

Fecha de recepción: abril 2026
 Fecha de aceptación: junio 2026

Bodies of antithesis¹

Andria Charilaou⁽¹⁾

Abstract: This paper examines how militarisation shapes women's everyday lives in the contested environment of Pyla, trapped within the buffer zone and encircled by six military forces (UK, UN, Turkish, Greek, Greek Cypriot, and Turkish Cypriot). The project is informed by Mustafa Hulusi's exhibition *Nightclubs in Nature*, depicting sex-work venues embedded in Northern Cyprus's militarised zones. Hulusi exposes the spatial entanglement between women, particularly sex workers, and soldiers. This project extends the initial material, aiming to document women's lived experiences that remain largely absent. The research bridges this gap through oral history and visual ethnography conducted with women in Pyla.

These testimonies show how militarisation structures both intimate and public life through the extension of surveillance into domestic spaces and routine sexual harassment in public spaces. Repeated across urban space, these practices regulate how women move, how they are seen, and how they perceive themselves. Militarisation mobilises bodies in antithesis: the soldier as "saviour" linked to the woman as "body to be saved", or the "predatory body" of the soldier versus the woman's "body of fear." It reproduces such roles to sustain gender power structures. Drawing on gender performativity (Butler, 1988), the research argues that these roles are maintained and legitimised through constant, forced repetition. Militarisation scholarship (Enloe, 2000) and its geography (Kirsch & Flint, 2011) expose symbolic and functional reliance on these structures and reveal how they are inscribed in space. By linking women's marginalised testimonies with these frameworks, the research unveils how colonial-era military infrastructures and discourses—checkpoints, surveillance, and border controls—sustain patriarchal norms, confining women to passive, sexualised, or caregiving roles. Militarisation instrumentalises women's bodies for territorial control. This work exposes this process, reframing women not as passive symbols but as the very infrastructure through which militarised power is sustained and can be unsettled. Their testimonies do not simply describe this system; they reveal its mechanisms, tensions, and points of fracture.

Keywords: Militarisation - Bodily Territoriality - Intimate Geographies - Visual Ethnography - Gender performativity - Spatialised violence

[Abstracts in spanish and portuguese on page 159. Spanish version on page 235]

(1) See CV on page 160

Introduction

Context

Cyprus demonstrates how post-colonial infrastructures and logics continue to shape everyday life. The division of the island is not only the result of the 1974 Turkish invasion but is rooted in British colonial strategies of governance that institutionalised ethnic separation. Through practices of divide and control, colonial administration positioned Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities as oppositional groups, embedding division within both political organisation and spatial planning. These logics persist. The island remains partitioned through colonial-era infrastructures, most notably the Buffer Zone, first established in 1963 under British military command which continues to separate communities, regulate movement, and structure perception. Militarisation builds on this inherited condition, using spatial division to sustain its presence and authority.

Following independence in 1960 and the events of 1974, this division was further materialised through checkpoints, military infrastructures, and restricted movement. A dense military presence now sustains this fragmented and contested landscape. Specifically, six forces operate across the island: Turkish Army bases and Turkish Cypriot Security in the north, Greek Forces and Greek Cypriot Forces in the south, British Army Bases in the south, and a United Nations Peacekeeping Mission within the Buffer Zone (Kirsch & Flint, 2011). Their overlapping presence produces a condition in which the soldier's body is constantly present without a clear boundary between civilian and military space. Soldiers, checkpoints, and outposts become part of daily routines in the urban space. Over time, inhabitants not only have adapted to such practices, but living with the many different forms of militarisation has been normalised (Papadakis, 2005). This constant exposure and intense visibility become mechanisms through which militarism stabilises itself.

The normalised militarised presence operates within a state of unresolved conflict. Kirsch and Flint (2011) describe Cyprus as a “conflict in limbo” environment, where the distinction between war and peace is unclear, resulting in a complex uncertain reality. The lack of resolution sustains a sense of vulnerability, which justifies the ongoing presence of the military as protection. Militarism exploits this condition of uncertainty to legitimise its presence and consolidate its power. It operates through spatial practices, such as surveillance, checkpoints, and public rituals, that organise movement, visibility, and behaviour. Through these practices, space becomes a medium of control and for producing meaning. It enacts new norms and shapes historical narratives, that embeds within institutions, maps, and stories (Kirsch & Flint, 2011). As Hajer and Versteeg (2005) argue, such practices stabilise “fixed notions of spatial hierarchies,” shaping how power is perceived and accepted. Militarism therefore uses space to construct dominant narratives in which its presence appears natural, necessary, and justified. In this way, militarised power extends beyond infrastructure, organising social relations through what is seen, performed and normalised in everyday life.

Women in Militarised Geographies

This research examines how militarism organises social relations and dominant narratives around women. As Cynthia Enloe argues, militarism is a “gradual process through which something becomes controlled by, dependent on, and derives its value from” (Enloe, 2000). In this process, gender is central. Drawing on Enloe (2000) and Kirsch and Flint (2011) this research argues that militarism instrumentalises women’s bodies to sustain its authority. It does so by attaching value and meaning to women, making gender a primary tool for control. The research therefore examines how militarism produces and stabilises dominant gender narratives, how it organises them spatially, and how these narratives structure behaviour, visibility, and hierarchy in everyday life.

Approach

The paper develops this argument in three steps.

Chapter B:

First, theoretical and archival analysis examine; how militarism produces gendered meanings and stabilises fixed hierarchies?

Chapter C:

Second, spatial analysis investigates; how military spatially organises and perpetuates these meanings within Cyprus’s landscape?

Chapter D:

Third, through visual ethnography and oral histories in Pyla, the paper unveils; how women experience, negotiate, and at times disrupt these meanings in everyday life?

2. Institutionalising gender roles

A. Theoretical Framework

This chapter examines how militarism produces gendered meanings and stabilises fixed hierarchies. Drawing on Foucault (1978), Butler (1988), and Williams (1991), it conceptualises this process in three operations: inscription, stabilisation, and circulation.

Power and the Saturated Body

Foucault’s (1978) concept of the “sexual saturation of the female body” shows how power operates by attaching meaning to bodies. The female body becomes a site of control through which sexuality and behaviour are regulated, ultimately limiting its autonomy. In militarised environments, this saturation manifests as fixed gender roles. Women are

positioned as caregivers, victims, or sexualised bodies. These meanings do not simply describe women; they constrain what women can do and how they are perceived.

Performativity and Relational Binaries

Butler (1988) explains how such gendered meanings stabilise through repetition. Hence, gender is not a natural identity but the result of repeated social acts and norms that normalise and stabilise gender identity. These acts dictate how one should perform one's body and shape how the body is perceived by society. In militarised landscapes, repetition occurs through everyday interactions between women and soldiers, institutional practises, and symbolic representations. Through constant repetition, these gender roles become fixed, normalised, and unquestioned.

Crucially, Butler adds that these roles are relational. The meaning of the male body depends on the positioning of the female body. For instance, when the woman is framed as the "object to be saved," the soldier automatically becomes the "saviour." Without this staged performance of female vulnerability, the soldier's protective role loses its meaning. Militarism therefore depends on the continuous reproduction of these binary relations between women and soldiers.

Emotional Representation as a "Body Genre"

While Foucault and Butler explain how gendered roles are produced and stabilised, Williams (1991) explains how they circulate. Her concept of "body genres" shows how visual culture uses the female body to generate collective emotion. Across the film genres of horror, pornography, and melodrama, the female body is positioned in fear, pleasure and pain accordingly, to evoke the exact same emotions to the audience. Militarism draws on this same mechanism. Women's bodies become vehicles through which narratives of protection, sacrifice, and heroism are communicated and felt. Therefore, the female body becomes the "screen" upon which militarised meanings are projected and through which it becomes persuasive to society. (Figure 1).

Together, these frameworks show that military operates through the female body. It inscribes meaning onto it, stabilises that meaning through repetition, and circulates it through emotional representation. Hence, Gender is one of militarism's organising mechanisms.

The following section demonstrates how these gendered meanings recur across visual material, revealing their systematic and institutional character.



Figure 1. Stills from pornography, horror, and melodrama films juxtaposed with military representations of women. Note. Film stills from “body genres” (Williams, 1991) are juxtaposed with images from the author’s archive, illustrating the repetition of gendered roles across visual culture and militarised contexts. Archive compiled by the author (Charilaou, 2023; updated 2026).

B. Archive Analysis

The Prototype: The Knight Errant

Sir John Everett Millais' *The Knight Errant* (1870) serves as a visual manifesto for unveiling militarised gender relations. The painting depicts a naked woman bound to a tree, immobilised and vulnerable, while a knight approaches to rescue her. The contrast between her nudity and his steel armour reinforces an unequal power dynamic. The woman is a passive victim and the soldier an active heroic saviour. As noted by Carreiras (2006) and Cockburn (2001), such imagery entrenches the belief that soldiers fight to protect women, while women exist as the objects requiring that protection. The female body becomes the condition through which the soldier's role gains meaning perpetuating oppressing narratives of protection.



Figure 2. The Knight Errant. Note. Painting by Sir John Everett Millais (1870). From Tate (2023).

Methodology:

To demonstrate that these gendered structures extend beyond a single image, this paper builds on prior research (Charilaou, 2023), specifically the archive analysis developed in the thesis *Bodies of Antithesis*. This archive compiles visual representations of women in relation to soldiers across media, documentary, and artistic production in diverse geographical contexts and periods of conflict. Through comparative analysis, it identifies recurring patterns in how women are positioned in relation to militarised actors, revealing the systematic and relational nature of these roles.

Discovery: Fourteen Relational Roles

Through the archive analysis the research identifies fourteen recurring roles assigned to women.

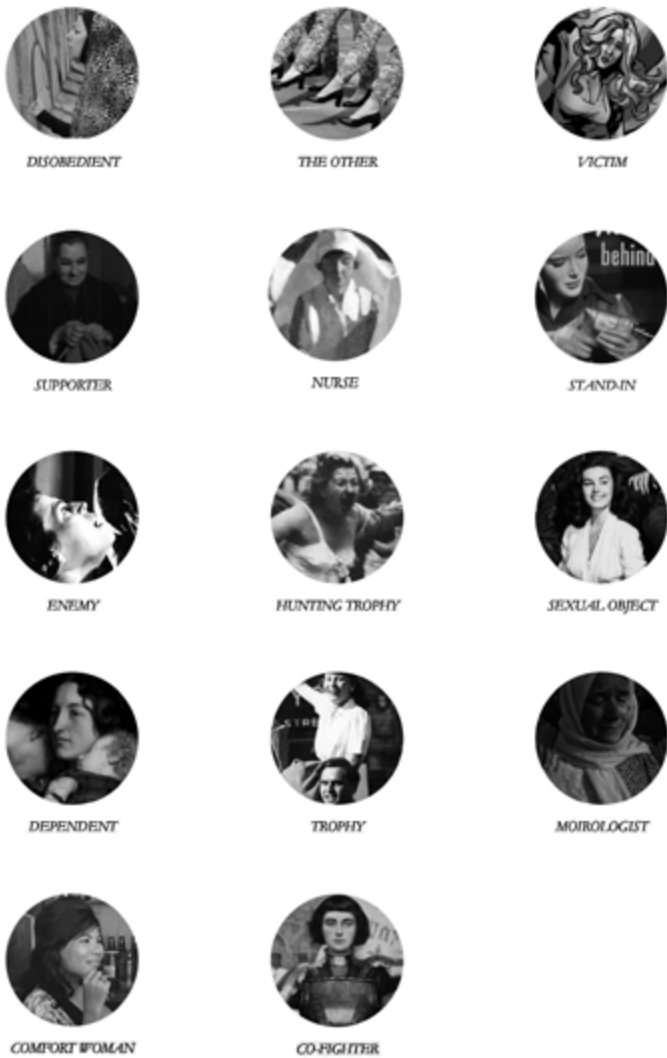


Figure 3. Gender roles of women in relation to the soldier. Note. Visual archive illustrating gendered roles in relation to soldiers. Compilation by the author (Charilaou, 2023).

These roles range from passive figures (the victim, the moirolgist, the dependent) to functional (the nurse, the supporter, the trophy, and the stand-in) and figures of exploitation and control (the hunting trophy, the enemy, the comfort woman, the other, the disobedient). Whether fighting alongside men as 'co-fighters' or framed as 'sexual objects', women's roles are consistently scripted in relation to the soldier's presence or absence.

Conclusion: Occupying the Body

These roles are not isolated representations but part of a systematic pattern. Across contexts, women are repeatedly positioned as bodies to be protected, desired, controlled, or disciplined.

The archive of fourteen roles materialises what Foucault describes as the saturation of the female body with meaning (1978). Each attribution regulates behaviour, shapes perception, and assigns value. Through repetition, these meanings stabilise into fixed gender roles, as Butler (1988) argues. These roles are both relational and hierarchical. The identity of the soldier depends on them. The archive makes this dependency explicit: militarism mobilises bodies in antithesis. The soldier as 'saviour' requires the woman as a 'body to be saved'; the 'predatory soldier' depends on the 'fearful woman'. These binaries structure and sustain gendered power relations. At the same time, these roles operate affectively in society. As Williams (1991) suggests, the female body functions as a medium to evoke collective emotions. Militarism draws on this capacity, transforming women's bodies into vehicles for narratives of protection, sacrifice, heroism, and fear, narratives that become socially persuasive and widely accepted.

The archive thus functions not as a collection of images, but as evidence of a mechanism. Militarism institutionalises gender roles by producing, stabilising, and circulating these meanings. Its symbolic authority depends on women's bodies as the medium through which the soldier's identity is defined. The recurrence of these roles across historical and geographical contexts points to an institutional logic rather than isolated representation. Cyprus is therefore not an exception, but a site where this broader system becomes particularly visible. What distinguishes the Cypriot case is the persistence of these conditions: shaped by an unresolved conflict and reinforced by post-colonial infrastructures, militarised logics have remained embedded in everyday life since its independence from British rule.

3. Spatialising gender roles in Cyprus

Spatialising Gender Roles in Militarised Cyprus

This chapter examines how military organises and perpetuates these meanings within Cyprus's landscape. It shows how militarism uses space to stage, distribute, and conceal women's roles, embedding them within the built and symbolic landscape of Cyprus.

The Visual-Spatial Trigger: Nightclubs in Nature

Nightclubs in Nature by Mustafa Hulusi reveals the spatial entanglement between soldiers and women's bodies, particularly sex workers. The photographic series juxtaposes sexualised commercial imagery with militarised landscapes: a 'Sexy Lady' neon sign glowing in a parched grain field; the 'Biyax' logo rising against the Pentadaktylos mountains; a 'Playboy' sign tucked among palm trees; a 'Miss Me' sign surrounded by straw. Behind these nightclub façades operate illegal brothels embedded within Northern Cyprus's militarised zones. These sex-work venues spatialise the relationship between soldiers and women as sexual labourers, making visible how gender roles unveiled in the archive materialise in space. Hulusi's work functions here as spatial evidence. It reveals that militarised gender relations are organised geographically, directing attention to a first category of sites: pleasure sites.



Figure 4.

a) Pleasure sites

Military presence consistently produces zones of leisure and sex work around military bases (Loopmans & Van Den Broeck, 2011). In Cyprus, this pattern emerges through both visual evidence and spatial mapping. Mapping Hulusi's (2019) 'Nightclubs in Nature' shows that these venues form a cluster between three military bases. This reflects what Kirsch and Flint (2011) define as *pleasure sites*: districts shaped by the off-duty activities of

soldiers which have spontaneously colonized various districts. This pattern extends across the island. In Limassol, the road known as “The Strip”, adjacent to the British Akrotiri base, has developed into a nightlife corridor catering to military personnel, advertising “topless girls” and “all-day English breakfasts” (Kirsch & Flint, 2011). Similar formations appear elsewhere: the FKK sauna club “Temple of Aphrodite” near the Greek Cypriot base at Palodia; bars near Greek and UN bases along the buffer zone in Nicosia offering discounted prices to soldiers; strip clubs near the UK Dhekelia base; and illegal brothels operating within the buffer zone in Pyla.

This spatial arrangement creates a sharp asymmetry. The soldier remains highly visible, embodying state authority and upholding patriarchal and national structures (Vassiliadou, 2002). In contrast, the female sex worker is pushed into marginal, concealed spaces, behind nightclub façades, next to borders, within no-human’s-land or within the buffer zone. Her labour sustains the off-duty life and quick escapism of military personnel, yet it is spatially systematically erased from the official urban fabric.

b) Performative Sites

While pleasure sites conceal leisure and sexual forms of labour, other spaces do the opposite: they stage gender roles publicly. Militarism actively produces sites where women perform care, support, and mourning to sustain national narratives.

- Crystallising the Saviour Effect

Monuments fix gender roles into permanent spatial form. Across Cyprus, numerous military statues consistently depict the soldier as heroic and sacrificial, while women are largely absent from the commemorative landscape.

When women do appear, they occupy subordinate roles, such as passive, vulnerable, or supportive, as seen in the Liberty Monument in Nicosia. Such representations solidify gender hierarchy where women’s presence exists to validate soldier’s heroism.



Figure 5. Liberty Monument, Nicosia.

Note. Photograph by the author (Charilaou, 2023), originally produced for the thesis *Bodies of Antithesis*.

Staging Care as a Natural Female Obligation

While monuments freeze gender roles, annual military parades activate them through repetition. Held in central streets, these events position women as caregivers and supporters. An example is the specific inclusion of women pushing veterans of the 1974 war in wheelchairs.



Figure 6. Military parade in Cyprus.
Note. Women carrying former soldiers in wheelchairs during a military parade. Author unknown (2020).
From National Guard of Cyprus.

This performance re-enacts the wartime role women as the nurse, framing the soldier as a figure deserving care, while casting the woman as the one who must provide it. Through repetition in public space, these acts become normalised. As Butler (1988) argues, repeated performance stabilises gender roles as natural. Broadcast via national media, these acts extend beyond the street into domestic space, drawing the audience into the performance as passive supporters. By transforming the city into a stage, militarism normalises care as a natural female gendered obligation.

Capitalising on Women's Grief

Commemorative practices organise grief spatially. Memorials, churches, and monuments become stages where women repeatedly perform grief under armed military presence.



Figure 7. Military presence at the funeral of a former soldier in Cyprus.
Note. Author unknown (2020).
From National Guard of Cyprus.

During these events, women enact the role of the *moirologist*, framing the soldier as a heroic sacrifice figure. The juxtaposition of these two bodies produces a powerful emotional script. Drawing on Williams (1991), the female body in pain generates collective emotions: loss, gratitude, and loyalty, akin to the melodrama genre. The military does not merely attend funerals; it instrumentalises them. By capitalising on women's grief, it transforms private mourning into a public mechanism that reinforces military legitimacy.

Geography of Uneven Visibility

These spatial practices demonstrate that militarism organises women's bodies by controlling their visibility. Women associated with care, mourning, and admiration are made highly visible in 'performative sites', where their labour supports the image of the soldier as heroic and legitimate. In contrast, women associated with sexual and leisure labour that disrupts this image are displaced in 'pleasure sites', remaining marginal and concealed. This uneven visibility is strategic. It reveals a structural dependency. Militarism depends on both; women's emotional labour to legitimise itself, and women's sexual labour to sustain everyday military life. By separating these roles spatially and controlling visibility, it preserves its moral image while maintaining its functional needs. Women's labour is therefore not only exploited, but also selectively revealed or erased.

4. Lived Experience in Pyla

Context

This dependency becomes most legible in Pyla, where these overlapping military regimes, weak regulation, and informal economies intersect. Here, militarised power is not abstract, it is lived, negotiated, and at times resisted. This chapter shifts from spatial analysis to lived experience, foregrounding women's marginalised voices. These accounts show how women experience, reproduce, and disrupt gender roles in everyday life.



Figure 8. Pyla's militarised landscape. Note. Photograph by the author (Charilaou, 2023), originally produced for the thesis *Bodies of Antithesis*.

Pyla is trapped within the buffer zone and adjacent to the British Sovereign Base Area of Dhekelia. It is surrounded by six military forces; UK, Greek, Greek Cypriot, Turkish, Turkish Cypriot, and UN. Simultaneously, it is the only village where Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities coexist under a bicommunal council. While it falls under the government of the Republic of Cyprus, it is policed by UN peacekeepers. It also contains a checkpoint allowing movement between the Republic of Cyprus and Northern Cyprus. These overlapping and often conflicting authorities, together with the border's porosity produce fragmented regulation and legal ambiguity.

This ambiguity is not neutral. Regulatory gaps, environmental isolation, political exceptionality, and high military presence enable activities that would otherwise be restricted. As Papadakis (2005) notes, it attracts informal economies, including “nightclubs and gambling houses ...seeking the freedoms that only a ‘no-man’s land’ could offer” and other forms of “unregulated pleasure.” Pyla thus exemplifies what Kirsch and Flint (2011) describe as a pleasure site: spaces where militarisation and leisure economies converge.

Methodology and Positionality

Existing research on Pyla focuses on national narratives and belonging (Papadakis, 2005) and on intercultural and sociolinguistic dynamics (Karpava, 2024), largely overlooking gendered experience. This research addresses that gap through a qualitative feminist methodology combining oral history, visual ethnography, and spatial analysis.

Semi-structured and walking interviews were conducted with women across the village. Moving between public and domestic spaces enabled participants to anchor narratives to specific locations, revealing how mobility, risk, and routine shift across overlapping jurisdictions. This approach situates memory within space, linking personal experience to spatial conditions.

Visual ethnography extends this analysis combining photography, video, and visual storytelling, including site-specific performance. These methods translate interviews into spatial narratives while foregrounding embodied experience under conditions of surveillance and control.

Positionality shaped both access and responses. As a Greek Cypriot woman raised in militarised Nicosia, I occupied a familiar yet partial position. This positioning introduced limitations, particularly in language and trust. Specifically, during the interviews, Greek Cypriot participants tended to speak openly about the Turkish military, whereas Turkish Cypriot participants frequently adopted more cautious or neutral positions. Acknowledging this asymmetry frames the findings as relational and situated, rather than neutral.

Role of Ethnicity

Militarisation in Pyla functions through ethnic perception. The same soldier is interpreted differently depending on affiliation: the “native” soldier as protector, while the “other’s” soldier as a threat. Interviews confirm this pattern. Greek Cypriot women often overlook and normalise nearby Greek Cypriot outposts while expressing fear toward Turkish and

Turkish Cypriot ones, and vice versa. Militarisation sustains this divide by continuously producing the figure of the “enemy” to legitimise their own roles for protection. In a bi-communal setting such as Pyla, this process generates competing national narratives and uneven exposure to risk. Greek Cypriot women are positioned as needing protection from Turkish, Turkish Cypriot and British forces, while Turkish Cypriot women are exposed to a broader and more fragmented military presence (Papastavrou, 2012). Risk is therefore shaped not only by gender, but by ethnicity within overlapping regimes of protection and threat.

Stories from Pyla

Militarisation organises women’s bodies through uneven visibility, structured by the type of labour they are expected to perform. The following section examines how these dynamics unfold in everyday life through women’s narratives in Pyla. Four stories isolate key mechanisms:

- (1) surveillance becoming environmental harassment,
- (2) its extension into domestic space,
- (3) women’s labour sustaining military presence, and
- (4) moments of disruption.

Story 1 – Surveillance Becoming Environmental Harassment

Voices:

A Turkish Cypriot woman recalls:

“While I was driving on the highway, military trucks carrying around fifteen soldiers surrounded me... they were looking and waving at me.”

A Greek Cypriot woman reflects on a teenage experience:

“While walking through the village with a friend, I heard a man calling my name. When I turned around, I saw unfamiliar men. Later, I realised they were soldiers from the hilltop outpost overlooking the schoolyard where I used to play. While playing with my friends, we used to shout each other’s names. When they called my name, I understood they had been watching us. I later reported the incident to the municipality.”

Analysis:

Surveillance transforms here from passive observation to active intervention. The elevated outpost allows continuous visibility, embedding surveillance within the village. By calling her name, soldiers convert this visibility into environmental sexual harassment. Surveillance becomes targeted and embodied. This shift repositions the woman from an observed subject to a targeted and sexualised body. Public space becomes a site of intrusion and uncertainty, structured by the soldier’s power in directly materialising surveillance.

Her report does not alter these conditions, but it makes the mechanism visible.

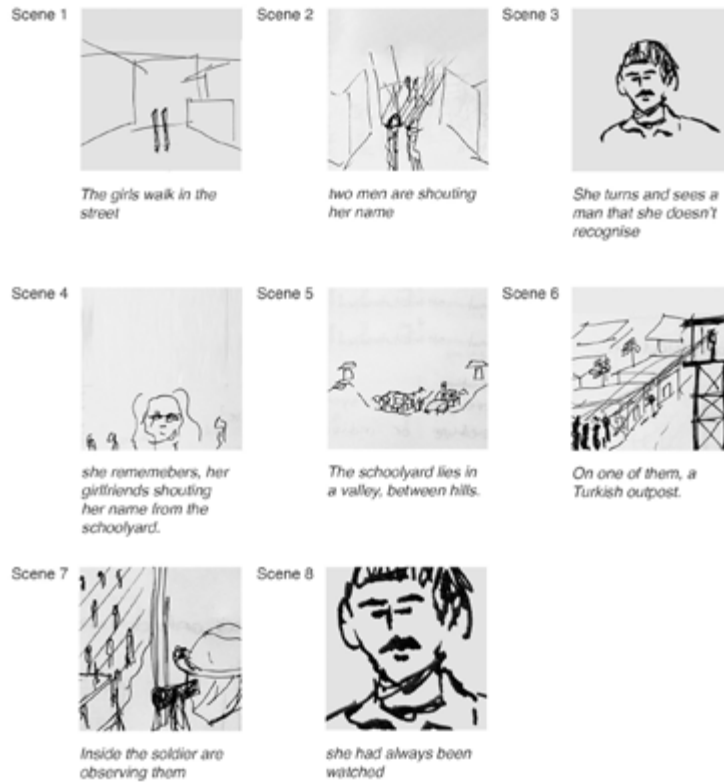


Figure 9. Storyboard: Surveillance becoming environmental sexual harassment. Note. Visual ethnography by the author (Charilaou, 2023), developed for the thesis Bodies of Antithesis.

Story 2 - Surveillance Entering Domestic Space

Voices:

A Greek Cypriot woman states:

"I get irritated and scared when they shout slogans at night."

Another woman, speaking from her bedroom while pointing to the Turkish outpost, explains: "I feel like I am always watched... I have difficulties living everyday life knowing that soldiers observe us from the hills."



Figure 10. Woman on her balcony in Pyla: Surveillance entering domestic space

Note. Photograph by the author (Charilaou, 2023), developed for the thesis *Bodies of Antithesis*.

Analysis:

If the first story shows surveillance becoming direct in public space, this one shows how it extends into intimate space. The visual alignment between the outpost and the bedroom collapses the boundary between outside and inside. The statue further reinforces this condition. Its fixed gesture with his hand raised to his mouth commanding silence, projects authority into the landscape, stabilising surveillance both spatially and symbolically. Power operates through anticipation. Constant visibility produces a heightened awareness of the body that often turns into fear. The possibility of being seen regulates behaviour within the home. Control is internalised, structuring how the body is positioned, moves, and feels within domestic space.

Story 3 - Gendered Labour Sustaining Military Presence

Voices:

“I brought food to my grandson during his military service.”

“Sometimes we give them rides.”

“They come and ask for coffee.”

“I supported my boyfriend during his obligatory military service.”

“We were preparing and delivering food to soldiers during holidays.”

Analysis:

These testimonies shift the focus from control to dependency. Both Turkish and Greek Cypriot women living near military outposts describe how soldiers regularly rely on nearby households. Women give rides, prepare food, and provide everyday support, both individually and collectively. Military presence depends on this labour. Proximity enables constant interaction, embedding soldiers within daily routines. Women provide care, food, and transport—labour that is unpaid, unrecognised, expected, and normalised.

In turn, this labour reproduces women's role as available and supportive. Dependency is masked as ordinary, everyday practice.

Story 4 - Negotiating Expected Roles

Voices:

A migrant woman recounts:

"While I was standing on my balcony, soldiers asked me to take a photograph of them. I took it. Then they asked me to send it. I knew they expected my contact details, and I didn't want that. So, I said the photo hadn't turned out well. They left. I kept the image as a souvenir."

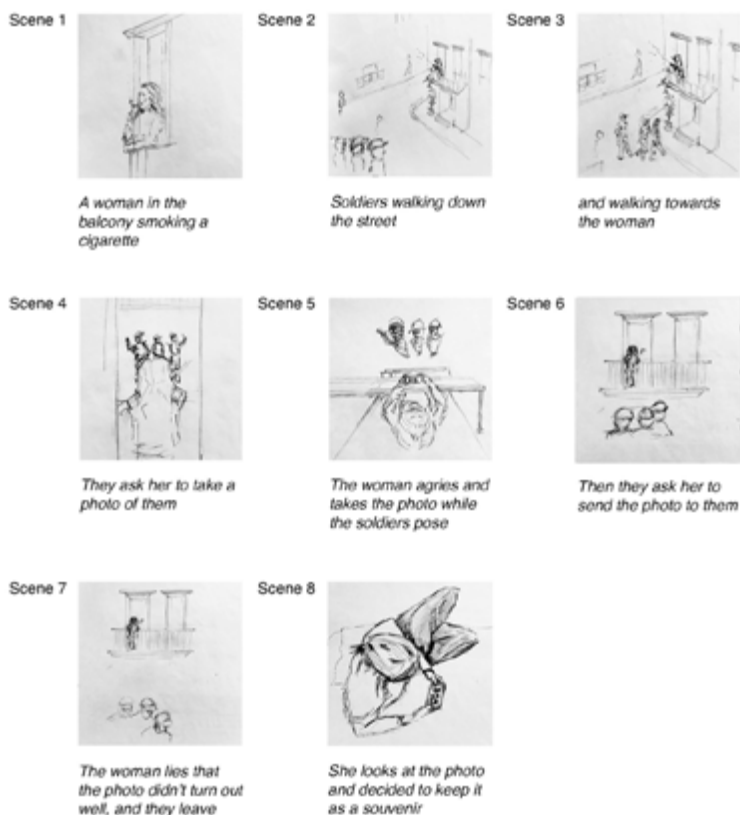


Figure 11. Storyboard: Negotiating expected roles. Note. Visual ethnography by the author (Charilaou, 2023), developed for the thesis Bodies of Antithesis.

Analysis:

The previous set of stories unveil that militarised interaction operates through expectation: women are assumed to be accessible and compliant. By taking the photograph, she initially complies with such expectations. The critical moment is refusal. By withholding her contact details, she interrupts the expected continuation of the interaction. This micro-resistance exposes the mechanism. Control relies on compliance and can be unsettled when compliance is withdrawn.

Absence: Intimacy and the Unspoken**Voices:**

“My friends saved their virginity for soldiers”

These stories document visible interactions of surveillance, intrusion, and care labour. Yet militarisation also depends on forms of labour that remain systematically unspoken. Accounts of Pyla as a site of “unregulated pleasure” (Papadakis, 2005; United Nations, 2025) foreground leisure economies while obscuring the gendered labour that sustains them.

This paper intervenes in this absence by tracing how these economies extend into intimate life. Interview material suggests that militarised logics do not stop at the level of space or labour, but organise desire, sexuality, and belonging. Narratives of young women “saving” their virginity for soldiers reveal how intimacy itself becomes aligned with the figure of the soldier. These are neither isolated nor purely personal choices; they reflect the internalisation of militarised and national logics within women’s bodies.

This exposes a critical blind spot in existing accounts of militarised leisure economies. Further research must confront how militarised power operates not only through space and labour, but through the intimate sphere, where its effects are most deeply internalised and least publicly acknowledged.

5. Discussion

These stories trace how militarised power operates through everyday spatial practices. Surveillance shifts from distant observation to direct intervention (Story 1) and then operates through anticipation (Story 2). It moves from public space into the domestic interior, restructuring how women inhabit both. Military presence also depends on women’s labour (Story 3). Care, mobility, and support embed it within daily routines, rendering it ordinary. This dependency is masked by its normalisation: what appears as everyday assistance is a condition of military functioning. Yet this system is not fixed. Moments of refusal expose its limits (Story 4). Even minimal acts disrupt the expectations that sustain it.

What remains unspoken is equally significant. The absence of intimate and sexual labour from narratives points to forms of exploitation that cannot be publicly articulated yet remain central to militarised economies. Pyla exposes militarisation as a layered system operating through exposure, internalisation, dependency, and concealment. Across these layers, women's bodies sustain the very structures that constrain them. At the same time, their actions reveal where those structures can be negotiated, resisted, and destabilised.

6. Conclusion

Militarism does not operate solely through territory, institutions, or force. It is sustained through the organisation of women's bodies. It relies on women in two interlinked ways: symbolically, to produce the figure of the soldier as hero, protector, and saviour; and materially, to sustain the everyday functioning of military presence through care, labour, and interaction.

Across the paper, this dependency is traced as a set of interconnected mechanisms. Militarism produces gendered meanings by inscribing fixed roles onto women's bodies, stabilising them through repetition, and circulating them through affective representation (Chapter B). These roles render the soldier legible: the protector emerges only through the construction of a vulnerable body that requires protection. At the same time, militarised landscapes organise these roles spatially (Chapter C). Practices of visibility and concealment distribute women's labour unevenly, staging care, mourning, and support as public performances, while displacing sexual and leisure labour into marginal and concealed spaces. This spatial division enables militarism to maintain a moral image while sustaining the practices that enable its everyday functioning.

In Pyla, these dynamics become tangible through women's omitted voices (Chapter D). Militarised power is enacted through ordinary spatial practices: surveillance shifts from distant observation to direct harassment and extends into domestic space; care labour embeds military presence within daily routines; and expectations of availability structure everyday interactions. Moreover, the very few testimonies on and the difficulty in unveiling sexual and leisure labour further render how deeply militarisation infiltrates women's bodies through sexuality, self-perception, value and belonging and how such connection remain systematically hidden. These practices render militarisation continuous and intimate, shaping how women move, behave, and perceive themselves. Yet they also reveal points of tension. Acts of refusal, however minor, expose the system's reliance on compliance and its susceptibility to disruption.

Oral histories are central to this analysis. The testimonies of women in Pyla provide real-time, embodied accounts of how militarisation is lived, negotiated, and internalised in everyday space. They reveal what remains invisible in official narratives: how surveillance is felt, how labour is normalised, and how power enters intimate life. These voices do not simply illustrate the argument, they produce it. By foregrounding women's experiences, the research shifts the point of view from the centre of power to its margins. This repositioning

is not only methodological but political. It proposes a way of reading and designing space from below, where marginalised voices become critical tools for exposing the hierarchical and oppressive structures embedded in the built environment.

Crucially, this system depends on forms of gender labour and embodiment that it cannot openly acknowledge. Women's emotional, sexual, and care labour sustains militarised life, yet remains partially concealed or normalised as natural. Militarism does not simply rely on this labour; it produces the conditions that make it appear inevitable, apolitical, and invisible. Militarism requires visibility to legitimise itself yet depends on concealment to function.

Importantly, this dependency and exploitation of the female body is not specific to Pyla nor Cyprus. The recurrence of these gendered roles across historical and geographical contexts indicates a broader institutional logic. Pyla does not stand as an exception, but as a site where this system becomes particularly legible.

By exposing this dependency and its mechanisms, this research reframes women not as passive symbols but as central to the reproduction of militarised power. At the same time, it reveals where that power can be unsettled. Where roles are disrupted, expectations refused, or labour withdrawn, militarised power is unsettled.

Military power is structured on a gendered infrastructure, that organises bodies, meanings, and space to sustain its authority. Its power lies not only in what it enforces, but in what it normalises and obscures. It is precisely within these concealed dependencies that its limits and its vulnerabilities begin to emerge.

Note

1. This article is based on research originally conducted for the master's thesis *Bodies of Antithesis* (2023), developed at Delft University of Technology under the supervision of Dr. V. E. Balz (Spatial Planning and Strategy) and L. P. J. van den Burg (Urban Design).

Bibliography

- Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), 519–531. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>
- Carreiras, H. (2006). *Gender and the military: Women in the armed forces of Western democracies*. Routledge.
- Charilaou, A. (2023). *Bodies of antithesis* [Master's thesis, Delft University of Technology]. <https://resolver.tudelft.nl/uuid:082470bc-952e-4e2a-994a-285858fa0881>
- Cockburn, C. (2001). *Gender in armed conflict and peace processes*. *The Cyprus Review*, 13(1), 59–74.

- Enloe, C. (2000). *Maneuvers: The international politics of militarizing women's lives*. University of California Press.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality: Volume 1: An introduction* (R. Hurley, Trans.). Pantheon Books.
- Hajer, M. A., & Versteeg, W. (2005). A decade of discourse analysis of environmental politics: Achievements, challenges, perspectives. *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 7(3), 175–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15239080500339646>
- Hulusi, M. (2019). Nightclubs in Nature [Exhibition]. *PI Artworks*, London and Istanbul.
- Karpava, S. (2024). Linguistic landscape of Pyla, a bi-communal village in Cyprus: Multilingualism, ethnolinguistic vitality and internationalisation. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2024.2395468>
- Kirsch, S., & Flint, C. (2011). *Reconstructing conflict: Integrations and divisions in modern Cyprus*. Ashgate.
- Loopmans, M., & Van den Broeck, P. (2011). *Global pressures, local measures: The re-regulation of sex work in the Antwerp Schipperskwartier*. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 102(5), 548–561. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9663.2011.00660.x>
- Papadakis, Y. (2005). *Echoes from the dead zone: Across the Cyprus divide*. I.B. Tauris.
- Papastavrou, S. (2012). *Decolonising the Cypriot woman: Moving beyond the rhetoric of the Cyprus problem*. *The Cyprus Review*, 24(2), 95–108.
- United Nations. (2025). *Report of the Secretary-General on his mission of good offices in Cyprus* (S/2025/448). <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4085045>
- Vassiliadou, M. (2002). *Questioning nationalism: The patriarchal and national struggles of Cypriot women within a European context*. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 9(4), 459–482.
- Williams, L. (1991). *Film bodies: Gender, genre, and excess*. *Film Quarterly*, 44(4), 2–13.

Resumen: Este artículo examina cómo la militarización configura la vida cotidiana de las mujeres en el entorno disputado de Pyla, atrapado dentro de la zona de amortiguamiento y rodeado por seis fuerzas militares (Reino Unido, ONU, turca, griega, grecochipriota y turcochipriota). El proyecto se nutre de la exposición *Nightclubs in Nature* de Mustafa Hulusi, que representa espacios de trabajo sexual insertos en zonas militarizadas del norte de Chipre. Hulusi expone el entrelazamiento espacial entre mujeres, particularmente trabajadoras sexuales, y soldados. Este proyecto amplía ese material inicial, con el objetivo de documentar experiencias vividas por mujeres que permanecen en gran medida ausentes. La investigación aborda esta brecha mediante historia oral y etnografía visual realizadas con mujeres en Pyla. Estos testimonios muestran cómo la militarización estructura tanto la vida íntima como la pública, a través de la extensión de la vigilancia hacia los espacios domésticos y del acoso sexual cotidiano en los espacios públicos. Repetidas en el espacio

urbano, estas prácticas regulan cómo las mujeres se mueven, cómo son vistas y cómo se perciben a sí mismas. La militarización moviliza los cuerpos en antítesis: el soldado como “salvador” vinculado a la mujer como “cuerpo a ser salvado”, o el “cuerpo depredador” del soldado frente al “cuerpo del miedo” de la mujer. La reproducción de estos roles sostiene estructuras de poder de género.

Apoyándose en la performatividad de género (Butler, 1988), la investigación sostiene que estos roles se mantienen y legitiman mediante una repetición constante y forzada. Los estudios sobre militarización (Enloe, 2000) y su geografía (Kirsch & Flint, 2011) evidencian la dependencia simbólica y funcional de estas estructuras y revelan cómo se inscriben en el espacio. Al vincular los testimonios marginados de las mujeres con estos marcos teóricos, la investigación muestra cómo las infraestructuras y discursos militares de origen colonial —controles, vigilancia y gestión fronteriza— sostienen normas patriarcales, confinando a las mujeres a roles pasivos, sexualizados o de cuidado.

La militarización instrumentaliza los cuerpos de las mujeres para el control territorial. Este trabajo expone este proceso, replanteando a las mujeres no como símbolos pasivos, sino como la propia infraestructura a través de la cual el poder militarizado se sostiene y puede ser desestabilizado. Sus testimonios no solo describen este sistema; revelan sus mecanismos, tensiones y puntos de fractura.

Palabras clave: Militarización - Territorialidad corporal - Geografías íntimas - Etnografía visual - Performatividad de género - Violencia espacializada

[The translations of the abstracts were reviewed by the author of each article.]

Andria Charilaou. Cypriot urbanist working on feminist and decolonial practices. A graduate of Delft University of Technology, she employs visual ethnography and oral history to examine contested and militarized landscapes, foregrounding women's embodied experiences in order to challenge dominant narratives.