

GREEK WOMEN AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to show the present (2013) status /condition of Greek women as a result of the economic crisis, which is on its fourth year and is still worsening. This paper aims also to develop into a comparative study, that is incorporate Greek Cypriot women's experiences of the economic crisis as it has been unfolding since March 2013 in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC). There are major differences between the two cases which will be highlighted but also similarities. Prior to this crisis in 2009 and 2013 in Greece and Cyprus women had made several successful steps (both legal and practical) towards gender equality of all sorts. With the apogee of the economic crisis, the Greek state began to gradually abandon its gender equality programs, especially the economic ones, by making drastic cuts, claiming that these programs will be reinstated as soon as unemployment is reduced, the economy is stabilized and growth is achieved. In Cyprus the curtailment of social welfare programs, reduction in salaries and dismissals of bank employees as well as the closure of middle-range businesses have hit many households in the last few months. These cuts dealt with social welfare benefits which were to aid large families, unmarried mothers, and victims of sex abuse, battered women, early retirement of women and a series of other benefits, which had tremendous consequences on women.

In order to further understand this situation in Greece, we sought the opinion of a number of unemployed and part-time employed women on how they are handling this crisis. Toward that end, a number of them were chosen who belonged to three socioeconomic strata – labour, service/sales and professionals. We used a snowball sample and the method of in-depth interview and collected our data during June and July 2013. In Cyprus we interviewed women who became unemployed from the private sector, women whose husbands are unemployed and self-employed women whose business has been very much affected. All the interviews were done in Nicosia. The interviewees were of different ages and socio-economic backgrounds. This work is in progress as more research will be needed.

Introduction

Why a feminist gender analysis is necessary in studying international and national economic crises? Such an approach helps us to delve deep into the existing power relations between

men and women and how these crises impact these relationships. It also helps us to bring to the discussion social groups which do not necessarily fit the stereotypical, heteronormative, hegemonic masculinity and femininity stereotypes. It also brings to the surface the deepening of gender inequalities and how women are called upon to undertake multiple roles both in the private and public space. It also shows more clearly the 'feminization of unemployment and poverty' the accentuation of inequalities and the backlash in social welfare programs, and services (day care centers, care for the elderly); the cuts in salaries and low-paid jobs-areas which hit mostly women of lower socioeconomic strata. It also allows us to bring to the analysis areas of discriminations at the expense of women whereby the value of domestic work is not listed as labour and not counted for in statistical data; women who take care of the elderly or other dependents who are mostly women become victims of discrimination without pension or other rights such as health rights, etc. In addition, the work of women in rural regions does not register in the labour market and thus does not appear in the unemployment statistics. A feminist analysis will inform us how different types of families experience less favourable treatment than others.

Finally this approach invites us to use intersectionality –that is how gender intersects with class, race, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, etc to make our discussion more complex- thus we need to also pay attention to the condition of vulnerable groups such as women with special needs, migrant and minority women, Roma women, the elderly, etc. Such an analysis will point to the need for gender-sensitive policies and alternative, more complex economic models which will be informed by women's needs and concerns. This has been the thinking in carrying out our research in the two cases of Greece and Cyprus.

General Findings

Below we sum up some of the general themes as these emerged from our discussion with

women from Greece and Cyprus

In the Greek case the results show that :

A. General:

- *all respondents claimed that the political parties and politicians are responsible for the economic crisis.*
- *most respondents claimed that the government is responsible for getting the economic loan from the IMF/EU/ULB (or Troika);*
- *most respondents believe that the economic recovery is a far fetch affair;*
- *most respondents believe that the government should not succumb to Troika's demands especially for more salary reductions;*
- *some respondents believe Greece should get out of the Eurozone;*
- *a few respondents believe Greece should get out of EU*

In the Cyprus case preliminary results show that in general :

- The women of a leftist ideology believe that the present government and the 'bad and corrupt' banking system brought about the economic crisis whereas the women with a rightist ideology believe the previous government and its mismanagement of public funds and TROIKA brought about the crisis.
- All the interviewees fear that the hard times are still ahead with new austerity measures.
- Most of the Greek Cypriot women believe that 'we as a society lost all our values, and lost touch with reality. We needed a shock..' type of attitude!
- Unemployment is on the rise and will get worse

B. In Particular the Greek women from different SEB believe:

1. labour: *Crisis caused shortage of money; double burden returned; family problems; family support (home and cash; job and services loss; and future unknown.*

2) service/ sales: *Crisis is not too serious and business as usual; loss of job /look for another; family support (home/cash); problems with spouse/boyfriend; few personal problems; no change in future*

3) Professional: *Crisis most serious, jobs loss serious, Loss of prestige, few family problems, family aids; most insecure of the future*

The Greek Cypriot women stressed the following regarding the impact of the economic crisis:

- All of them stressed the lack of communication within the family and the rise of psychological abuse, frustration and anger.

- Less money in the family led to rearrangement of priorities and they pay for example more attention to which supermarket they go to shop (look for the cheapest).
- Those who are unemployed lost 'appetite for life' and look for ways to immigrate
- The married women with young children feel 'handicapped' to help their children I their higher education
- Married women lost any desire for sex and feel disengaged from the relationship, lack of any joy. Psychosocial problems.
- Fear of more cuts in social benefits and welfare programs
- The professional women feel their university degrees did not help and would do anything to survive.

OVERVIEW OF THE GREEK WOMEN'S ECONOMIC CONDITION

Greece is going through its fourth year of a severe financial crisis. This crisis soon became conspicuous and was acknowledged by the government. Meanwhile, the international rating Houses had vastly devalued Greece's ability to borrow money. Consequently, the Greek government sought and secured financial aid from the International Monetary Fund, the Eurozone Nations and the European Central Bank (IMF/EU /ECB) (collectively called "Troika").

Subsequently May 2010 Troika (imposed on Greece heavy austerity measures as part of the agreement of the loan (110 billion) granted to Greece in order to bail it out of its economic default. In addition, this financial aid was granted with the proviso that Greece would undertake a program that included long austerity measures, economic and structural reforms, along with the privatization of government assets (mainly real estate). These measures were regarded by the Greek government and the people well 'unprecedented, in their scope, severity, volume and speed "(Papadopoulos, Roubakis, 2012:12). Subsequently, the loan was given to Greece in small installments and before each installment was delivered, Greece ought to complete a number of measures – austerity, restructuring of all institutions (public and

private), laying off of excess private employees and public personnel. Greece was slow to comply with Troika's expectations, and Troika became more severe in its demands to be carried out before each installment was delivered. Thus far, four installments have been delivered.

In order for the government to fulfill its part of the agreement with Troika it imposed a series of severe economic measures on both sectors of society – public and private. However, the one that concerns us here is that all institutions and agencies that had been created to aid women were either dismantled or stopped to operate. The private sector was left to its own fate: collective action became abolished, working contracts were drawn only between the owner and the perspective employee, salaries were minimal, work shifts were split, over-time was not rewarded, etc. Meanwhile, people of all sectors showed their dissatisfaction and disagreement by engaging into long and protracted strikes, demonstrations (often unconventional and violent), sit-ins, etc. And now in mid August all unions and associations both private and public are getting ready for the 'mother of all battles' between them and the state to take place sometimes in mid September. Everyone regardless of his/her political affiliation is cursing both politicians and political parties, especially the two parties (traditional enemies) who have created a weak coalition government.

At present the Gross Domestic Product has dropped, unemployment has climbed to 27.6 %, (32% for women), while youth unemployment has risen to 64%. . Entire families are unemployed and rely on their father's and mother's reduced pension. The inability of the state to provide welfare for its citizens reinforced the traditional role of the familistic *welfare* system whereby the family has become the sole economic provider for its members (Papadopoulos

and Roumpakis, 2012: 19). This condition is much more evident with unemployed women. Meanwhile people especially the young professionals, leave Greece in order to seek employment abroad. This move is reminiscent of the 1950s-1960s exodus by young Greeks. But the early exodus was made up by the young and unskilled. The present exodus is made up by young professionals, while the unskilled youth is left at home to fetch for themselves, who often resort to a reverse migration from the city to the country –side and thereby reversing another earlier situation of the 60s - 70s – from the village to the city. Hence, young Greeks are constantly on a roller-coaster.

And while this drama is played out the government audaciously claims that recovery is round the corner, which goes contrary to the projections by the Troika that it will take a number of years before the Greek economy is stabilized and viable. Nevertheless, whether the Troika or the Greek government is right the Greek people, especially the women are totally exhausted and have little hope left. Such pessimism and fear can be seen in people's faces and attitudes. The news media (both electronic and print) show stories of suicides, rapes, domestic violence, robberies, burglaries, pick-pocketing, rapes, murders and every sort of violent activity.

The daily measures imposed on the people have negatively affected all sectors and institutions, both public and private and have derailed the ordinary peoples' psyche. People have become tired of new measures, and every time the government announces them, there is an eruption of social discontent, through demonstrations and strikes while the political parties blame each other to no avail.

Further, the long and severe economic crisis has destroyed the people's hopes, but it has done more harm to women. For although Greek women had fought hard and protracted

battles against the traditional male patriarchy and gradually had lifted themselves from the bottom of the economic, educational and social pyramid and by the end of the century had reached an equal SES level with men, now a reversal of this process is in a full swing and there is no end in sight.

The Cypriot Experience

Unlike Greece, Cyprus has been facing a 'national problem' since August 1974 due to a coup d'état to topple the elected government which was engineered by the Greek junta and its local followers and the subsequent Turkish interventions. As a consequence the island has been de facto partitioned into north and south ever since. Negotiations between the leaders of the two major communities-Greek and Turkish Cypriots-have been going on for decades and to this day no mutually agreed solution has been found. In April 2004 the UN sponsored 'Annan Plan' for a comprehensive solution was defeated in referenda. A month later the Republic of Cyprus became a member of the European Union without its political problem being resolved. Now with the economic crisis there are politicians and civil society groups which view the crisis as an opportunity to pressure for a solution since, they argue, the reunification of the island and its joint economy will bring about new development and reactivation of private and public sectors as well as invite foreign investors in view of the discovery of hydrocarbons and natural gas in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cyprus.

In 1974 70% of the economy and natural resources of the island was destroyed, one third off the Greek Cypriot population (close to 200,000) was displaced from the north to the south, and the unemployment rate was over 45%. By early 1980s, however, the Greek Cypriot economy recovered-there are many exogenous factors for this-and analysts then spoke about

the 'Cyprus economic recovery miracle'!. (Hadjipavlou, 1997). This is another experience from the past that some politicians and analysts recall in order to stress the optimistic fact that the economic crisis in Cyprus will not last more than 2-3 years due to the Cypriots' perseverance and hard work.

A short background to the March 2013 euro group decision to impose among other measures a haircut in the Greek Cypriots bank savings is needed. According to Pophaides (2013) some decades ago the Greek Cypriot political and economic elite decided to transform the ROC into a regional financial and business center. Thus the country attracted offshore companies due to its geographic location, good legal system and, efficient banking system and good infrastructure. This proved to be successful and a large number of companies transferred their base to Cyprus. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union a portion of its capital found its way to Cyprus since the financial infrastructure was there. The accession of the republic of Cyprus to the EU and its membership to the Euro zone in 2008 resulted in a big growth of the financial sector due to the creation of a business-friendly environment. This huge increase in capital inflows took the form of deposits in Cyprus banks. This resulted into huge profits for the banks and some companies in the financial sector and created a euphoria. For instance, the banking sector grew enormously to the level of seven to eight times of the country's GDP (Pophaides as quoted by the European Central Bank). The total bank deposits grew from 38.1 billion euros in 2005 to 70.2 billion in 2012 (an increase of about 84%). According to statistics of the Central Bank of Cyprus non-euro zone residents' deposits with Cypriot banks were by end of 2012 about 21.5 billion euros which represent about 120% of the GDP. The banks used this money to expand their operations, in foreign markets, especially in Greece. Easy money led to the

housing bubble with real estate prices (2004-2008) following an upward path. By end of 2008 a crucial year in the global financial crisis the housing industry declined and many houses remained unsold. In the meantime enormous imports relative to exports increased deficit and fiscal deficit forced the government to seek short-term borrowing. The banking system having overextended itself by May 2011 the problems of the banks became apparent and Cyprus could no longer borrow in the international market. In the meantime the Greek economic crisis “dealt a serious blow to the Cypriot banking sector which after the haircut of the Greek sovereign debt incurred losses of about 4.5 billion euros, a huge amount when compared to the Cypriot GDP.” (Pophaides, 2013). In addition, the global financial crisis impacted negatively the Cypriot economy and by 2012 the rate of growth dropped to -2.4% and by then two of the largest banking institutions admitted that they needed state assistance. Finally, the government reluctantly turned to EMS for a rescue plan and to the Troika and produced a mutually agreed memorandum which was not signed by the outgoing government. A new government was elected in February 2013 and during the Anastasiades negotiations with the Troika in Brussels March 15 and 25 respectively a memorandum was signed. Analysts believed that this decision aimed at the destruction of the financial sector in Cyprus (Pophaides, 2013). The RoC was in need of 17 billion euros, one of its banks went bankrupt and the other its future not safeguarded yet. The Euro group offered to grant about 10 billion euro as a long-term loan provided the Republic was in a position to recapitalize its banks with its own resources. Which meant haircut of savings! The whole society was shocked especially the lower social classes and the retired people. There were demonstrations and protests against the memorandum and

the haircuts, anger expressed at the EU and German government but also at the local economic and banking elite and politicians blamed for greed, corruption and incompetence.

For the time being the government tries to stabilize the banking sector and maintain a social and political consensus. The Troika has recently visited (July 2013) the RoC and evaluated the financial and fiscal situation. Its assessment has been, on the whole, positive and no new fiscal measures have been deemed necessary. The Bank of Cyprus, the country's only systemic bank to survive the financial turmoil has just exited the regime of 'recovery and resolution' having completed the bail-in process with slashing of uninsured deposits at 47.5% . It has downsized itself, reduced the number of its branches and laid off members of its personnel. The banking system continues to function under strict restrictions imposed by the Troika. On the whole the economy is under recession with unemployment rising to 17.5%. The overall picture does not call for immediate optimism.

If we were to look at the composition of all executive boards committees of the banking sector, the semi-governmental organizations and government decision making bodies we note that they are male-dominated and men prioritize the needs and issues of concern. The model in dealing with economic crisis is sexist and based on the model of power over vs. the weak other. We believe the male discourse dominates and sets priorities from a male perspective. Despite the fact that the Greek Cypriot women constitute today more than half in the labour market thus contributing to the economic and social development their presence and voice in decision-making bodies is completely overlooked. In 2006 the percentage of women in employment was 60.3% and rose to 62.7% in 2008 and the percentage of unemployment of women from 5.4% in 2006 was reduced to 4.4% in 2008. Despite the increase of women in the economy the wage

gap and the inequalities between genders still remain- Greek Cypriot women are paid 23% less than men and it is the highest among EU countries. The intensification of inequalities is also due to the significant differentiation between the public and private sectors in relation to the implementation of laws and collective EU labour directives (POGO, 2013).

Thus the employment and economic sectors are gendered and if we look at who make decisions for the state budgets or at the EU level with regard to priorities for development we will note that men prevail in all institutions. For example at the EU parliament 24 % are women and 76% are men; only 23% women presidents or prime ministers; only 10% in positions of company directors. It will take more than 50 years for women to hold 40% of executive positions in companies. From the 500 biggest companies, only 13 have a female executive (Hadjipavlou and Demetriou).

Men are mostly employed in industry, building construction-areas that have been hit severely by the crisis thus the percentage of men appear to be higher than that of women in such sectors. In the EU 17% of women continue to live under the poverty level compared to 15% of men. Thus gender asymmetries and inequalities not only prevail but will continue to get worse as the crisis gives rise to extreme rightist ideologies, xenophobia and racism in which the most vulnerable groups are the first to be impacted.

Institutional infrastructure in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC)

In the RoC we do not have a Ministry of Equality but a National Machinery for Women's Rights which comes under the Ministry of Justice and Public order which is understaffed and shows the level of priority the government gives to gender equality issues. Despite the fact that the RoC has signed all the UN decisions and conventions on gender equality as well as adopted

the EU relevant directives, their implementation leaves much to be desired. This has remained an elite project. Women traditionally were employed in the service sector by 84% compared to men 62% (2002-5). After 2004 with the EU membership there have been administrative and legislative improvements due to the harmonization process with the *aquis communautaire* such as improved provisions for maternity and parental leave, child care facilities, reconciliation of women's family and professional responsibilities (note that no reference to father's responsibility!). A committee on the equality of Sexes in Employment and Vocational Training was created in 2003 based on the article 22 of the law of Equal treatment of men and Women on Employment and Vocational training (Law 2005(1)2002).

In 2001 out of private initiative of women the first Women's Cooperative bank was established and one of the purposes being to improve access of women to financial resources and aid women in the rural areas (Cyprus National Report ,2005). In the Cyprus parliament there was an equality committee which has now being incorporated in the Human Rights Committee which was viewed as a downgrading of the gender equality issues but no women parliamentarians objected to this merger!.

In the educational tertiary sector in the Greek Cypriot community more courses are now being taught on feminism and gender studies than in the last decade. For example the University of Cyprus started in 2012 a Gender Studies program at the graduate level. Non-governmental women's organizations and Institutes have become more active in the last decade in raising women's issues, especially in the areas of gender discrimination and gender-based violence (Hadjipavlou and Mertan, 2012). As mentioned earlier due to the national problem the issues of gender equality are still not considered as important and that is women's

collective mobilizations is more in need today. Both gender issues and class issues become sharper with the crisis but the nationalistic discourse does not allow much room for discussion, and the attitude being 'we have more important issues to deal with than these.' (Hadjipavlou and Demetriou, 2013).

LAWS AND INSTITUTIONS TO AID GENDER EQUALITY IN THE GREEK CONTEXT

To better understand the pre-economic crisis status of Greek women it is necessary to briefly outline the evolution of political acts, laws, institutional acts, and women's efforts. Thus, the evolution and improvement of gender equality had a gradual, beginning in the early post-WWII period when the Greek State started instituting gender equality programs aimed at improving the general condition of women. Toward that end the state gradually passed legislation to aid women to actively participate in the affairs of the community, the state and society in general and in 1952 women were given the right of suffrage to actively participate in political affairs as participants and candidates for public office at both levels, local and national; second, various forms of aid in the form of fringe benefits were gradually provided to women employed by the State, such as maternity leave, early retirement and other benefits not offered to their male counterparts; third, during the early 1960s the educational system was reformed by the government which offered free education at all levels for both sexes, thus giving a precious opportunity to women especially to those girls whose families belonged to the lower economic strata, to educate themselves; Fourth, during the late 1970s, and early 1980s several laws were passed by the state aiming at eliminating the male-female disparity. These gender equality

policies were buttressed by various EU directives which were both symbolic and instrumental and played a crucial role in aiding and consolidating gender equality, in both public and private sectors. (Papageorgiou, 2006; 2007 Petmezidou, 2003; Stratigaki, 2008; Karamesini, 2008).

In the years prior to the economic default, women had become more demonstrative and thus making their presence felt in both public and private sectors. The number of women who worked had been increasing, especially among the young generation. Thus, while in 1995 working women constituted 38.1% of the workforce, in 2006 the number increased to 47.4%, most of who were employed by the state (GSEE National Report, 2009). By mid-2009 over 50% of the Greek working population was employed by the State either directly or through some of its utility agencies and the majority were women (Eleftherotypia, 2009). No doubt the spearheading of women for total equality was also aided by laws passed in the late 1980s and 1990s. Consequently, by the late 1990s and early 2000s women were in essence asking for the speedy implementation of the existing laws (e.g., affirmative action). Moreover, before the apogee of the economic crisis of 2009, the improvement of structures and mechanisms to aid total gender equality had also become the focal point. Hence, by the end of 2008 several more laws were passed; In addition, the EU directives positively influenced the gender equality policies in several areas, especially those areas where they could directly intervene through financing e.g., of education and employment (Stratigaki, 2008: 357). The amount of funding and the rules established by the European Community Fund provided the springboard for designing an actual gender employment policy as well as for measures taken to advance the policy on gender equality (Karamesini, 2008: 280-281). Another benefit of the EU directives

was that they required that the Greek legal system to align its laws with those of the EU.

(Ombudsman's Report, 2009:11, Mavromoustakou, 2007).

The disposition of the EU directives and the subsequent need for Greek law to coordinate with them, had also contributed to the development of agencies, *institutions and mechanisms* whose purpose was to promote and to ensure gender equality. One of these early institutional agencies is the *General Secretary of Gender Equality (GSGE)* which is (or maybe was) a permanent and autonomous state agency. Some of its important duties include the design, promotion, adoption and implementation of measures that promote gender equality. Another such institution is the Research Center for Gender Equality Issues (KETHI), whose duties include the study, promotion and monitor of gender issues. In addition, several committees were created such as the National Committee for Gender Equality (NCGE) was established in 2006 as a permanent forum for social dialogue on gender issues. (Karamesini, 2008: 286; FEK, 2006).

However, under the present economic severity, the state prioritized its needs and started dismantling or closing down some gender agencies and institutions which in its own assessment were least needed. Gender equality in the government's views was less important. Therefore, women were left to fetch for themselves. Gender discrimination started flourishing again and women were the first to lose their jobs and the last to get one. As an official from the GSGE puts it:

"officials from the government told us when we complained about it, that gender rights are a luxury at these times of economic difficulties. Priority of the government now, is the economic growth and after it, all rights will be restored.. '.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM - METHODOLOGY

A cursory look in the present bibliography shows, that the effects of economic crisis on gender relations in European countries have not yet been scientifically studied, the notion being, that there does not seem to be a direct correlation (\pm) between the two. In the case of Greece there is also no such scientific literature in existence between the two. However, it goes without saying that while both sexes are affected by the economic crisis women are affected more, since they hold less social and economic power, have more disproportional share of family burden and are under greater pressures for additional work, both paid and unpaid. Such conditions are so obvious that can be seen by the ordinary observer, because the dividing line between the pre crisis period and – 4 years during the ongoing crisis is so conspicuous that one needs not to have a trained eye to observe such a situation, especially since prior to the coming of the crisis, Greek women had acquired all of their social, economic, and political rights (at least on paper).

Now in order to fully understand the Greek women's present situation one needs time and resources. However, my purpose here is very modest. I wish to learn more than the regular observer can, concerning the effects of the present economic crisis on unemployed and/or semi-employed women; on how they handle it; on what problems it has caused to their personal lives concerning their relations with their family and friends; and on what their alternatives are. To accomplish this *snowball* sample of women was taken, using *open-ended* interviews and conducted in a period of June, July and 2013. We are cognizant of the fact that this period is not best for research in Mediterranean states for the summer is the most

optimistic period of the year. However, be as it may. For our sample we chose unemployed and part-time employed women from three socioeconomic groups (labor, sales/services and professional). In terms of their marital status some are single, some married, others divorced and others lived with their partners. The majority of married women had children.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Taking the above conditions into consideration the purpose of this study is:

1. To present the profile of these women, in terms of education, income, profession (SES) and marital status and to show some of the ways adopted by them in order to cope with the current crisis.
2. to examine the gender implications of government policies during the crisis. What are the norms (e.g., increase of labour force participation, gender division of unpaid work, responsibilities for children and elderly care, etc.
3. To examine **who, how, and how much** women themselves feel, they have been affected by the current economic crisis.
4. To examine the attitudes, tendencies and expectations of the different SES groups, etc.

The purpose of this study requires the use of the *qualitative approach*, for it wished to explore feelings, tendencies, attitudes and all the subjective and non-numerically measured answers.

We in no way attempted to direct the discussion for this is the essence of qualitative research.

Most importantly however, the qualitative approach asks thought questions. It gives the subject time to think and to answer the questions in her own way, language and style which the researcher often aids and encourages the subject to feel at ease, to talk whichever way she feels better and take all the time she needs, while the researcher accommodates the subject through compassion and reflexivity. (Papageorgiou, 2010)

SURVEY RESULTS

In discussing the results of our study we decided to divide it into four categories in order to elucidate each thematic part. Toward that end we named each category – employment, social benefits, family and psychology. We must caution, however, that all categories are overlapping for all discussion was not structured and the respondents mixed all the issues in their discussion. The separation of subjects discussed was done after the interviews were over. We therefore, had to use our judgment on which statement of the respondent went in which category. Therefore we put the different answers in the category we felt was most representative.

1. Employment

At present (August 2013), the rate of unemployment in Greece for both sexes is the highest in Europe (27.8%). According to the official statistics, young people of both sexes between the ages of 15-24 have the highest rate of unemployment (57, 5%) and while the statistics of the older groups is not far behind, while women's unemployment is higher than that of men (30.5% and 24.2% respectively) and projections show that the unemployment rate for both men and women will be increased in the following year (TA NEA, 12 July 12, 2013).

In terms of the length of time of unemployment, 15.9% of women are unemployed and have remained so, far over one year and a half (officially labeled *long term unemployed*) compared with 10.4% for men for the same period of time. We suspect that the percentage of unemployed women is even higher than the official statistics show for two reasons. First, a

large number of women work in the so called 'unofficial'¹ type of work and second, many women belong in the category of "discouraged' workers². Both cases are not categorized as 'paid work' and are not accounted by the official statistics and thus do not qualify for unemployment benefits (Stratigaki, 2004).

In examining the socioeconomic groups of our sample we observe that the older women, those of over 55 years of age, regardless of their SES status are feared the most of being unemployed. If they still hold a job they feel they are the next to go, because of their age, hence they see their future with much pessimism. The 25-35 years old group, is mostly made up of women who hold clerical/ sales jobs, and are the least fearful, have not fully settled as been independent of family or having their own nuclear family type and still rely on their parents in case of a job loss. The labor group, is scattered throughout the entire age scale. Here the young see the future as very bleak with no prospect of finding a job or for job improvement while the older women are very stoical about the whole matter. The 35-50 year age group is mostly professionals, they are the least flexible for the prospect of job change as far as doing something else, contenting that they have spent long time training; but on the other hand they are thinking of migrating elsewhere provided that they do the same type of work. As an unemployed professional put it:

'Without work you cannot go anywhere you cannot do anything for yourself, for your family, your kids, your friends... it makes you feel useless, like a second class citizen... I try to do my best to leave Greece

¹ Unofficial- not registered with the department of labour and thus do not qualify for labour benefits. This situation is exploited by many employers in order to avoid paying employ insurance threatening to fire them if they ask for it.

² Discouraged worker is one who is not able to find a steady job for a long period of time

and go abroad to find a job, provided that there I will be doing the same thing also, and the money may be better.

Another unemployed professional is also job concerned, and its loss has caused her a series of other problems. She said:

'Unemployment is a nightmare... I lost my sleep, my appetite and my drive to go out and see some friends. With the passage of time I lose my dignity. I will leave Greece, so I can go out and find a job... I cannot stay here in this depressive environment without doing something to help myself...'

Unemployed professionals and, generally, educated women, except of their economic problems they also have social problems as well. As an unemployed professional argued:

'before losing my job I was feeling good and optimistic. But after losing it along with the good salary that went with it, I felt my legs were cut down. Along with my job and salary, went my identity which emanated from my job. My job also offered me good social recognition. Therefore my position was the source for everything in my life.'

A part of our sample consists of 'long term' unemployed women (1½ years unemployed). This category included previously middle-class, middle age women who are falling into the "new poor"³ category since they do not have made any money for long time and the long term unemployment period has depleted their savings. This is the most sad - unemployed category: older age, no money and no job in sight. But regardless of their frustration, the majority of these women do not wish to change professions or re-educate themselves because they believe that in their own profession they still have a lot to give. Especially, the oldest of the group not only refuse to re-educate themselves but they feel angry because at this age they are caught in a trap of been too old to work and too young to retire. They argued that over the many years of work they have acquired experience and ability they could offer for the benefit of society. As an older unemployed professional respondent put it:

I do not want to sound selfish but I believe that I see myself as an able person, full of skills, experience, willing and able to offer work and to contribute for society. I can do nice things for society...but unfortunately I cannot find a job... and put to work what I have learned), I have not work for two years and this I drives me crazy'

³ Indeed in Greece, a percentage (15.9%) of the unemployed women belong to the 'long term' unemployed (over 18 months) compared with the 10.4% rate of men.

There are some women however, (especially the self employed in their forties with average education) who do not lose their hope, despite the crisis. They believe that if they re-train themselves or get trained for a new business or new job they might find a better business or better job and be happier. They feel that they should think only positive of their situation and most important on their preferences. As a new optimist self employed woman whose business is slow put it this way:

For many years I had a job that I did not like so much but I have felt secured and did not think to do something else. When I left my old job I felt that I would die.. But after a year and a half worrying and frustration, I thought I should make the change. I did something new that I wanted to do it all by my life. With my mother's financial help, I re-educated myself in something that I loved doing and despite the present economic difficulties I am happy that I made this turn...

Another unemployed optimistic and professional woman felt this way:

When I lost my job, I had gone crazy.. I thought I should fix my CV, to find a new job .. to redefine myself, my position within the social environment which I regard very important.

The economic crisis has created economic difficulties for pensioners also⁴. Often their unemployed girls either ask for hand-outs or return home and in many cases if they are married and both unemployed especially with one child or more, the entire family returns to parents' home. This downward mobility puts women under a tremendous psychological burden. For not too long ago, they had thought they had outgrown the family protectionism and had created a new and better life for themselves and suddenly they fell back on family support. As an unemployed professional respondent explained it:

'My old parents support me through with their pension. We all live on their pensions... I do not want to think what is going to happen if my mother passes away... I'll be in the streets begging... the state has to do something for us'

We must note that, the bulk of pensioners in Greece belong to the middle-low and low classes, and therefore, the aid they offer to their unemployed girls is very small. In addition, in many cases the parents don't own their own apartment and pay rent, thereby worsening the problem.

⁴ In 2007, 21% of women and 18% of men were classified as poor. This is particularly true amongst the elderly. At present the number of poor has increased (over 60% of women are under the poverty line).

The slippery slope of the 'new poor' category is hurting people from all classes. Previously, high salaried middle class women have seen their salary been reduced and have dropped drastically down to the status of the new poor. One of the reasons is that businesses have dropped and owners cannot afford to pay the high dues of taxes and insurance to the government and often close down their businesses, and thus, they too might become part of the new poor. Another reason is that the over burgeoned public sector depletes much of the available resources and hence there is no money left in the state's coffers. The bottom line is that, the high social security dues along with the sales taxes (23%) have forced many business women to drop down to the new poor status.

A number of unemployed labour class women have resorted to volunteerism by working for the church or other philanthropic institutions, because they share the condition of those who are down and out, and feel greater solidarity with them, because, themselves are almost there. And they do all that work for three meals a day only.

Part-time or seasonal employment is another thorny issue in both labour and sales sectors. Finding a part time job is difficult not only to get a job but one gets no union support either. These women are truly free agents and have to put up with all the demands of their employer, ethical and otherwise. As a part time- employed woman mentioned:

'Here you are on your own, even god refuses to look after you; you are on the go, even while you work you are looking for another job; you never know when they will let you go...'

Of the sales/clerical class group pessimism is not as severe, as that of the professionals. This group consists mainly of younger girls between 25-35 years old and they seem to be more cognizant of the precariousness of their situation. As a 30 year old sales girl put it:

'Both my husband and I are unemployed. We have one child and our economic situation is bad. We get some help from our parents and have reduced our budget to the minimal. But we stay 'cool' and we hope, simply because sales work does not demand much previous experience. We are hopeful that we will make it'

A 25 years old unemployed secretary stated:

In the past four years I've done secretarial work and I've changed several jobs. Sometimes I get fired other times I quit. So the economic crisis has not really put a heavy burden on me. I live with my boyfriend who is a computer man, and although he does not make much money we survive. I've always tried not to allow my employment status interfere with my life so long as I survive'

This class of employed women has the fewest problems of all sorts. It is neither uneducated nor college graduated and they seem to have settled and accept more and more easily the fate of life. The reasons being that: they are young – and youth by definition is more optimistic and sociable. They get and lose their job more often than any other social group, and that perhaps has hardened them and have learned not to get things too seriously.

The labour group lays at the bottom of the SES pyramid. In terms of age it occupies the entire age range of our sample -25-60 years old. In terms of occupation, it seldom reaches upward mobility; in terms of education some of our respondents went as high as junior high school. Has the economic crisis affected their economic condition? Most respondents said that economically they have always been at the bottom of the economic pyramid and therefore they know what it is to be poor. Yet, even here the economic crisis has affected them. However, a pleasantly surprising fact must be mentioned, namely, that this group tended to be more mature, modest, understanding of the current situation and more philosophical with the broader meaning of the word. A 50 years unemployed factory work who lost her job 2 years ago said:

'I have lost my job many times and I know what it is like to be there. I never gave up and never will. I always find things to do around the house and the neighborhood sometimes with pay but mostly free. My husband, a laborer, is also unemployed, is always arguing politics and blames politicians for the present mess but I stay out of all this misery,

although I believe that the politicians messed up the whole country and they brought us in this condition'

A 35 year unemployed laborer is more pessimistic and feels that there is no hope for her to escape this conditions; she claimed that:

I come from a poor background. My parents always argue and blame society for everything. We never had a stable life, work and employment is our everyday preoccupation. Now both of my parents have small pensions and can survive. But I don't see any future for myself...

2. Social Benefits

The consequences of the economic crisis are felt by all women. In addition, they have been traumatized by issues such as pregnancy, unmarried motherhood, battering women, sex abuse, and many other issues, which have been most traumatic to unemployed women especially since the state put a halt on all of their social benefits. To make up for this discrepancy, Greek families stepped in and took over this responsibility which in most cases is hardly bearable. This condition is reminiscent of the days before the institution of the welfare system, when families had no outside help and had to fetch for themselves. Some writers have coined this welfare reversal as the return to the *'familistic'* welfare system (Papadopoulos, Roubakis, 2012).

Work per se is not the only problem of unemployed women; the conditions at work are often an additional problem; sex overtures and passes by the superiors is often the reason a woman loses her job, especially during this economic crisis where a job is mostly needed. As a part time employee put it:

'After my maternity leave and coming back to work my boss told me that 'I am sorry you cannot work full time but only a few days a week because business is bad. I knew that he was lying but I cannot take him to the court because I will lose everything. At least I work for a few hours a day ... I have tried many times to look for another job but I cannot find a full time job ... so I stay here. But now my boss makes many passes at me knowing that I need my job. I don't know how long it will last before I quit...

There are cases when the employers use the economic crisis as a tool of repression on their female employees by making hash- hash epithets or using out right sex overtures. Their point is very well illustrated by an unemployed clerical respondent:

"I do certain things that I would never do under 'regular' circumstances. I compromise, I work in a photographic shop and I have to go to back room. Over there my boss harasses me by using foul language systematically and sometimes he goes over the limits... I feel want to kill him or to report him to the police.. But if I do it I'll lose my job. And I do not have any other source of income... My parents cannot help me...

The loss of social benefits is a loss to all women but it is the most hurtful to working single mothers, because the state has drastically reduce the free day care centers to save money. Such cuts quite hurt those women who come from the low social strata. Efforts made by the Confederation of Labor to block this state move have been unsuccessful. An unemployed cleric put it this way:

*I want to look for a job, but where I my going to leave my little child? I did apply for a place to leave it in a Free State supported daycare center but they claimed they did not have any opening. My parents are living far from here... What am I going to do? I think I am going out of my mind
....*

3. Family

Like the past where women were fighting hard to rid of their double burden (homework and pay work), the present economic crisis has brought them back to the doldrums. Their main concern now is their family and especially their children. All the things they had hoped to provide for their children before the economic crisis have gone. They feel that their plans for the future have become a far fetch dream. As an unemployed professional respondent stated:

'I really feel mad and disappointed, because I cannot do what I wanted to do for my family and my children.. I feel that am not being fair to my children... because I wanted them to have the opportunity to take extra classes in English, to buy things for them, to take them to many places... It is not the same situation with their father... Although he does things for them but it is different to do things with their mother and their mother to do things for them...

Blue color unemployed women feel even worse than those women who can afford at least the basic things for their family. While they cannot offer their children the basic material, they feel frustrated, unhappy, worried and especially mad, because they are betrayed by their politicians and political parties who were helpful in the past but now either they cannot help or they don't want to. A blue color unemployed respondent stated:

I feel that I am not fair to my children... I am worried continuously and I have a fight on an everyday basis with all of my family, my children, my parents and my husband. Sometimes I explode over my children and that explosion makes me feel guilty and crazy afterwards.'

In regard to the relations concerning the household chores we were told that some husbands had shared the responsibilities of the housework chores before the economic crisis and continue to do so during the crisis. In other cases husbands neither shared the house responsibilities before the crisis nor do during the crisis. This suggests that crises of short duration such as those of the present one cannot change the deeply seated traditional values and attitudes. As two middle class respondents put it:

'I have taken all home responsibilities on my own, and now that my husband is not working, I still do everything at home by myself. He seats at the couch all the time but I do not blame him. That is the way he grew up and that's the way we started from the beginning of our marriage. I did not react then and now is too late to react...'

Another respondent claimed that:

'my husband does a few things around the house but not always. However, it is not the same with me regardless of how I feel I take my homework responsibility seriously and always! ...'

An extreme case is when husbands never do house chores whether they work or not. They leave that for their wives whether they have a job or not. An unemployed middle class respondent put this issue very succinctly;

My husband lost his job 2 years ago... He suffers from depression... and he is sitting in the couch the whole day speechless, watching TV all day long without saying a word... he drives me crazy... I cannot stand to see him sit there, while I do all this housework. He learned not to do anything at home when we both worked; this is my fault... I did not care then we

could effort to pay the housecleaning lady. Now that we cannot effort to pay her I do all the work alone... he does nothing, he does not care either... he passes on to me his depressive attitude, he does not even look for a job by himself; he expects me to look for him.. we have fights often...

The economic crisis has not always been the cause for a strained relationship between married couples. Often it has served a reverse purpose. Hence, as far as the relationship between some couples are concerned we were given various answers, Whereby in some cases the economic crisis had strengthened the relationship between the spouses and the couple. An unemployed woman in her late 30s, with college background, and no children, in discussing the effects of the economic crisis said:

'the economic crisis brought us closer. Of course he stays at home many hours, sometimes we argue for little unimportant things, but we talk our problems out and find something to do together; I would say that this crisis brought us closer to each other...'

For other respondents the economic crisis caused problems to the couples especially when the husband or boyfriend is unemployed. And while women fill their time by doing homework their spouses do absolutely nothing, sticking to their traditional beliefs claiming that homework is exclusively a woman's job, even though they do not always verbalize it, but their behavior shows it. An unemployed secretary put the point this way:

At the beginning of the crisis and the loss of my husband's job it did not seem to cause any problems between us..; we both hoped that at least one of us we would find a job. However, while the time was passing by and we could not find a job the problems started to come out and gradually they increased and got worse, to the point where we are thinking of spiting up...

4. Psychological

The economic crisis has caused women psychological problems also. They have often developed feelings of betrayal by been abandoned by almost everyone, beginning with the

politicians and political parties, by employers, often by their spouses, by their boyfriends and many more. Regardless of one's age, education, marital and family status, she suffers with depression and anxiety. The highest degree of suffering falls on women who have young children. This group of women, especially, the young unmarried mothers is most frustrated. A young middle class unmarried and unemployed mother discusses the current economic crisis by saying:

"... it bothers me psychologically, it destroys my human feelings, my personality, is crashed. I don't know what is right or wrong. The state has ethically, socially and psychologically imposed on us a certain way of life, that is not ours, it does not fit us, it brings us back to the middle ages, and deprives us from our human rights; the state has change us in a violent, fast way, it has disregarded... that makes me so mad and bothers me so much psychologically.. the state through the media gives us many reasons for our present condition but I don't pay attention to all that. All I knew is that I am down and out in every way'.

The older respondents do not concentrate so much as blaming others. They are more concerned about themselves and their children. An older middle class unemployed respondent said:

"I do worry about my children because they have all the equipment to succeed, they are educated, they are smart and yet they cannot find a job here, they cannot make a family. I don't care for me, I already lived my life. I am concerned more about my children who have a whole future ahead of them... what is going to happen to them... What are they going to do... how are they going to live... All this mess makes me anxious and depressed and I have lost my sleep... I cannot think ... I forget things too; my husband is also anxious and worried but he does not show his feeling as much as I do'.

The continuous complaints expressed in our interviews, was that in addition to many problems the economic crisis caused, it also affected their ability to go out and see friends, relations or merely to do window shopping, bothered them and blame the crisis for that. This condition creates a problem especially for the younger women. Their point was stated very clearly by an unemployed clerical respondent:

There is no money for me to go out and I always try to find some excuses for staying at home, this is bad for me because I do not have a boyfriend and I wonder how am I going to find one, if I cannot go out to meet people?

Other respondents site the overload of work as the main reason of not going out or not dating. Many women who change their profession do not have time to go out because they work a lot at home. An art teacher who works for a few hours put it this way:

The economic crisis forced me to change my profession and do something for the first time at this age!.. I use to be teaching art for high school children and now I teach it to pre-school kids. I take them to the museums and talk to them art. I spend so much time to prepare myself that I do not have the time to go out. Even if I do go out my mind is always preoccupied with my preparation for next day class...

The Greek Cypriot Experience:

In June 2013 the Pancyprrian Women's Organization POGO (a leftist organization affiliated to the Communist party AKEL) , its branches of Nicosia and Kyrenia districts conducted a qualitative survey among young females aimed to look at "The impact of the Economic Crisis on the Quality of Life of Young Women." It is generally observed that the economic crisis abolished many of the successes of women's benefits and that the neoliberal policies of austerity measures hit mostly the working people. Specifically the women statistically are hit by poverty much more than men. The government has abolished the allowance for mothers, the marriage allowance and the curtailment of childbirth and child allowance. Such measures for sure disempower the women's efforts for equality. The POGO research has found that the issues relating to employment have affected the total income of employed young women in the majority of 74.5%; 15% stated they are unemployed and 13.4% lost their job this year whereas 43% said that a member of their family lost their job. More than 65% have had downsize of their salaries whereas 35.1% have been forced to accept flexible hours of work. 25.4% stated that the working hours have increased without any increase in payments. In a relevant question more than half of the respondent stated that their household condition is much worse today than a year ago and more than 63% stated that they are unhappy with the present economic situation in their country. With regard to the level of satisfaction in various aspects of their life though 66.5% expressed satisfaction with the place they live in, 41.3% have stopped looking to buy their own house whereas 52.1% stated they have delayed getting married due to the economic crisis and those who are married delay in wanting to have children. A positive aspect that came from this survey was the fact that many said they value more what they have now and have lowered their expectations. This might also backfire because it might create more passive attitudes toward struggling to gain what they are entitled to.

With regard to gender stereotypes there is a tendency to defy the traditional context which gives the man the leading role in employment . Despite this about 15% seem to resist changes in the gender roles and they prefer the man to be the 'provider' and the women dependent on him. A big majority though 73.4% of young women believe that men should participate in household work. About 46.5% of the respondents believe that in times of economic crisis women must take care of the children and the elderly whereas 21% disagrees. With regard to control over household finances 65.5% disagrees that only the men should have this responsibility and 65.6% also disagrees with the statement that the wife should stop work because of her family duties.

What is apparent from this survey is that gender equality and the many benefits women had gained are being affected and still there exists confusion as to what extent young women challenge the patriarchal structures and question the fact that issues of gender equality become secondary in times of economic crisis. Some of these findings are similar to the qualitative research we carried out among Greek Cypriot women ages 30-60 in August 2013 in Nicosia, Cyprus.

The three main areas of semi-structured questions we looked at include: (1) the impact of the crisis financially (loss of job, reduction of salary, part time, etc),; re-evaluation of needs? Who is responsible for this crisis? curtailment of social benefits? (2) What impact the crisis has had on their social relations (family, friends , community); have the gender roles changed because of the crisis? And (3) the psychological impact- issues of dignity, self-confidence,,, etc. an opportunity for self development? different worldview??

Employment

As mentioned earlier the unemployment rate reached 17.3% which for the RoC is very high

and accounts for 78,000 unemployed. According to official statistics the persons in the age range of 15-25 and 26-35 are among the highest (**find exact numbers...**).

“I was working for twelve years in the Laiki Bank and lost my job in April 2013. I feel so useless and cannot go anywhere without thinking first of its financial cost and what it would mean regarding our monthly budget. I will look around and find the cheapest supermarket to do my shopping. It is not like before when I did not have to think like this... Thank God my children are grown up but they are not sure if they will have a job next month” (GC woman aged 52).

The economic crisis and the loss of jobs made many women I spoke to, re-evaluate their spending habits as well as develop another consumer’s conscience as well as feel the uncertainty. Other women said that they experienced a shock when their savings were haircut and expressed a lot of anger at the government which accepted such a provision, “Troika is doing its job, but why did our government accept such an unfair demand? I blame the government and political parties for this. I worked so hard to save that money and it is mine..” said one of the women.

Two of the women with university degrees and working in a private business were told they are needed only part-time because the business is not doing well. They felt exploited before the crisis and now it got worse but they have no alternative *“but to leave the country and go where, so we have to endure?”*

One of my interviewees is self-employed, she has her own hairdresser shop. Her business has dropped the last few months and had to lower the prices. Her husband lost his job in a company. She is in her late 40s and has two children. Her son was studying in Madrid but now she brought him back and her daughter finishes high school this coming year. She is worried about their future and is thinking of emigrating to Dubai:

“If I have a chance I will go abroad. I heard that in Dubai they need doctors, lawyers and people with university degrees. If I found a job as a hairdresser in a hotel or a mall to open my own shop I would go tomorrow and work hard to help my two children...everybody who comes to my hairdresser these days is sad and before the crisis there was joy and laughter at the hairdresser but now women look sad and as if they have resigned from life... they are very angry at the corrupt politicians” (48 years old).

Traditionally, in every crisis-political, social and economic- the Cypriots pay a lot of attention to Education because they feel it is an investment no one can take away and can be an asset for survival in bad times. It is interesting that no mention is made about the father’s responsibility to share in the children’s education and needs. The answer is searched abroad. This mother is also sensitive to how the mood and environment in her place of work has changed and it is as if it provides a space for her customers to release their anger and share their sadness. This anger though is not transformed into agency to want to change things and start a conversation around their rights and new ways of improving their condition. In this case we also see a reversal of gender roles whereby the mother is the breadwinner and head of household.

Another woman told me that she had been married since 1985 and she and her husband had good jobs. Now they are both unemployed and very upset. His business went bankrupt. The wife was given a bonus of 35,000 Euros but half of it was withheld for the loan she had made long ago. *“The rest I will take and use it to go to America, this is where we studied and will take our two children to be educated there. Here we do not see a future.”* She said and then added, *“if we stay longer we shall get on each other’s nerves and start shouting at each other without any reason.”*

The other day when I went to the bank the young employees there were all new faces. When I asked what happened to the ones I have known for years they told me they could not stay on fighting for what they felt belonged to them for so many years, i.e. their job and so they

submitted their resignation before they would be dismissed. This is another way some women choose to save face and their dignity.

Relationships in the family

The economic crisis creates a lot of stress and anxiety not only on the unemployed person but to her/his relationships within the family and friends. Many women told me they have not had a sexual relationship with their husbands for many weeks. They do not have such a desire. *“My husband is frustrated and behaves angrily at me and wants to control my life. I cannot go anywhere without him checking on me. He thinks I will have an extramarital affair because I still have a part-time job. He used to direct a company of 15 persons, now nothing”*

Apart from lack of communication and mistrust in the family there is jealousy and men feel as vulnerable as women who lose their jobs, perhaps even more because their masculinity and socially expected roles have been violated and feel powerless.

A young newly-married woman (28 years) told me she does not have children and wants to delay it as much as possible and wants to make sure her marriage works well though they both have jobs they are not certain they will in a month's time let alone in a year.

Another woman told me she had her two children at a private school until the summer but now they cannot afford to send them there so they are applying to go to the public schools. *“We have to change our way of life and see how we can make ends meet with one salary. Thank God we own the house we live in.”*

Of course the economic crisis and unemployment of one or both spouses affects the future of the children and the re-arrangement of their comfortable life, something that creates tensions and questions as to 'why now'? Such situations reveal the class issues and downward mobility which creates fears and anger. Still the women feel the traditional role to protect the family and take on the burden of making a future for their children

Psychological impact

The excess in consumerism and senseless spending has created a certain class of people who lost touch with reality and had no values of moderation and social conscience. My hairdresser told me the following when discussing downward social mobility:

“ I had women coming here holding a 3,000 euro worth a handbag. And they were throwing it on the floor. This one customer of mine said to me, ‘last night we went to a fish tavern with my family and we paid 300 euros, isn’t it a good price?’” she kept asking me. The other day she came crying and looked very poorly and I asked what happened and she said her husband’s business closed and they owed a lot of money to the banks. I thought to myself ‘maybe they needed a shock to recover from this arrogance and snobbism..’”

Cases like the above abound in a society where the last two decades there was a high economic prosperity and the GNP was comparable to Israel’s and Switzerland’s. Surely materialistic values and a newly-rich class engaged in consumerism gave themselves confidence and certainty. Now they discover how vulnerable they have become and many of them going into depression. Many people from this social category take anti-depressant pills. Like the Cyprus state many people spent much more than they could afford and therefore they kept borrowing from the banks money that was going to consumerism and not to any development projects. In three years the private borrowings (2005-2007) was double (Georgiades, 2013).

Two of the younger women who are unemployed felt losing their self-confidence and independence when they lost their jobs. They told me they want to learn to live with uncertainty and have limited their wants and needs. They take public transportation now and enjoy other things in their community and neighborhood that they never noticed before since they were always in a rush. “We shall try to look for a job, any job and anywhere but we shall try not to leave Cyprus as two of our friends have already done.”

It is interesting to note than none of these women I interviewed mentioned the ‘national

problem' and the issue of natural gas which the politicians and foreign interested parties do in conjunction to the economic crisis. What does this tell us about gender and politics and national or global issues?

As we mentioned at the beginning this paper is work in progress but let us sum up some of the general thoughts as these emerge from the two studies:

SUMMARY

The Greek case:

In short the results of our survey indicate the following:

A. The economic crisis has created many problems to women of all SES classes, the most being expressed by the professional followed by the workers and least by that services/sales group.

1. The labor class suffered the most from problems already caused by lack of money but also from problems caused due to the present economic difficulties.
2. The labor class is also the most stoical in facing the crisis and in substituting unemployment with volunteer work.
3. The sales and service class (it seems that) did not take the economic crisis very seriously, perhaps because this group's position is always precarious in so far as employment is concerned. Where one seldom sees permanent and secured employment for long time.
4. The professional class took the crisis most seriously, because it regarded professional work stable, lucrative and prestigious. They seldom wish to change professions, instead they prefer to emigrate so long as they do the same type of work.

B. In regard to problems not directly and fully related to the economic crisis we observe the following:

1. the labor class has succumbed to the double burden – (unpaid work/home chores and paid work); in addition, they withstand the various other personal and family problems with much stoicism – they are the champions of maturity

2. the sales/service class did not take very seriously problems related or caused by the economic crisis; in the case concerning their relationship with their spouses things were business as usual- no great changes were made
3. the professional class' position aside of their economic concerns and difficulties the related issues were not much affected; concerning their relations with their husband/boyfriends, may became more closer and understanding, homework status remained as it was before – mostly democratic

C. Unemployment and family dependency

1. the labour class relied the most on family help, family economic aid, house aid
2. the sales/secretariat class also relied on family for shelter/home and money
3. the professional class also relied on family economic and shelter aid, but relied also on care taking of the children mothers, because parents either worked or were looking for a job.

Finally, this brief summary suggests that the most important institution in Greece is the family, especially in periods of crisis such as the present one, gets fully activated. The Church in the past has not been very helpful. But during the present economic crisis it has been helpful - it turns out tens of thousands of meals each day for poor, while it is aided by thousands of volunteers, most of them being women, and a good number of them are unemployed. State institutions are useless. Only some private volunteer organizations try to help. In addition certain cities such as Athens in charge of its Mayor are doing an outstanding job. Be as it may, however, the economic crisis did very much harm to Greek women: it brought them down to their knees; keeps them out the floor, but they are not out – at least not yet!

The Greek Cypriot situation

As in the Greek case, in the Cyprus case too, the family is still one of the strong institutions and women/mothers feel it their responsibility to find ways to continue to support their children.

There is critique of the handing of the governments-former and present- in handling the

economic crisis. The lack of money or less money has pushed many women to rethink and rearrange their spending habits. Feelings of uncertainty and anxiety have had a negative impact on the family relationships especially between the spouses. There is a willingness to emigrate for a better life which reminds one of the post 1974 period when the unemployment reached an unprecedented rate of 45%. We note a downward mobility and a new class stratification emerging.

There began private initiatives organizing what they are called 'public markets' (laika pantopolia) to help in kind the needy families. Artists and singers organize concerts to gather foodstuffs and money for the needy. The crisis has raised the feelings of collective solidarity. The institution of the Church has come in to help but what we hear today is that the state will cut the state budget by 700 million euro in 2014 which includes welfare and other programs assisting low-income families.

What we observe in general is that there is lack of a holistic approach to dealing with the crisis and the states do not look at gender equality as an economic need as well. and do not to recognize that equality in the labour market increases economic development. In other words, investment in gender equality is meager in relation to the capital needed to recapitalize the banks. The states in times of crisis need to also recognize the benefits derived from the role the sexes can play in social change and thus should both participate in the redefinition of the role of politics and economic development. There is a need for the participation and presence of feminist women in the center of decision making so as to understand that economic decisions and the ways used to deal with the crisis as they are being carried out till now are gendered and

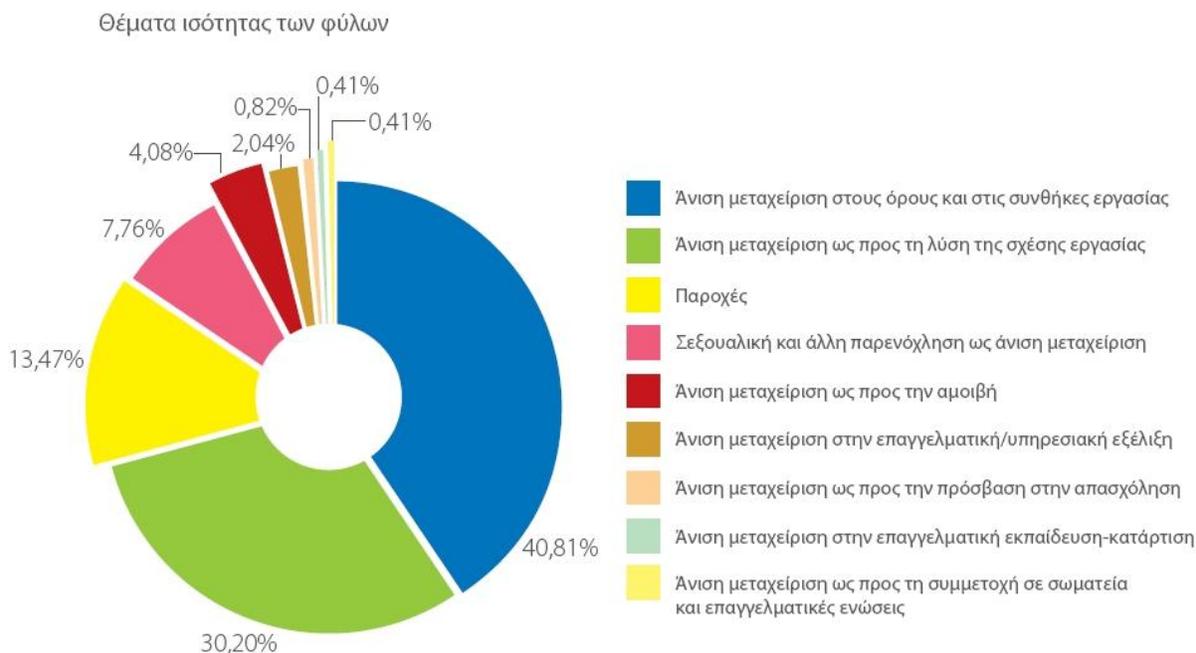
discriminatory. Participatory democracy calls upon all the social groups that are affected to participate in the process with transparency. For instance, a gender approach will call upon a rearrangement of the tax system so that the cuts and curtailment of benefits and allowances would not create a discriminatory gender regime. In other words we need a new mentality in a culture of dialogue and empowerment of the less privileged social groups of our societies.

Notes

The latest statistics by Ombudsman (2012 report) concerning gender equality the following results show an obvious discrimination against women:

1. 40.8% – unequal treatment of women by the rules and conditions of work
2. 30.20% - unequal treatment of women concerning the relations of work
3. 7,76 - unequal sexual treatment of women
4. 4,08% - unequal pay treatment against women
5. 13.4% unequal treatment against women concerning job training

Table 1. status of Gender equality in Greece



Source: Ombudsman Report, 2012

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