“THEY TEACH US TO HATE EACH OTHER”
A Study on Social Impediments for Peace-Building
Interaction Between Young Cypriot Women

Linnéa Frändå
ABSTRACT

The yet unresolved interethnic conflict on the island of Cyprus known as the ‘Cyprus Problem’ is one of the longest persisting conflicts in the world stretching over five decades. The conflict is between the Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots and has consequently divided the Island into a Greek-Cypriot administrated southern part, and a Turkish-Cypriot administrated northern part. Despite the opening of the borders in 2003, which granted permission to cross over to each side, studies show that the peace-building interaction between the younger generations remains limited. Through in-depth interviews with ten young Cypriot women, the thesis analyses social factors impeding the interaction across the divide and provide an understanding of the women’s perception of peace in Cyprus. The politicisation of the construction of belonging continues to disconnect the women from a shared Cypriot identity and hence impedes interaction across the divide. Further, the context of the negotiations has created a stalemate on peace-building interaction for many of the women and had a negative impact on their views on politics in general. The study reaffirms that women’s political involvement is essential to bring about peace and reconciliation in Cyprus.

Keywords: Cyprus, conflict, identity, politics of belonging, women, peace
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INTRODUCTION

The ‘Cyprus Problem’, one of many names for the yet unresolved interethnic conflict. Consequently, dividing the island for five decades into a southern and northern part, administrated by Greek-Cypriots in the south and Turkish-Cypriots in the north. Not until 2003, with the opening of the boarders could the islanders cross to each respective side of the UN-controlled Buffer Zone and revisit their houses in villages now inhabited by strangers for over three decades. Today, fourteen years have passed, and a generation of young Cypriots have lived most of their lives with the opportunity to cross and interact with people around the whole island. However, a recent survey on the younger generations’ attitudes to the ‘Cyprus Problem’ presented an alarmingly low level of interaction among young adults across the divide (Hatay et al. 2015). The study looked into societal reasons underlying or influencing political opinions among university students in Cyprus, identifying three potential factors; transgenerational memory, social pressure and structural/ institutional pressure. Despite the free movement for Cypriots, social factors are impeding the interaction between the communities. The survey result on the students’ frequency of crossing differentiated remarkably. Among the Turkish-Cypriots students surveyed more than half said they visit the south at least a few times per month, only 12.8% stated that they had never crossed. In contrast, almost half of the Greek-Cypriot students responded that they had never crossed, whereas 43% said they rarely cross (ibid). The reasons for crossing are thus for the Turkish-Cypriots associated with leisure and shopping, to meet friends from the other side remains low in both communities alike. Previous research has also shown that Greek-Cypriot youth to a greater extent than Turkish-Cypriot youth have inherited intergenerational memories and traumas of the conflict (see Hadjiyanni 2002, Bryant 2012). The conclusion of the 2015 study emphasised the need for intergroup contact between youth on both sides as a confidence and trust building measure. With the intractable nature of the conflict and the complex reasons for its perpetuation, a multilevel understanding of the impediments for interaction across the divide is deemed necessary.

The results of a quantitative study on women in Cyprus conducted between the years 2002-2008 showed that although the majority believed women should play major parts in social change the political participation and mobilisation for women's rights remains distinctively low (Hadjipavlou 2010). The active involvement of women in governments is still at unacceptable levels today, an effect caused by patriarchal structures which historically have impeded and discouraged women's political participation for change (ibid). Breaking the social norms and
advocating for change, women’s initiatives of bi-communal interactions across the divide has played a significant part in the promotion of peace in Cyprus. Showing the incentive of women’s organisations to reunite and form long-lasting bonds between the communities of the island. Despite this, there is a lack of women around the negotiating tables throughout the several attempts to find a solution to the conflict. The bi-communal women’s initiatives have not rooted themselves into the younger generation which has no recollection of living side by side as Cypriots of the island. The young women have instead been socialised into an ethnically divided society fostered by nationalism and patriarchal institutions.

This thesis builds on the two quantitative studies mentioned above, conducted in 2015 and between 2002-2008. The cited results of the studies as laid out above poses a series of inquiries for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of young women's conditions and prospects in Cyprus. Through in-depth interviews with ten young Cypriot women across the island, this thesis aims to identify and analyse factors that affect the peace-building interaction of young women and provide a better understanding of their perception of peace in Cyprus. Peace-building interaction is defined as communication that fosters relationships and breaks down prejudices and stereotypes. For example by crossing to the other side. Through a perspective of peace and reconciliation, the study will provide a deeper comprehension of the reasoning by young women on the Cypriot identity and interaction across the divide, on their perception of women’s role in the peace process and their vision of peace in Cyprus. How do the young women conceptualise peace in Cyprus? What factors influence their peace-building interaction across the divide? Does the lack of women’s political involvement affect the interest of young women in the negotiation process and in solving the ‘Cyprus Problem’? Incorporating a gender perspective on the ‘Cyprus Problem’, of the essence for understanding the complex and dynamic experiences of different social groups, this thesis additionally lays the groundwork for further research on the younger generations in Cyprus.

The first section of the thesis contains a discussion of the theoretical framework used in analysing the empirical data. Following is a description of the thesis methodology. The third part provides a background to the conflict emphasising elements of importance for a deeper understanding of the informants’ perspective of the division of the island. The fourth section contains the analysis of the empirical data and is divided into three parts followed by concluding remarks.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section will provide a discussion of the underlying factors that affect the level of interaction across the divide through theories on ethnic conflict and gender. The construction of belonging, and the production of knowledge and historical narratives. The chapter ends with a discussion of the value of intergroup contact to foster peace and reconciliation.

Ethnic conflict through a gendered lens

Resolution theory defines long-term conflicts as intractable. Such conflicts tend to attract several parties and increase the complicatedness of the conflict over time and threaten basic human needs and values (Coleman 2006). Intractability calls for a multidimensional analysis of the effect of the different parties involved. Using feminist theory on intersectionality, social structures and gender dynamics, this section will discuss the particular social divisions between men and women, as strengthened in a conflict society. That in order to assists the understanding of the complex and dynamic experiences of different social groups.

Nationalism and patriarchal structures are often strengthened within ethnic conflicts. The gender division between men and women are deepened by the focus on maintaining the “national project”. Hence highlighting women's role in reproducing the nation through childbirth. The emphasis on women's bodily functions is not only a characteristic of societies with an ethnic identity problem. Within radical feminist theory, women's oppression is originating in the reproduction and biological motherhood, and in gender and sexuality (Hekman 2014). The biological family is based on an unequal power relationship where the woman, because of her biological functions, becomes dependent on the man (Firestone 1997). Chodorow (1997) explains this relationship by arguing that the woman’s role as mother reproduces the sexual and financial division of labour that structures society, which starts within the family. Women are doubtlessly placed in the private sphere and defined through their gender expectations as mothers, that is the result of object-relational experiences, which become internalised (Hekman 2014). The emphasis on the public/private divide by radical feminist theory forms an understanding of the difficulty for women to enter the public sphere. It is rather self-explanatory that the task of childrearing is traditionally not defined within the male role. A gender perspective highlights the constructivism of femininity and masculinity. Gender is a social system, associated with a culture and always connected to power. It is performative and hence feels like “second nature”, meaning things done regularly produces feelings of
“naturalness”. Which can, in turn, lead to the assumption that it is biologically associated. Gender is however done differently depending on the social and historical context. By being gendered one becomes a social subject. Separate but connected, sexuality, in turn, has the power to establish the meaning of gender and is embedded in social relations of power in society (MacKinnon 1989). Male sexuality dominates and defines the social construct of both gender and sexuality, as the defining subject. Defining the female subject is one of the initial projects within feminist theory. Both masculinity and femininity have throughout history been defined through the male subject. Although the acknowledgement of the lack of female subjectivity is important in feminist theory and gender analysis, there is further need for the incorporation of power dynamics in the construction of subjects.

Judith Butler argues that a subject is constituted conjointly by language, power and materiality (Hekman 2014). Subjects are made through the subjection to power. Butler is less concerned with the identity of the subject and more so with “the question of how power forms the field in which subjects become possible” (Hekman 2014:178). What Butler means is that while “the subject is constituted is not to claim that it is determined; on the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency” (1995:46). In other words, if we look at it from a perspective of social norms, which shape our daily lives and interactions, it is precisely the awareness of such norms that enables us to break free and resist against them. According to Butler, subjects are created through what they are not; they are “formed through exclusionary operations” (1995:48). Butler highlights the power and discourse that produce the subject in the first place. In doing so, the subject needs to be deconstructed. Understanding the different levels of female subordination requires an intersectional approach, with an emphasis also on women as a heterogeneous group. This becomes of high importance within the understanding of belonging and how we articulate the feeling of home and the attachment we feel to a particular place.

**Construction of belonging**

To understand the notion of belonging we need to know how it is constructed. Using the theory of belonging and politics of belonging as devised by Yuval-Davies, this section will lay the groundwork for an analytical understanding of belonging.

Yuval-Davies (2006) identifies three analytical levels on how belonging is constructed.
The first level concerns social locations; the second relates to individuals' identifications and emotional attachments to various collectivitiesthe third relates to ethical and political value systems with which people judge their own and others' belonging/s. These different levels are interrelated, but cannot be reduced to each other, as so many political projects of belonging tend to assume (ibid pp. 199).

With an understanding of intersectional analysis, social location is constructed through multiple levels of difference. An intersectional analysis is a concept that theorises the relationship between different social categories such as gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. (Valentine 2007:10). By analysing the intersectional identity of women, Crenshaw (1991) exposed how women of colour were previously marginalised within discourses of feminism and antiracism. Crenshaw (1991) illustrates the subordination of different intersectional identities through a discussion of immigrant women's experiences of domestic violence, which differentiates remarkably from that of a middle-class white woman. Financial dependency, language, access to social services, and family/friends' support networks are all examples that illustrate how patterns of subordination intersect in women's experience of domestic violence” (Crenshaw 1991:1249). Social location then determines the position of intersectional identities of people and their connection to power relations in society in specific historical and locational contexts (Yuval-Davies 2006). People constitute different categories of social location dependent on their intersectional identities, they are however not merely placed in different categories, but each category itself has a particular power positionality, either higher or lower than others (ibid).

Identities are created through people's accounts of who they are and who they are not (the comparison is of high importance), and often relates to the perception of what a collective identity (based on ethnicity, culture, religion, etc.) might mean. Constructions of belonging reflect peoples' emotional investments and desires for attachment. This construction contains a level of performativity, “specific repetitive practices, relating to specific social and cultural spaces, which link individual and collective behaviour, are crucial for the construction and reproduction of identity narratives and constructions of attachment” (Yuval-Davies 2006:203). For example, in the reproduction of identity, the everyday action plays an essential role. The normalisation of behaviours makes people not question how their behaviour is socially and culturally influenced. Butler argues that identity in itself is not descriptive but prescriptive, “Identity categories are never merely descriptive, but always normative, and as such, exclusionary” (1995:49). Belonging is not exclusively about social location and construction
of identities and attachments, but further about how these, in particular, are valued. Ethics and ideology influence the way boundaries between categories and identities should be drawn (ibid). When threatened, belonging becomes politicised. “Politics of Belonging” maintain the apparent boundary between “us” and “them” through the political project of constructing a sense of belonging (ibid). The emphasis on the creation of belonging and the boundary-making between the collective identity and those outside of it is particularly important in the nation building project. Understanding the politics of belonging in an ethnically divided island hence become of the essence to grasp the perpetuation of the conflict itself.

Creating narratives

The above discussion has focused on the construction of identity and the use of gender roles and social norms to build a national sense of belonging. The discussion has revealed how social institutions uphold and reproduces the feelings of belonging to a particular social group. What is missing up until now is the link between the production of knowledge and power. Using theories of the philosopher Michael Foucault, this section will discuss the relationship between knowledge, power and truth. The production of knowledge and truth is of the essence in creating the narratives of the conflict and the “other” in ethnically divided societies.

Foucault (1980) coins the term “power/knowledge” to amplify that power is constituted through legitimate forms of knowledge, scientific understandings and “truth”. Discourses become instruments of power and the upholder of a socially produced truth. Every society, according to Foucault, creates “regimes of truth” through discourses which are accepted and upholds a sense of unquestionable certainty. The “regimes of truth” are reinforced (and reproduced) continuously through education systems, media, and the flow of interchanging political and economic ideologies (Rabinow 1984). In this sense, the “battle for truth” is not to find some absolute truth that can be discovered and accepted. But is a battle about “the rules according to which the true and false are separated and specific effects of power are attached to the true” [...] a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays” (Rabinow 1984:74). In a conflict society, the status of truth plays an important part in the production of knowledge and narratives of history. As argued above, the production of the “other” and the “enemy” is done through legitimate sources of knowledge selected to uphold the socially produced truth. It is only in the discovery of the language and knowledge of the discourse that resistance can be formed. To challenge power is not a matter of seeking “truth”, but “of
Detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time” (ibid pp. 75). So how can this detachment take place? From the perspective of a conflict society, the creation of the “enemy” can only be broken by the awareness of its constructionist nature and through interaction with the “other”.

**Peace through interaction**

The above discussions have theoretically grounded some of the effects of a society in conflict, of value for the analysis of the empirical data in this thesis. To sum up, ethnic division strengthens patriarchal structures which limit women's involvement in society and most importantly in reaching higher influential positions in governments and companies by imposing the assumption that women are doubtlessly responsible for childrearing and household duties. This trickle down into the constructed identity of the woman, and the norms affiliated with that identity. Even though the social norms for women might be the same in a specific place and historical context, the preconditions for women to abide differentiates as people have several intersectional identities determining their social location in society. The social location, in turn, relates to the individual and collective identities that form a sense of emotional attachment to a particular place, forming a sense of belonging. The collective identity is significant in this construction but is thus fabricated by politics and governments’ “national-building” projects. Within these projects, the above section on knowledge production has shown how governments produce “truth” through discourses that construct a sense of indisputable certainty. This part will discuss ways of detaching the “truth” from discourses on the “victim” and “enemy” through intergroup contact theory.

Intergroup contact theory, also known as “contact hypothesis”, has proven influential in identifying the critical situational conditions for intergroup contact to reduce prejudice and discrimination (Pettigrew 1998). Founder of the theory, Gordon Allport (1954), hypothesised that intergroup contact could only produce positive results if meeting conditions of “equal group status within the situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; and the support of authorities, law, or custom” (Pettigrew 1998:66). According to Allport, contact that does not meet these four conditions will hence produce adverse effects. The conditions can also be described as essentially facilitating factors for successful interaction. Pettigrew (1998), reformulates the theory by stating how successful intergroup contact follows four processes of change. The initial process is learning about the other group and reducing stereotypes, and the
second process is the changing of behaviour by the group members as a consequence of the interaction. Thirdly, positive intergroup contact generates affective ties between the groups based on found emotional bonds between members. The fourth process is self-reflexive, in providing new perspectives on in-group customs and norms (Pettigrew 1998: 70-73). All four processes of change thus require long interactions for having a substantial impact, forming friendship-bonds as an example. Intergroup contact theory is however not without its limitations, for instance, prejudiced people do not want to involve themselves with outside groups (ibid). The solution to this according to the theory is non-optional interaction with outside groups. However, that poses an assumption that all interaction will foster positive effects. Institutional and societal norms also impact the effect of contact situations (ibid). For example, interethnic conflicts such as in Cyprus created a context that severely limited the intergroup contact, sustained by stereotypes and biased history recollection, etc. In a context of peace and reconciliation, intergroup contact is of the essence. It thus becomes vital to understand what impedes the interaction between different community groups.

METHOD

The empirical material analysed in this thesis is collected through semi-structured interviews with ten informants. To provide an understanding of the decoding and analysis of the empirical data, this chapter will explain the methods used and the process of selecting the informants.

Selection of informants

The informants of this study have been chosen based on a few criteria; they identify as women, have lived all or most of their lives in Cyprus, and are between 20-30 years of age. I chose my informants through the friends of already established contacts from my four years on the island. Some were also selected through a snowball effect of informant’s friends. I aimed to find women from different cities around Cyprus to despite the small sample, have a wider regional reach to the study and not limit it solely to the capital, Nicosia. Most women thus presently live and work in Nicosia. The age range is of importance as the study aims to give voice to the perspective of young Cypriot women in Cyprus, it is my interpretation that a young adult is between 20-30 years of age. Attached to this age group is a probability of more independence, started or completed university studies and the beginning of a working career. The age group was also selected for comparable purposes to the only to my knowledge previous study with a
similar topic and age group made in 2015 (see Hatay et al. 2015). The purposeful focus on only women is because of my epistemological perspective that gender is one of many identities that gives different experiences, of importance to understand as a separate and connected entity when studying a phenomenon. The size of the study further limits the focus to young women, but it is my wish that the results can encourage more qualitative research also on young Cypriot men in Cyprus.

**Semi-structured interviews**

In comparison to previous quantitative research on the topic of young adults’ attitudes to the ‘Cyprus Problem’ (see Hatay et al. 2015), this study has the ambition to contribute to a deeper understanding by employing qualitative methods. Compiling the empirical data through semi-structured interviews gave the informants the chance to reflect on their reasoning behind the answers to my questions. To provide a more analytical depth of the study. The interviews took place in public settings of coffee shops (apart from one done over Skype) and lasted between 1.5 to 2 hours. All interviews were conducted in English. It was made clear from the beginning that all participation would be anonymous and pseudonyms be created for each person. Apart from answering a list of questions, the informants were also asked to give their definition of words such as peace and politics. At the end of each interview, they were presented with the graphics from the 2015 study on the frequency of crossing (see introduction) among university students. The stark contrast between the two sides spurred up new feelings and reflections among several of the informants even though many had anticipated the results based on their own and their friends crossing patterns.

**Thematic analysis**

To decode the empirical material of this study, I have used thematic analysis to analyse and report patterns within the qualitative data. Three themes have been developed through the inductive analysis, each capturing something important from the data in relation to the research questions of the thesis, also representing a level of “patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun et al. 2006:82). An inductive approach signifies that the identified themes are strongly linked to the data themselves (ibid). The first discovered theme analyses institutional mistrust because of the political context. The second theme identifies a conflict between shared Cypriot identity and incentives for interaction. The third theme investigates the women’s recollection of gender dynamics and understanding of women’s low political involvement.
Thematic analysis has been used as a constructionist method, which “examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society” (Braun et al. 2006:83). The constructionist framework has guided the analysis to focus on theorising the sociocultural contexts, and structural conditions, which enabled the individuals' explanations provided (ibid).

**Ethical considerations**

In conducting qualitative research, it is of great essence to position oneself in the research field. As a peace activist, having spent four years in Cyprus, my wish is for the island to unite. This is one of the main reasons why I chose to write about young women as my experience with working in parts of the peace process through civil society I have noticed a lack of young Cypriot women’s voices. My aim with this thesis is to convey an understanding of Cypriot women's thoughts and experiences from being raised in a conflict society. I have deliberately refrained from categorising the women interviewed in this study as either Greek-Cypriot or Turkish-Cypriot as I do not intend to reproduce the dichotomization between them. Two women interviewed are 26-year-olds and from north Nicosia. The characteristics of value to the reader makes up the pseudonyms for the women, which is their age and where they have been raised. Village names have been removed and are referred to by region. I have used the most common English translation when citing places and regions of the island as many places have both Greek and Turkish names.

**THE SOCIAL BARRIERS OF A SOCIETY IN CONFLICT**

The chapter begins with a brief outline of the ‘Cyprus Problem’ and the social effects on society through the lens of nationalism, gender and education. It continues with a discussion of the different women groups’ initiatives for peace in Cyprus and their efforts to incorporate gender equality and gender mainstreaming into the peace process.

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1 The ten women in the study are referred to as follows; 25-year-old, village in Larnaca region; 25-year-old, village in Troodos region; 23-year-old, Limassol; 28-year-old, Limassol; 27-year-old, south Nicosia; 26-year-old, north Nicosia, 24-year-old, village in north Nicosia region; 26-year-old, north Nicosia; 29-year-old, village in Karpas region; 29-year-old, north Nicosia
The ‘Cyprus Problem’

Cyprus, a society in conflict, divided since 1974 by a UN controlled Buffer Zone across the island, a consequence of what has become known as the ‘Cyprus Problem’. The ‘Cyprus Problem’ (also called the ‘Cyprus Issue/Question/Conflict/Dispute’) refers to the interethnic conflict between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots on the island. In defining the conflict, the ethnic divisions were formed during the anti-colonial struggle from the British in 1955–59, where the Greeks of Cyprus fought the British for Enosis (union) with “motherland” Greece and the Turks of Cyprus fought the British for Taksim, union of part of the island with “motherland” Turkey (Hadjipavlou 2006). Cyprus gained independence from the British in 1960. The later intensified intercommunal clashes of 1963 between the minority of Turkish-Cypriots (18%) and the majority of Greek-Cypriots (80%) led to a creation of Turkish-Cypriot ethnic enclaves and ended with the Turkish Military operation in 1974 and the facto division of the island into ‘south’ and ‘north’ controlled by Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots respectively (Zembylas et al. 2016). The two parts of the island have been fully isolated from each other until 2003 when the first permission to cross the border was permitted for families to revisit their homes and villages (Demetriou 2007). Homes now re-inhabited by either Greek-Cypriot, Turkish-Cypriot or Turkish families since the ethnic-based displacement across the border caused by the war. Social activism by civil society in the form of women's groups, youth groups and NGOs created a grassroots-based revolution forcing the Turkish-Cypriot leadership and the Turkish military to open the borders (Hadjipavlou 2010).

A light of hope to reunite the island was rekindled in 2004 with the United Nations (UN) proposed reunification plan, the Annan-Plan, named after the former Secretary General Kofi Annan. However, with the majority of Greek-Cypriots voting no and the majority of Turkish-Cypriots voting yes, the status quo remained. Shortly after the referendum, the Greek-Cypriot controlled Republic of Cyprus joined the European Union (EU), although EU had hoped for the country to be united before accession (Anastasiou 2009). The ‘north’ is still part of the EU, but since the Republic of Cyprus does not exercise control in this area, EU legislation is officially suspended there (Galvanek 2013). The Turkish-Cypriot administration declared independence in 1983, under the name "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" but the independence is still only recognised by Turkey and was immediately condemned by the international community (Ker-Lindsay 2015). Presently, efforts to find a solution to the ‘Cyprus

2 The ‘Greek’ and ‘Turkish’ prefix refers to Greek speaking and Turkish speaking Cypriot.
Problem’ have intensified with the two political leaders aiming to present a Cyprus-led reunification plan for a new referendum. The peace negotiations are led by the Greek-Cypriot community leader Nikos Anastasiades and Turkish-Cypriot community leader Mustafa Akinci under the auspices of the UN Good Offices in Cyprus.

The now decade-long ethnic division of the island has rendered the communities estranged from each other, leading to a strong nation-building of “Greekness” and “Turkishness” on each respective side (see Bryant 2004, Papadakis 2008). The ethnic nationalism stressed the “common history, descent, language, culture and religion with the people of the “motherlands,” Turkey and Greece” (Papadakis 2008:131). Nationalism, militarism and ethnic identity are fuelling factors. Nationalism, in particular, is argued by both communities as perpetuating the conflict (Galvanek 2013). “Each community constructs the other as the cause of their suffering and perceive their own side as not responsible” (Hadjipavlou 2007:355). The dichotomies of “us” versus “the other” and of the “victim” and “enemy” have for decades made the communities drift further apart. The “conflict culture” has also been prevalent in the history education in the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot school system.

**History recollection in the education system**

The education systems have been one of the main instruments in the reproduction of national narratives where the textbooks and methodologies historically have been imported from the "motherlands" of Greece and Turkey (Hadjipavlou 2007). Up until this day, national days of the "motherlands" are commemorated in Cypriot schools across the island. For a long time, Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots were taught only the history of Greece and Turkey whereas the history of Cyprus only recently was introduced in the curriculum (Papadakis 2008, Zembylas et al. 2016). The history recollection of Cyprus within the communities differentiate on several points. Firstly, the history of the island either begins with the arrival of Greeks or of Turks. Secondly, the terminology for Cypriots is changed to ‘Greeks of Cyprus' and ‘Turks of Cyprus' indicating a stronger connection to the "motherlands" than to Cyprus. Thirdly, the events of 1974 are in the Greek-Cypriot books phrased as the "Barbaric Turkish Invasion" while in the Turkish-Cypriot books as the "Happy Peace operation" (ibid). Both the history teaching in Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot schools are ethnocentric and culturally monolithic, presenting only a one-sided view of the events following the 1960s (ibid pp. 135-36). However, the Turkish-Cypriot history books changed in 2004 with the newly elected socialist government.
that wanted a more inclusive and peace-promoting approach to history teaching. Hence the new books were “Cypriocentric” and used more inclusive terms such as Cypriots which include both Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots (Papadakis 2008). Currently, the books of 2004 have been replaced by a middle-ground between the old history books and those from 2004. Also in 2004, a Committee on Educational Reform evaluated the Greek-Cypriot education system that leads to increased efforts to rewrite the national curricula for all subjects taught in school, the first product came out in 2010 (Zembylas et al. 2016). A common denominator between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot history recollection is the bi-communal emphasis and the complete neglect of other communities' history in Cyprus such as the Maronite, Armenian and Latin (Hadjipavlou 2010). There also exists a clear gender bias in the history books with few or no mentions of Cyprus women's contribution to social and cultural life (AHDR 2015). Bi-communal initiatives such as the Association of Historical Research and Dialogue (AHDR) are working to promote peace education and hosts workshops for educators across the island to supplement the lack of formal education in history teaching for teachers (www.ahdr.info). Regardless of these efforts there currently exists a generation of young Cypriots that has been brought up with an altered view of the ‘Cyprus Problem’, the “other”, and the history of the island, something that in discussion with Cypriots is referred to as going through “brainwashing”.

**Women in Cyprus and their involvement for peace**

One group’s efforts for peace in Cyprus have yet to be acknowledged in the school history books on Cyprus. That is the efforts by the women’s organisations and their island-wide initiatives for gender equality and gender mainstreaming of the peace negotiations. The “national problem” of aiming to solve the status quo has for decades overshadowed and downplayed women’s issues and failed to incorporate their different experiences of the conflict (Hadjipavlou 2010). The lack of women’s involvement and place at the negotiating table throughout the several attempts in finding a solution shows the “genderless” assumption of the conflict and hence undermines the different experiences by women and men. Thus, applying a gender perspective on the ‘Cyprus Problem’ only assists the understanding of the complex and dynamic experiences of different social groups, the main target here being women.

The national project of the two respective sides has further emphasised the role of women as carriers of national values and gatekeepers of traditions, as defined by men. Nationalism and
patriarchal structures, deepened by the ethnic conflict, further strengthens the gender division between men and women (Hadjipavlou 2010). The conflict in Cyprus was a "patriarchal struggle on a patriarchal island, which most women followed and became involved in" (Vassiliadou 2002:459). Women became part of another struggle rather than against the patriarchal hegemonic structures in society, and were told that the conditions of despair created by the war made "women's issues" less significant (ibid).

In 2002, an extensive research project was initiated by a group of feminist scholars and civil society actors on both sides of the divided island, examining the situation of women in Cyprus. Between 2002 to 2008, 80 women from the five communities of Cyprus\(^3\) participated in the research through focus groups and a total of 1,697 women took part in a quantitative questionnaire. Up until then, no research had been conducted on women in all communities of Cyprus. Previous research had been made separately within each community and was only publicly available in the Greek Cypriot or Turkish Cypriot community.

The results of the study, presented in Maria Hadjipavlou’s book ‘Women and Change in Cyprus’ (2010), revealed the strong presence of patriarchy and nationalism within the Cypriot society. Cypriot women are marginalised both at the political level and within the peace negotiations. A number of social and psychological obstacles for women to reach higher professional positions were found, among them; the notion of women's place being primarily in the home, few positions allocated for women, lack of support from family members and society (including other women) and a fear of handling power (Hadjipavlou 2010). In the Cypriot society, for a woman to pursue a career and other personal interest she is obliged to hire another woman to take care of the household duties, as the man is not expected to do so (ibid). The socioeconomic developments for women that came with the EU membership for the Republic of Cyprus (south) increased the productive role of women and provided for legal protection and rights through the signing of international conventions such as the CEDAW\(^4\).

With the suspension of the EU acquis in the north, the legal protection of rights does not exist to any satisfactory extent for women in the north. The EU accession did not bring any real liberation of women or gender equality, and hence emancipation is enabled by employing

\(^3\) As stated in the constitution from 1960 the five communities of Cyprus are the Greek-Cypriot, Turkish-Cypriot, Maronite, Armenian and Latin. The later three have representatives within the parliament of the government of the Republic of Cyprus.

\(^4\) UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
foreign domestic workers (Hadjipavlou 2010). As argued in feminist theory, women’s oppression partly takes its form in the division of labour within the family. They are doubtlessly placed in the private sphere and defined through their gender expectations as mothers. The public/private dichotomy is evident in the Cypriot society which impedes on women's ability to reach decision-making position in society. The patriarchal hegemony and social structures have historically discouraged women to actively participate in the public discourse (Hadjipavlou 2010). The women's movement in Cyprus has previously been confined in women's affiliations of political parties and failed to develop an independent voice in society (ibid).

When asked about their involvement in women's organisations not affiliated with a political party the participation of women was particularly low, showing that women did not mobilise for their rights or build pressure for social change, even to a lesser extent among the younger generation (age 18-29).

A vicious cycle has been created whereby the non-visibility of women in public life is due to their poor involvement and participation in political or women’s organised groups, yet they can only become visible if they participate in political movements to challenge the patriarchal political order (Hadjipavlou 2010:127).

Despite the social impediments for women in Cyprus, women’s groups have thus engaged in dialogue and challenged the ethnic division by reaching across the divide. Since the opening of the borders in 2003, island-wide initiatives of women's organisations have increased their pressure on the negotiating parties in the peace talks to adopt a gender perspective in all negotiating chapters. They uphold the refusal of confining to a nationalist agenda on each side and to patriarchal institutions strengthened by the ethnic conflict by viewing the conflict and women's conditions through a gender lens (Hadjipavlou 2006).

These women tried to transcend the Line in all its manifestations and create spaces for the articulation of their experiences of the conflict and the ‘Other’. Also, these women opened a new space for a shared narrative to be created with possibilities for reconciliation and renewed relationships (ibid pp. 336).

In 2003, a group of women formed the organisation Hands Across the Divide, the first independent bi-communal women’s organisation. The Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot members of the organisation professed a united voice to change the negative perception of the “other” with dialogue. Peace was envisioned through demilitarisation, removal of foreign troops and continued dialogue across the divide (Hadjipavlou 2006). Currently, Hands Across
the Divide is not active, but some of its members remain as representatives of the organisation in umbrella organisations such as the Cyprus Women's Lobby.

Women’s organisations across Cyprus have for decades engaged and advocated for the inclusion of a gender perspective in the on-going peace negotiations. Despite this, women continue to be underrepresented at the negotiating table, within working groups and technical committees of the peace talks. One of the initiatives was the Gender Advisory Team (GAT), formed in 2009 and consisting of a core group of women from both sides of the divide that aimed at integrating gender equality into the peace process. GAT has since its establishment presented recommendations on the negotiation chapters to the political leaders in 2010, 2011 and 2012 respectively, and published a report on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 13255 in Cyprus (GAT 2012). The growing pressure of women's groups influenced the decision by the two political leaders leading the negotiations to form a Technical Committee on Gender Equality in May 2015. One significant obstacle is thus that the committee is not allowed to be in active dialogue with civil society organisations. Questions remain about whether gender equality issues are side-lined within the committee instead of gender being all encompassing in every part of part of the negotiations.

Another recent effort resulted in a publication of guidelines for best practices to incorporate the UNSCR 1325 in the peace process. The publication ‘White Book Guidelines of Best Practice: UNSCR 1325’ was the result of a workshop of women from civil society, public sector, educators, lawyers and journalists in November 2016. Divided into four groups, the members of the workshop developed practices for the four pillars of the resolution namely; participation, protection, prevention, relief and recovery (White Book 2017). The outcome of the workshop was presented and discussed during a conference titled “Pathways towards Sustainable Peacebuilding”. The aspiration of the workshop and conference was to promote a set of “good practices to advance the women, peace and security agenda as a core dimension of the larger discussion of the Cyprus peace building process” (ibid pp. 7).

5 The United Nations Security Council (UNSCR) 1325 was adopted unanimously in 2000 by the UN Security Council. Resolution 1325 on ‘Women, Peace and Security’, mandates that women should be participants in the making and keeping of peace in the local, national and international arenas. Cyprus has signed the resolution but is yet to develop a National Action Plan for its implementation.
Despite the efforts of the women's organisations the outreach of these initiatives continues to be the so-called "usual suspects"\textsuperscript{6}, which is also a reoccurring problem for island-wide efforts to promote peace and unification of the island. Mobilising women’s rights in the patriarchal conflict society remains a challenge. There is a severe lack of women’s voices in the mass media, in either community. Rarely are women invited on to prime time discussion programmes to talk about the continuation of the problem and what its non-solution mean for women, and suggestions they may have (Hadjipavlou in Ker-Lindsay 2015:98). Considering that the mass media has been reported as one of the prime sources of information on the peace process also among the younger generations (Hatay et al. 2015), this lack of a women's perspective of the conflict in media reproduces the "genderless" notion of the conflict. Questions remain if this has any substantial effect on young women's attitudes towards the peace negotiations and the continued mobilisation for women's rights in Cyprus.

**VOICES OF YOUNG WOMEN IN CYPRUS**

In the analysis of the interviews, three themes have emerged that signified a level of patterned responses which aid the decoding of the empirical data and the answer to the questions of inquiry in the study. How do young women conceptualise peace in Cyprus? What factors influence their peace-building interaction across the divide? Does the lack of women's political involvement affect the interest of young women in the negotiation process and in solving the ‘Cyprus Problem'? The first theme concerns institutional mistrust as a consequence of the political context. The second theme relates to a conflict between shared identity and incentives for interaction across the divide and the last theme analyses how gender dynamics normalise the tolerance of women’s low political involvement. The analysis will be divided into three parts based on the themes. Before commencing into the analysis, a brief description of the informants will be provided, highlighting some commonalities between them apart from their proclaimed identity as Cypriots.

Ten young women were interviewed in a semi-structured setting, ages ranging from 23-29 years old. All have gone to university, where all but one have completed at least one university degree. Five informants have studied at universities abroad either in Turkey or the UK. All

\textsuperscript{6} The “usual suspects” refers to the group of people already in agreement with the cause. A common terminology used in informal discussions with activists on the island.
women are currently working or at the end of their university degree. Several of the informants live at home because of an unstable work situation or other financial reasons. All but two currently live in cities and four were raised in villages. Six of the women are or have been involved in civil society organisations whereas the reason for those not organising themselves socially mainly is a lack of a cause they feel passionate about. Four women have participated in peace-building activities, but only a few attend bi-communal events regularly. All informants wish for a Cyprus without borders and for a solution to be found. However, none of the women asked, believe that a solution will be negotiated this time around and few remain hopeful towards the ongoing negotiations. Out of the ten women interviewed, five have family members that became internally displaced because of the war. There is thus a distinct difference between the Cypriots participating in the study. That is, Cypriots residing in the north daily discuss the ‘Cyprus Problem’ with friends and family whereas for Cypriots living in the south it rarely or never comes up daily in conversations.

“They wouldn’t tell us anything about the other side”

This section will provide an understanding of the women’s recollection of the history teaching in schools, their definition and opinions about politics in Cyprus and trust in governmental institutions. The experience of growing up in a conflict society becomes evident through the informants’ description of the fatigue they feel when hearing about the negotiations and how it overshadows all other matters of politics in Cyprus. All women expressed a severe mistrust in the politicians on the whole island which influenced their definition of politics. More often through a narrow and negative definition which for example excluded a rights perspective. Among the definitions by the women were “corrupted”, “mind games”, “manipulating the masses”, “stupid things”, “mine versus yours, “a waste of time”, “power”, “fulfilling self-interests”. Only two women spoke of politics in a wider perspective, incorporating for example topics such as environment and feminism. All women emphasised that “politics in Cyprus is about solving the Cyprus Problem” (27-year-old, south Nicosia) with politicians that fails to incorporate new perspectives. One women described the political situation as being trapped within a vicious circle:

I think the political area is quite corrupted. I studied political science and what I see around me is not satisfactory. I couldn't see myself there, but I know I need to get involved because otherwise, things won't change. It's a vicious cycle cause you don't want to get involved but if you're not, you can't change anything. I don't know maybe I'm too young. (29-year-old, north Nicosia)
Several of the women felt that political parties have caused divisions within the societies on both sides and express a constant struggle between the “rejectionist” and “solutionist” parties which further influence the media reporting. The main source of information about the negotiations was for the women social media, argued as the most balanced source. Most women expressed that the mainstream media is biased, either towards one side or following a political party. Overall, few women expressed an interest in reading the news, those interested seek alternative sources of information by for example reading foreign newspapers, discussions with friends, civil society organisations and government websites.

The news are one-sided. They side with the government, and they will tell the story of their side, not the other side. […] You find alternative sources. My social media is more balanced than the normal media. (26-year-old, north Nicosia).

The media is not helping us to understand stuff. […] I would say that I'm not very well informed. Perhaps because it's only male people talking about these things, that's one thing I don't like. Another thing I don't like is how they always repeat themselves, and I feel like if I watch the news, I won't learn anything new because they [the political leaders] are not specific about what they’re doing when they get together. (25-year-old, village in Larnaca region)

Overall one can notice a tendency among the informants that they are less interested in politics because of their experience of politics in Cyprus. The informants overall seem to mistrust the government and its representatives. When describing the experience of growing up in a village one woman expresses how the different attitudes towards the other side are formed by the family and the government.

In the villages, this thing is different than in cities. In the village, everybody is a team, and almost everybody is a racist. […] They couldn't understand that all this start from the government, not the people living there. They say Turkish Cypriots and Turks are the same. Everything starts from the government and in the village from the family. If the family members are racist and against then the children and grandchildren will be like this unless your mind is open. That's why I don't want to stay in politics and read about this. I know that everything has started from the government, not the people living on the other side. (25-year-old, village in Troodos region)

Most women were also aware of the one-sided history teachings in school which raised their distrust for their governments. Two informants recall their family members that experienced the war giving them their perspective of the history, which forced them to evaluate the teachings in the schools at an early age.

My father battled in the war. When I started primary school and studied Cyprus history, he said, "learn what they write in the books, write what they want for the exams and when you come out the
class forget all about it because it's not true." [...] Even in primary school my father taught me like that and evaluating the history. (24-year-old, village in north Nicosia region)

Others recalled how they learned about the other side at a later stage in life and reflected on how the history has been taught on the other side.

They never told us what we did to the other side. They only told us what happened to us, how horrible they were to us and the first time I heard what we did to them was in London. I just happened to find this book about the story of a Turkish-Cypriot girl who told the story of Greek-Cypriots going into her village and started killing people. [...] No one ever told us about this. We grew up thinking that we are the victims and they are the bad people. [...] I’m sure this happened also on the other side that we are the bad people, then it’s going to be really difficult to bring these two sides together. (25-year-old, village in Larnaca region)

What they tell us is that Greece established EOKA to get rid of the Turkish Cypriots and join Cyprus with Greece. But it was not like that. The British divided us. But this we found out later, you cannot read it from the books. It's not impartial, and it's still more than what they tell the students on the Greek side. They have to rewrite it, but I don't know how. The whole story is corrupted. (29-year-old, north Nicosia)

The women have grown up in a culture that aims to create emotional bonds of victimhood as part of the socialisation process into the society on each respective side. The emotional attachment to the social group is created through feelings of victimhood which has been further emphasised through the history teachings in schools. A vast majority of the women have discovered the production of “truths” by the political powers, alienating the “other” as an enemy. Some at an early stage through an evaluation of the school curricula of the conflict. The new holistic view has been guided by family members, perspectives from abroad or through friendships with the “other”. Whereas the state has maintained as the upholder of its own socially produced “truth” throughout the women's lives. This has, in turn, affected their view of media, government and politicians in Cyprus and inhibited their willingness to have anything to do with politics on the island. The vicious cycle of women's political involvement is still present as first introduced seven years ago (see Hadjipavlou 2010) as one of the results of the island-wide study initiated in 2002. Even though the detachment of the power of truth is a process many of the women have encountered, it is still yet to increase peace-building interaction and calls for a closer look at other factors for its impediment.
“I identify as a Cypriot because this is my homeland”

This part will analyse the level of interaction across the divide, the informants’ perception of the “other”, and how the women construct the Cypriot identity. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that the women identify themselves solely as Cypriots, leaving the prefix of ‘Greek’ or ‘Turkish’ unspoken. However, the distinction between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots were continuously made when speaking about the Cypriots living on each side of the divide. More as an ingrained terminology fostered by the socialisation processes on each side rather than a conscious decision, which became evident in their emphasis on being just Cypriot. But what does it mean to be Cypriot? One woman expressed Cypriotness with a clear negligence of those living in the north. “I don’t think there are any. They are not considered Cypriot. [...] I don't know about life on the other side, and I don't really care about life on the other side. They are invaders” (28-year-old, Limassol). The negligence and lack of knowledge of the other side did however not come as a surprise for the Cypriots in the north.

Greek-Cypriots have a common misunderstanding that Turkish-Cypriots don’t exist, that those living on the other side are Turks. They think we are economically deprived and think we live in tents or something. Seriously, not all people are educated on this (29-year-old, north Nicosia).

The division has made its mark not only in the form of a physical border but also a border in peoples’ mind which has yet to be opened as the physical one was fourteen years ago. It is evident that these feelings of disconnectedness with the other side does not foster incentives to interact. The two Cypriot women quoted above thus share similar experiences when crossing for the first time to visit their parent’s old house.

My family is from the occupied area. I don’t talk to them about it because it’s obviously painful for them. My father was kicked out of there when he was 10. […] I’ve been once with my family cause they wanted to see their house but then I had my family members burst into tears so we left and I haven’t been ever since. And I never will go. Because of pride (28-year-old, Limassol).

Of course, I remember the first time. It was a big incident. My father and grandfather used to tell us stories about our farm in Pafos that one day we would go back to our village. It was 2003, our family were one of the first once to cross. […] It was so emotional. We took our grandfather, and he cried like hell, my father did as well. When we crossed, it was grape time, and we went to my grandfather’s field, and he tried to take the grapes, and I told him “grandpa you can't do this, it doesn't belong to you anymore”. He went totally crazy. He said, "I planted these trees, they are my products!" Everybody cried. It wasn't nice. It was a tragedy. I was so upset to see my father and grandfather like this. (29-year-old, north Nicosia)
Whereas one woman decided never to cross again, the other woman crosses on a regular basis for different reasons such as shopping products not available in the north, to meet friends and to travel from the airport in the south. Many of these reasons were expressed by most Cypriots living in the north and thus pinpoint the unbalanced need for crossing between the two sides. As one informant expressed, “I know a lot of people from my village that go almost every week to Larnaca, where they originally are from, to have a coffee. Turkish Cypriots are a lot more curious on what they lose from not being in the EU” (29-year-old, village in Karpas region). For those living in the south, the emphasis on need is also highlighted. “The Turkish-Cypriots need to get out, and the south is a way to get out. If Greek-Cypriots had a need they would cross. Greek-Cypriots go to visit their houses maybe once or twice” (27-year-old, south Nicosia). The presented reasons for Cypriots in the north to cross in comparison to the “lack of” reasons for those living in the south are however more practical than interactional and in a limited extent peace-building. Out of the five women interviewed in the north, three have Cypriots friends in the south. Although the same people are either involved with peace activism, language exchange or have befriended Cypriots from the south while studying abroad or in the south. Befriending Cypriots on the other side outside of these premises seems to require organisational settings such as bi-communal events.

When I go with my Turkish-Cypriot friends, I try to bring them to Home for Cooperation⁷ if it's their first time for them to meet Greek-Cypriots. To meet outside it's more separated, I go with my brother to meet my Greek-Cypriot friends. Language plays a role, and we know Greek. (26-year-old, north Nicosia)

I want to meet Greek-Cypriots, but I don't have any occasion to meet people and become friends.
(24-year-old, village in north Nicosia region)

The interviewed Cypriots from the north had a shared view that Cypriots in the south cross the divide in a much lesser extent. Although, when shown the statistics presented in the survey from 2015 (Hatay et al. 2015) they were all shocked over the high percentage of Cypriots in the south that had never crossed. Which is also evident in the fewer occasions that Cypriots in the south get to meet and befriend Cypriots from the north. Out of the five women asked, only one had become friends with Cypriots living in the north during a cultural exchange abroad. One woman interacts with Cypriots from the north through her job in the service sector but has

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⁷ Home for Cooperation is a community center located in the UN-controlled Buffer Zone in the heart of Nicosia. Opening its doors in 2011, the Home has become a neutral meeting place for people living on both sides through bi-communal social events. The building also hosts several peace-promoting NGOs in its premises.
herself not crossed and despite her changed opinion of crossing her peer group limits her opportunities.

I'd like to go see my fathers’ house, but I never went. I never had the opportunity. When I found out that my parents went, we had a big fight. I didn't like it. Because they had to pay and show their ID. I don’t want to show my ID on my island. […] I was very young, 12 or 13, when they went. Now I would like to go. Now I care that I will show my ID, but I changed my mind. I would like to see how it is. But all of my friends in Nicosia are against. (25-year-old, village in Troodos region)

The resentment for showing ID is grounded in the belief that it would legitimate that the north is not part of “our island”. “I don't want to show my ID because the war was very recent, I feel like the island is still one. Maybe someday I would feel more at peace with it.” (23-year-old, Limassol). Another woman in the south noticed her own crossing behaviour was with people from other countries.

Whenever I went to the other side it was never with Cypriots it was always with friends from other countries. There is this thing you know young Cypriots won’t go to the north. […] They don’t really think about it, they just know it’s something people don’t do. I think lots of people don’t do it because no one else does it. (25-year-old, village in Larnaca region)

When presented with the statistics on frequency of crossing, the Cypriots in the south were also surprised by the high level of Cypriots that never had crossed to the north. But when self-reflecting on their own behaviour and that of their fellow Cypriot friends, they legitimised the statistics. Out of the women interviewed three has never crossed to the other side, two reside in the south and one in the north. For the Cypriot woman in the north, the reason for not crossing is thus entirely different and commences the analysis of the Cypriot identity.

I can't cross because my parents were born in Turkey, so they identify me as Turkish. I tried after my 18th birthday. I crossed the Turkish side, but the Greek side said, "show me your mother's ID". Because they see on the system that I haven't crossed, so they sensed that something was wrong about me. I felt isolated. Why didn't they accept me? What did I do to them? I'm Cypriot. I don't say I'm Turkish or Greek or something else. I was born here. I've been living here, this is my island. But they see me as an enemy. (26-year-old, north Nicosia)

Despite the expressed similarities that the majority of women interviewed felt when crossing and interacting with Cypriots on the other side, the language division and the categorisation by society into those that are Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot severely inhibits feelings of a shared identity as Cypriots. Because of the strong ties to the made up ‘motherlands’, the meaning of a Cypriot identity has gotten lost. Despite the fact that the women interviewed define themselves as Cypriot the definition does not seem to foster incentive for interaction
across the divide, with their fellow Cypriots. Stressing the importance of developing of a shared identity. Ingrained behaviours, just like the distinction between Turkish-Cypriots and Greek-Cypriots, such as not crossing the border from south to north has been constructed as part of the social behaviours of Cypriots in the south. A consequence of the construction of belonging, politicised by the national project. Despite a similar presence of nationalism in the north, the practical needs for crossing overturn any reasoning for not doing so.

When evaluating the level of interaction across the divide through Allport’s (1954) intergroup contact theory, it is evident that the support of authorities, law or customs is a missing condition that could essentially facilitate interaction. As many of the women recalled, there remains a lack of political will to break down the mental walls built by the governmental powers on the island. The women share a common goal of an island without borders, but the conditions of the different sides (one being an EU member and the other unrecognised territory) does not create equality within the situation. Hence, Cypriots in the north cross at a higher frequency than those in the south. Lastly, the disconnection to a shared identity across the divide limits cooperation. Increased by the construction of belonging to each respective side's national project. The knowledge of the politicisation of belonging is still to form resistance among most of the women interviewed. Despite very few expression of resentment towards the “other” by the informants, one notices a stalemate on peace-building interaction as the women still wait for a solution before it can begin.

“Well there are no women as far as I know”

The last section will discuss the women’s feelings of representation in the negotiations and society at large, and the process to find peace in Cyprus. None of the women asked felt represented in the on-going peace negotiations, the main reason being the low level of women present. “Most of them are men. You don't see women. I mean you see women in front of the cameras, but usually they are assistants or secretaries or something” (26-year-old, north Nicosia). When asked about the reason behind the low representation of women most of the informants firstly referred to the social structures in society, limiting women’s political participation, and secondly to the low political interest of women in Cyprus.

It is reasonable because women would like to marry and have kids and it is quite hard to do both. It would be hard for women to be housekeeper, wife and politician. I see that men don't support women in that regard either, and it makes me feel sad. I think it's not a matter of change. It's in our hearts because it's strongly a man's field politics. It would be hard to change. (23-year-old, Limassol)
I think we need more women that attend the negotiations. Women have a different type of saying and doing things. [...] There are few women because most of the women in our country are not interest in politics. They do stuff for themselves like getting married, having children or academics. Somehow deep down we are still oppressed by the male power. (26-year-old, north Nicosia)

Also asked about their knowledge of bi-communal women’s initiatives, surprisingly only one woman had heard of their efforts. Reasons for the lack of awareness can be explained by the invisibility of women’s political efforts for change in the history teachings and the low media interest in reporting on women’s perspectives on political issues (see AHDR 2015, Hadjipavlou 2010). The women are somewhat aware of the gender divisions in society but do not believe change will come anytime soon. The lack of interest and their negative view of politics in Cyprus affects their ambition to bring about change by getting politically involved. The vicious cycle makes itself known again. However, the women do not see the politicians as the only tool for peace, more as the beginning. Explaining why the underrepresentation of women in the negotiations is not a decisive factor for the informants. Meaning that the strive for peace stands above the feelings of representation in the closed negotiations. With the knowledge of their socialisation into a society built on dividing the Cypriot identity, the women feel that peace cannot come unless knowledge of the other is improved and a collective identity reinstated.

When we as Cypriots start to share the same emotions, our gains and losses of our shared history we can have peace. We don't have to forget. We should accept what we did. What we did to Greek Cypriots and what they did to us Turkish Cypriots. [...] The peace process will start afterwards. After we choose to participate as a whole country. (24-year-old, village in north Nicosia region)

You can't erase the past but how do you bury them? If you bury them inside you then you will not find peace. If you say, this should not happen again how do I prevent it? You will find peace. Start thinking and understand. (27-year-old, south Nicosia)

The vast majority of the women interviewed argued for the importance of learning about the history of the other so that the generations to come will have a more holistic approach of the conflict and the history of the island. The informants also stressed the importance of interacting together across the divide and emphasised organised bi-communal activities as the tool to start building friendships. Despite this, many of the women interviewed had themselves not participated in any bi-communal event nor knew of the Home for Cooperation in the Buffer Zone. Some admitted that they would rather go meet up with their friends instead, out of comfort. There was also a tendency to think that events organised in the Buffer Zone had a connotation with political parties and that participation would mean support for their political views. Peace was not seen as something that comes with the political leadership, but the
governments still have the power to influence stubborn minds. "There needs to be political will saying that there is no problem to cross the border and go to restaurants on the other side. Otherwise, it will not change" (29-year-old, north Nicosia). The prolonged conflict and political situation followed by the non-inclusiveness of the negotiations has made most of the women wait with their peace-building interaction until a solution on paper is presented. Out of the ten women interviewed, six would vote yes in a possible referendum, one would vote no, and three are indecisive waiting to read the proposed plan.

I would not sign something that says Cyprus is free, but the Turkish people have to leave. They have their lives here. After so many years. I'm not talking from the people who are coming now but those that have lived here for many years. I don't want them to leave because they have a life here. You cannot ask them to leave. (25-year-old, village in Troodos region)

The peace is not going to come with the paper of the plan it's just a general writing for me, and I have lots of issues I would like to see, but the most important part is to have the solution and go step by step for the peace. If they're not going to include women's percentage in the government, for example, we can change that later. The important part is to make a solution, and then we may change things later. (29-year-old, village in Karpas region)

Growing up in the political context of the island has made the women aware of the priorities of the politicians on each side. The ‘Cyprus Problem’ one way or another needs to be brought out of the status quo. The division within the political arena between “rejectionists” and “solutionist” needs to be resolved for other issues such as human rights, gender equality, and environment to be addressed properly. But is the island ready for peace? According to the women, peace requires respect for the “other”. It also requires inclusiveness and open-mindedness. Reflecting on their upbringing and how these criteria make themselves visible and invisible in the society on both sides, many felt hopeful for the coming generations but presently the mental walls, built up from years of being taught to hate the “other”, are still too high.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been twofold, firstly to locate factors that affect peace-building interaction among young women in Cyprus and secondly to provide an understanding on their conceptualisation of peace in Cyprus. The constructionist approach highlights that the research questions thus are interrelated and cannot be reduced to each other. In order to understand how Cypriot women interact across the divide one also need to analyse how they understand the ongoing negotiations and their perception to find peace in Cyprus. The result of the analysis
show that the politicisation of belonging, which has been reproduced through the education system, media, and day-to-day language, is an important factor that impedes on peace-building interaction. The nation-building on both sides of the divide has pulled the Cypriots further apart because of the constructed dichotomy between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots. Consequently, the politicisation of belonging has divided the social construction of the Cypriot identity. The national project’s aim to uphold borders in people's mind is still strongly present in the young generation of women and has maintained feelings of disconnectedness. Another factor impeding peace-building interaction is the political context of the island and the non-participatory nature of the negotiations. The conditions of the negotiations behind closed doors and the lack of detailed information available to the public have led to a focus on reconciliation as post-solution. Throughout the interview process, it became known that this also persists in the minds of the informants and to some extent is stalemating their peace-building interaction. As much as there is a need for Cypriots in the north to cross for practical reasons to a greater extent than for Cypriots in the south, the need to cross for peace-building interactional purposes is very limited. There is consequently a paradox, in order to find peace there need to be interactions between the different communities to break down stereotypes, prejudices and familiarise oneself with the “other”, which one is meant to reunite with. However, reconciliation is expected to come after a solution is presented by the political leaders and voted in a referendum. Despite the women’s low trust in the political leadership they still rely on them to find a solution and thus wait with interacting across the divide as there is no real incentive to do so until then. Peace appear to be postponed and not expected before a solution is found. This is thus a worrisome result considering that a solution will be settled by a referendum. How do you convince someone that have never interacted with people from the other side to vote yes when their society has consistently differentiated the one from the other, the “enemy” from the “victim”? This realisation made the women reflect on whether the communities are ready for a solution at this point, which was also grounded in the disbelief that a solution will be found with the current politicians in power. Their awareness of the biased history education has thus made them hopeful for upcoming generations to have a more holistic approach and nuanced perception of the “other”.

The results of this study have confirmed previous research that the current status quo regarding the ‘Cyprus Problem’ continue to overshadow the will of women to organise in women’s movements. The politics of the island further downplays an acceptance and support for an active women’s movement in society in general. A wider definition of politics needs to be established
and promoted for young women to find incentives to involve themselves in the political arena and mobilise for their rights. The gender dynamics is a realised obstacle for women but most noticeable, the political situation in Cyprus has caused a lack of political interest among them. The social barriers for women to reach higher professional positions as identified in the 2003 study on women's situation in Cyprus, is still present in the younger generations. The vicious cycle further impedes mobilisation for women’s rights among the majority of the informants. Patriarchal structures are still strongly present in society, and the low levels of resistance among the young generation of women towards gender norms and the island’s status quo is something that requires further research. The failure of the previously established bi-communal women’s initiatives to connect with the younger generations, as evident in the lack of knowledge about them, can be explained through the negative view of politics by the women interviewed and a slight unawareness of women’s suppressed position in society. Would a re-establishment of such initiatives reconnect the young generation of women based on their shared identities as Cypriots and as women? Based on the results of this thesis, increased political interest among young women in Cyprus would encourage more peace-building interaction, thus reaffirming the need for women’s political involvement, to deliver new perspectives and change. Improved education, increased gender awareness and women’s social organisation are essential to bring about peace and reconciliation in Cyprus.

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Association for Historical Research and Dialogue (AHDR). 2015. Gender as a missing lens - How to introduce gender into history teaching. AHDR.


APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General: occupation, age, education, interests, goals, city

How would you describe life as a woman in Cyprus?
How would you define politics?
Are you part of any political organisation or social movement?

With your friends/family, do you often discuss the Cyprus problem?
   o What is your general view on what you hear about it?
   o What’s your main information source?
   o How was it taught in your school?

Frequency of crossing; how often/or have you crossed to visit the other side?
   o What was your main reason, impression, feelings?

Women’s representation in the on-going peace negotiations
   o Have you heard of the bi-communal work by women’s organisations for peace in Cyprus?
   o Do you feel represented in the peace negotiations?

How do you define peace?
   o What do you think is the best way to find peace on this island?
   o What is your vision for Cyprus in 50 years?