imprisoned women were locked for 16 hours and even though international organisations characterised the new prisons as sufficient, women described it as a ‘modern’ dungeon.\textsuperscript{22}

The imprisonment or exile was the result of a long lasting and painful interrogation and detention in isolation that usually lasted for several months without charge or trial of the accused. The interrogation entailed physical abuse, sexual insinuations and threats, detention in complete isolation and extreme pressure for denouncing Communism. It was in fact during the interrogation and in the interrogation and police centres that the most horrendous cases of abuse and terrorisation took place.

\textbf{3. The female and political body in pain:}\textsuperscript{23} the torture and terrorisation of women dissidents during the \textit{junta}

As in Latin American dictatorial regimes and nationalist movements around the globe, the Greek military \textit{junta} was also facilitated by the institutionalised and symbolic transformation of leftists as ‘second-class citizens’. The regime established through the anti-communist ideology a machinery of terror that was both necessitated and justified for the salvation of the ‘decaying’ nation. As the country was in plaster

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid. p26.

\textsuperscript{22} See the \textit{Black Book} (1971). In March 1972, there were 15 women prisoners at Korydallos Prison and in May 1972, 17 women. See the \textit{Black Book} Vol. II (1972: 30).

\textsuperscript{23} I am paraphrasing Elaine Scarry’s well-known study on torture, \textit{The Body in Pain} (1985).
according to the dictator and Prime Minister, George Papadopoulos, the ancestral values were re-articulated within state rhetoric and propaganda. Accordingly, gender differences along with religion, ethnicity and morality were once again prescribed in the official discourse. In military regimes and nationalist movements, the enemy is always demonised, in the Greek *junta*, the enemies were the political dissidents, especially the politically active women.

According to the Amnesty International Report on the ‘Situation in Greece’, the torture and abuse that took place by the Colonels’ regime, was deliberately and officially used and was a widespread practice against the suspected politically active citizens. Amnesty International prepared a Delegation based on accounts of the victims or on second-hand testimonies of the imprisoned. Torture was deliberately performed, as a state practice, carried out by the Security Police (‘Asfalia’) and the Military Police (ESA), but also in some cases by the army and the gendarmerie. In the case of the army and the gendarmerie, the Delegation states that it is difficult to determine if these cases of torture were isolated or part of a standard procedure. However, the testimonies of the detained and interrogated dissidents throughout the *junta*, especially in the early stages and after the Student Revolts, are leading us towards the direction of a procedure closely associated with the abuse and the torture that was officially conducted by the notorious interrogation units of the EAT/ESA and in the Security Police in Bouboulinas street. Phaedon Vegleris a Professor of Economics argued that “our dictatorship could not have stood without torture: this is the sad truth. It is more effective than killing, because a killing cannot be denied. It is done in secrecy and is always denied and a doubt exists always” (Interview conducted on December 31st, 1976, Amnesty International “League for Democracy in Greece” MGA/Info XIV/Torture).

The techniques of torture, besides the standard and widespread method of ‘falanga’ (or bastinado, a quite common method during the Greek Civil War as well), which involved strapping the prisoner to a bench and beating the soles of the feet with a wood or a pipe, also entailed the beating of naked bodies with wires and electro shocks. Incidents of sexually related assaults were also reported. In the case of women, these involved rape or attempted rape, genital penetration with objects and water. In the case of men, sexual torture entailed excessive beatings on the genital
The micro-technologies of torture included the employment of specially designated ‘tools’. In fact, when Penelope Savinidou was tortured, the torturer Andrikos opened a drawer and showed his ‘tools’ saying that if she doesn’t talk, he will use them (1971: 36).

The Amnesty International Report states that even though the physical beatings of prisoners is a common practice of intimidation it can be classified as torture, only if it is conducted in a systematic way. In the Greek junta, the physical and psychological violence against the detainees was systematic, deliberate and targeted the political and gender identities of the dissidents. The prisoners were tortured for hours, on a daily basis, usually naked or half-naked, in some cases with their eyes covered; 5-6 officers were the torturers and many more were present. Nakedness, carried specific connotations for the traditional Greek culture and effectuated the sense of vulnerability, fear and humiliation. Non-physical methods of terrorisation and torture, proved to be equally traumatic, such as the witnessing or listening to the cries of other inmates being beaten, the depriving of water, food and the solitary confinement. In the Colonels’ regime the threat of ‘de-fenestration’ (the throwing off the window during interrogation and torture) was also quite common. Mock executions and the signing of declarations under absolute fear and physical force were also quite common techniques of terrorisation. Maria Kallergi, a 24 years old student arrested by the Central Intelligence Agency (KYP) and transported to the General Security Police, recalls another method used during her interrogation, the employment of dogs.

The interrogation began again. They called in the Communist hater who brought a large dog. The dog took an active part in the doings. The tortures continued in the same fascist manners for 25 days. Practically naked, they would take me out in the snow and drench me with icy water. Manousakakis [Major, the head of the command of the brigade] himself burned me with cigarettes and with a hot iron on the hands, the buttocks, the legs. They would put their pistols to my head daily (1971:29).

The majority of the arrests took place in the homes of the political dissidents, in front of their family members, late at night, in order to intensify the fear and intimidation,

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24 See Amnesty International Report and the memoirs of Korovesis (2007) and Arseni (2005). In fact, one of the most famous incidents of torture, were the brutal assaults against Periklis Korovesis and Kitty Arseni, that were made public abroad though their testimonies in the Council of Europe and caused international outcry and pressure against the regime.
but also in an effort to shatter the important role of the private domain within the Greek culture.\textsuperscript{25}

In many cases of torture, doctors were either compliant or cooperating with the regime and often facilitated the abuse of women; the judicial system further legitimised the persecution and harassment.\textsuperscript{26} Scarry also discusses the co-existence of medicine and law, health and justice, as institutional elaborations of the body and the state that were consistently inverted in the concentration camps (1985: 42). The troubling role of the two institutions was also imprinted on the atrocities that took place in the Greek Civil War and the military dictatorship. One typical example was Dr Kofas who was supervising the abuse of the \textit{junta} dissidents. Aspasia Karra, a Professor of Philology, semi-paralysed as a result of poliomyelitis, denounced that she was severely tortured during her interrogation and was in fact electrocuted with the permission of the doctor who was present.\textsuperscript{27}

Researchers working on torture and state terror,\textsuperscript{28} have argued that the perpetrators of atrocities under dictatorial regimes or during war are not born but transformed into torturers through hegemonic masculinity, militarisation, but also through what Suarez-Orozco and Robben describe as institutional authority and rigid hierarchy (2000: 9 n6). There have been cases, where the abusers have also been victimised in order to turn them into dehumanised professional torturers.\textsuperscript{29} Additionally, they were intoxicated by regular use of alcohol and drugs.\textsuperscript{30} Social institutions under dictatorial regimes are transformed into ‘institutions of terror’ that provide the technical and psychological support in order to carry out the organised terror and abuse.\textsuperscript{31} As argued by Suarez-Orozco and Robben, these organised systems of terror are always guided by an intellectual and moral framework, through the ideological structures.\textsuperscript{32}

As in other dictatorial and nationalist regimes, the militaristic narratives, along with paternalistic attitudes, facilitated the establishment of state mechanisms of

\textsuperscript{25} Similarities can be found in other military regimes such as the Argentinean; See Robben (2000: 74-76).
\textsuperscript{26} Also see Arseni (2005: 73).
\textsuperscript{27} See the Averof Prison Report, \textit{League for Democracy in Greece} (MGA/InfoXVI/Women Prisoners).
\textsuperscript{28} Scarry(1985); Taussig (1992); Suarez-Orozco and Robben (2000); Haritos-Fatouros (2002).
\textsuperscript{29} See the excellent study on institutionalised torture by Mika Haritos-Fatouros (2002).
\textsuperscript{30} Kity Arseni says in her memoir, that the officers who tortured her were intoxicated and drugged. She also testifies that they were in an amok (2005: 72-73).
\textsuperscript{31} See Robben and Suarez-Orozco (2000: 9 n6).
\textsuperscript{32} For more on the role of ideology in establishing state-organised systems of terror, see Robben and Suarez-Orozco (2000: 6 n3).
violence against women, designating them at the same time to the ‘private’ domain. Thus, women political activists of the *junta*, who didn’t conform to the appointed gender roles had to be assaulted in order to recuperate. In the Greek *junta*, as in the postwar period of political persecution, female political activism was also equated to promiscuity and offered a valid justification for their abuse. The actress Kitty Arseni was told during her interrogation: “parasites like you should be killed. What is your business interfering with politics?” (2005:80).

Ivekovic and Mostov argue that women as mothers are the reproducers of the nation, but they are also perceived as possible threats or enemies to the nation (2004:11). As within the context of the Greek Civil War, the nationalist discourse of the *junta* re-articulated the ‘dipole’ of woman as the ‘whore’ and the ‘virgin’. On the one hand, women are projected as the continuation of the nation and on the other, they are considered as lesser political subjects and circumscribed within the private domain in order to be monitored. Within the nationalist regimes, gender inconformity provides justification for the political exclusion and social marginalisation of women political dissidents.

Women political dissidents of the period, were the ‘destroyers’ of the nation and of the Christian traditions of the *ethnos*; thus, the bodies and sexuality of women had to be regulated and controlled.33 Ivekovic and Mostov describe this process as ‘state fatherhood’, in the sense that the nation is equated to family and the associated concepts of motherhood and reproduction as political acts, are under the control of the state and its institutions, such as the church and the family (2004: 11). In the Greek *junta*, as elsewhere, the aforementioned state practices are materialised by the long existing gender hierarchies and patriarchal structure. Ivekovic and Mostov argue that “the instrumentalisation of national body politics facilitates consolidation of the nation-state through regulatory practices rooted in the sexualisation of women and their vulnerability to sexual assault” (2004:11).

Within this framework, I would like to discuss the case of Kitty Arseni who was arrested in 1967 as a member of the Patriotic Anti-Dictatorship Front and tried the same year by the court-martial. During her interrogation by the Security Police, she was massively tortured and terrorised. In her memoir she states:

> Twenty days have passed since my arrest...I was brought to the terrace...I was beaten, but I don’t fell pain. I want to shout but I don’t have voice, so

33 Ivekovic and Mostov (2004: 11).
that I could be heard in the solitary confinement. I want a candescent iron to burn the parts of my body that were touched (2005: 70).

She continues:
Now I remember when you said that, the fear of pain is bigger than the reality of pain. I didn’t see anything rational on them, something that I could explain in my mind. I saw how they wanted to rip me in pieces, looking like cannibals. They were hedonic while I was writhing. That was their job. They didn’t know me at all… I wish they had left a part of my body free so that I could somehow resist… (2005: 72).

A blonde one was doing falanga, while the others jumped on top of me, stepping on my stomach, gripping my neck; they lit matches to burn my eyes. I insisted on seeing while I was tortured… so Spanos shouted: “no light, since she wants to see, she will stay in the dark. Burn her eyes…, and he started tearing up my dress. My mouth was shut with a mop. They were banging my head. And then they turned on a machine that imitates the noise of a motorcycle, “Don’t shout, noone will hear you, noone, talk”. That was when I got scared, a lot. Only for a moment Spanos said: “we should throw her off the terrace to turn in pieces”. Then I breathed, I wanted so much to die. But they didn’t” (2005: 72).

During the torture, the victim seeks for an explanation, not only for the reasons of his/her abuse, but also of the ‘rationality’ of torture. However, the methods and the machinery of torture were beyond their wildest imagination.

In the repressive and patriarchal Greek state, the role of motherhood was projected as integral to the traditional and religious values of the Greek society. Especially when it comes to reproduction, women’s role as mothers was emphasised and political activists were pressured to reveal information or sign the loyalty oaths in order to avoid the torture of their children. The use of children and other family members was a common form of psychological pressure and political intimidation during the interrogation. Dimitra Apostolou, was told that the Security Police had arrested her husband and daughter. Actually they interrogated her daughter in the next room, so she could hear her (1971: 23). Similarly, Kitty Arseni recalls: “I was hallucinating, having nightmares, with my family being tortured, my mother beaten and my sister raped” (2005: 76). At the same time their abuse entailed gender specific markers and was justified since women dissidents had denounced the saint role of mother and adopted an active role in the political arena.

Women’s sexuality and reproduction within the nationalist regime as occurred in other dictatorships and similar nationalist frameworks, is crucial and that’s why it needs to be controlled. With regard to the sexuality of the women political detainees, “we must bear in mind how the patriarchal system constructs women's sexuality and
women's bodies” (Gomez, 2005). When absolute and incontrollable power prevails, a culture of violence is formed.34 Maria Angelaki, recalls that during her interrogation, the torturers kicked her in the genitals and struck her breasts.

They told me that they would torture me in such a way that I would never be able to become a mother. They tore off my clothes, stripped me naked and then stood around me talking obscenely laughing coarsely and threatening me with shameful innuendos or with unmentionable words. They told me that they would subject me to a torture instrument which they called ‘the little machine’ (1971:22).

Similarly, Melpo Lekatsa during her interrogation was pressured by the well-known torturer Spanos to reveal details of her personal life during her interrogation (Newspaper TA NEA, “Prison Diary on a chocolate paper”, November 17th, 1997).

As Mayer aptly points out “when nation, gender and sexuality intersect, the body becomes an important marker— even a boundary—for the nation” (2000: 17-18). The tortured body becomes an instrument of shame, especially the exposed naked body. Melpo Lekatsa describes the first bath she took after a whole month as a traumatic experience.

…three soldiers took me to an outdoor bathroom…and made me undress. For a whole month that I was imprisoned I didn't have any contact with water. The dirt had stuck on my skin and I look like a leper…suddenly the dirt is superseded by something worse. Three pairs of insatiable glances are setting eyes on my body…the drops of water are falling like barbs on me. The pains and spasms are intensified. I feel tragically. I feel like screaming, like running on the highway (Newspaper TA NEA, “Prison Diary on a chocolate paper”, November 17th, 1997).

In most cases of torture, the female body was naked; it was a quite common practice to pressure women to strip off their clothes. There was also the significant ideological parameter associated to the naked body, eagerly employed by the militaristic and patriarchal domination. The naked body was vulnerable, exposed, penetrated, easy to assault; women were transformed to a disposable, disoriented human mass. Sexual domination, rape and the threat of rape, was transformed into a powerful mechanism of control, both political and gender.

Scarry draws an insightful parallel between the interrogation and the pain as a way of wounding, which is also transformed into a vehicle of self-betrayal (1985: 46-47). She argues that torture consists of a physical act, the infliction of pain and a verbal act, in the form of interrogation, where the body can often betray the person.

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who is being tortured (1985: 35). When Melpo Lekatsa was detained at the white cell of EAT/ESA in January 1974, she recalls: I was constantly trying to subject myself to the idea that I should not surrender, that I should endure…but then I got anxious again. Maybe I don’t have the quality of a heroine (Newspaper TA NEA, “Prison Diary on a chocolate paper”, November 17th, 1997). Kitty Arseni also writes:

I am not afraid of the perverted executioners, Spanos’ paranoiac face, the counter with the ropes, the darkness of the terrace and the waters of the wash house. I have the taste of the mop in my mouth, the noise of the motorcycle on my ears. I see Spanos face in front of me, but above all I hate my body for weakening. And I wait for them. As long as they come. I am ready. Now I don’t care that my mind isn’t working. I don’t need it. Now, that I have decided it, now I now how you l encounter with them” (2005: 70-71).

As Scarry aptly points out, “in torture, the world is reduced to a single room or set of rooms, in the Greek junta, they were the ‘guests rooms’. “The torture rooms are often given names that acknowledge and call attention to the generous, civilizing impulse normally present in the human shelter” (1985: 40). That’s why even though women and men detainees acknowledged that they were prisoners, their cells were acting as shelters, as their private space, almost sacred. The few resources, a mattress, a table, most importantly their books and some paper provided them with some sort of selfhood and intimacy. During my interview with Zoi Xenaki, a political detainee during the dictatorship, she began her narration with a very detailed drawing of her cell. Therefore, “the prisoner’s physical world is limited to the room and its contents; no other concrete embodiments of civilization pass through the doors” (Scarry, 1985: 41).
Concluding Remarks

State persecution and gender violence during the period of the military junta need to be approached not only as isolated incidents of the Colonels’ regime, but as a constituent element of the nationalist ideology. State anti-communist propaganda was necessitating not only the coup but also the validity of re-appropriating gender roles. The “engendered nationalist narratives” resulted to a culture of violence that was naturalised and justified for the preservation of the nation and women were projected as the guardians of ethnicity and morality. The bodies, actions, and beliefs of women had to be controlled and punished as they were in a position to challenge the prevailing gender and power hierarchies. Thus, the reconstruction of the ethnós was passing through the ‘bodies’ of women, both literally and symbolically.

I am closing in the words of a woman dissident of the military dictatorship:
“...I assumed for a minute that they did it [the torture] in order for me to hate my body and give them my soul. Maybe…but I loved it more, because it endured."

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