

Gendered Narratives in Adamantios Diamantis' *The World of Cyprus*

MARIA PHOTIOU¹

Abstract

In this paper, I examine Adamantios Diamantis' painting The World of Cyprus as a representation of a male-dominated society where women are marginalised. Through the analysis of the artwork, I will consider how the piece presents a traditional 'world of Cyprus' that was beginning to disappear during the post-1960s. I will refer to Diamantis' work as an example to explore gender relations and socio-political conditions in patriarchal Cyprus. I will argue that socio-political conditions in Cyprus left little space for women to contest patriarchy, to fight for gender equality, or to gain public visibility.²

Keywords: patriarchal Cyprus, Adamantios Diamantis, gendered narratives, gender roles, gender studies, Cypriot art

Introduction: The Making of *The World of Cyprus*

The monumental artwork *The World of Cyprus* was created by Cypriot artist Adamantios Diamantis (1900-1994) between the years 1967 and 1972. Diamantis is a foremost Cypriot artist who studied at the London St. Martin School of Art and at the Royal college of Art during the early 1920s. After his return to Cyprus in 1926, he taught in secondary schools until the early 1960s.³ *The World of Cyprus* is based on a series of drawings and sketches made during Diamantis' peregrinations around the island between 1931 and 1970. The final work of 1.75 m height and 17.50 m width consists of 67 people and 25 sceneries. Interestingly, the actual title, *The World of Cyprus*, was given to the piece around the time of its first exhibition at the Museum of Folk Art in Nicosia, in 1975. Initially, Diamantis referred to the work as a 'picture without a name' but later adopted the title 'Demography'. He then borrowed the final title from his friend and poet George Seferis and dedicated the work to him.⁴

¹ Maria Photiou, Research Fellow, University of Derby, PhD in Art History, Loughborough University.

² This paper is derived, in part, from research I undertook for my doctoral research entitled *Rethinking the History of Cypriot Art: Greek Cypriot Women Artists in Cyprus* at Loughborough University.

³ For further information on Diamantis' life and work, see Eleni Nikita, *Adamantios Diamantis: His Life and Work* (Nicosia: Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation, 1998).

⁴ Adamantios Diamantis, *The World of Cyprus: A Narrative* (Nicosia: Kailas Printers & Lithogra-

Diamantis produced several preparatory trials for *The World of Cyprus*. For over three years he deliberated on the type of composition, colours, and figures for this creation. An important element in his work is the construction of a Cypriot national identity and culture. This is not surprising if we consider that in the 1950 referendum, the majority of Greek Cypriots voted in favour of union with Greece. It was within this socio-political context that Diamantis produced *The World of Cyprus*. As Danos points out, Diamantis ‘embarked on a decades-long process of idolising the Cypriot peasantry and their land as living testimonies to the island’s Hellenic cultural heritage’.⁵ Diamantis talked about his fascination with the ordinary people from the villages he visited:

‘For the first time I came to know my country. [...] I saw the world of Cyprus, I became familiar with it, and I started drawing anything I could: men, women children. [...] What an indescribable revelation this was for me! Its antiquity, its truth moved me tremendously. [...] Since then, I have seen no other element in Cyprus that has moved me so much as the study of the people of Cyprus. The women stood as statues and moved like archaic figures. [...] The ancient and eternal figures of this place constitute important sources of inspiration.’⁶

Diamantis constructed in *The World of Cyprus* an idolisation of the people he met and the places he visited. Colour was fundamental in the realisation of the work; however, the choice of colour was another problem that troubled the artist for a long time. Diamantis discusses in the following narrative his struggles to solve the problems he was experiencing in relation to the composition, colour, and figures: ‘In other words, more than three years after I had become involved in this painting I had solved all the problems: the picture was drawn but without colour’.⁷ His choice to draw the image with black and white shades is a politicised strategy to emphasise the national identity of his figures. Diamantis’ use of exclusively black and white shades is based on the traditional colours that Greek Cypriots were constrained to wear under the Ottoman Empire occupation. Consequently, through the occupation, the aesthetic tradition evolved into a radical consciousness of the ‘other’; black garments for Greeks, red for Turks. Diamantis’ employment of predom-

phers LTD, 2002), p. 89.

⁵ Antonis Danos, ‘Twentieth-Century Greek Cypriot Art: An “Other” Modernism on the Periphery,’ *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* (October 2014), p. 220.

⁶ Quoted in Danos, *ibid.*, p. 220.

⁷ Adamantios Diamantis, *ibid.*, p. 40.

inantly black colour also mirrors Cypriot tradition, specifically 'vrakes' (the traditional costume for Cypriot men), and the black cassocks of the priests in Cyprus.

Religion is another fundamental element in Diamantis' work. This is not surprising if we consider that Archbishop Makarios III served as the first president of Cyprus during 1960 and 1977. Makarios was considered to be the ethnarch and led the political affairs of the Greek Cypriot community. The pivotal position of the church in socio-political happenings is represented in Diamantis' *The World of Cyprus*. The central scene of the work shows two imposing figures: one is a man from Pygi village, and the other is priest Papaconstantinos from Pera Chorio of Nisou village. Diamantis described the priest as 'tall, bulky, proud and imposing [...] and with the gravitas of the "cloth" and the priesthood [...] which is disappearing. The priest of the village, the master, the judge, severe perhaps but just, his opinion, his judgement always right and respected'.⁸ Diamantis reinforces the importance of religion by positioning an image of a church in the background of the central scene. As he explained, 'The church in the centre was also a solution, a link'.⁹ Without doubt, the priest's image, along with the church representation in the background, emphasises the close relationship between Greek Orthodox religion and patriarchal Cypriot society.

Women and Patriarchy in Cyprus

Patriarchy, the institutionalised domination of society by men, had long been a part of Cypriot society. For decades, patriarchal structures prevented women from actively participating in the political State of affairs in Cyprus. Heidi Hartman defines the term 'patriarchy' in her article *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* as a social hierarchy of relationships among men in order to dominate women:

'We can usefully define patriarchy as a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which though hierarchical, establish and create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. Though patriarchy is hierarchical and men of different classes, races or ethnic groups have different places in the patriarchy, they are also united in the shared relationship of dominance over their women; they are dependent on each other to maintain that domination. [...] The material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men's control over women's labour

⁸ Ibid, p. 67.

⁹ Ibid, p. 70.

power. Men maintain control by excluding women from access to some essential productive resources (in capitalist societies, for example, jobs that pay living wages) and by restricting women's sexuality.¹⁰

It is important to recognise that we find a powerful formulation of these structures within Cypriot society. As Hadjipavlou and Mertan point out, 'Cypriot society has been male dominated, and patriarchal structures gave rise to social stereotypes, gender prejudices, and sexual division of labour'.¹¹

Although Diamantis portrayed in *The World of Cyprus* a representation of colonial Cyprus, it is important to recognise that certain patriarchal structures existed before British rule commenced in 1878 and remained in place after the 1960 independence. Prior to British rule, Cyprus was under Ottoman occupation, and Islamic conservatism severely affected Cypriot women's lives: their lives, their bodies, their activities, and their spirit were crushed' by the restrictive society that required women to be hidden inside the house and completely excluded from the outside world.¹² Within this context, I agree with Pollock's argument that patriarchy:

[...] does not [only] refer to the static, oppressive domination by one sex over another, but to a web of psychological relationships which institute a socially significant difference on the axis of sex which is so deeply located in our very sense of lived, sexual, identity that it appears to us as natural and unalterable.¹³

The oppressive nature of patriarchy in Cyprus produced a strong distinction between the categories of masculinity and femininity. This distinction dominated all aspects of women's lives and their social positions. For a long time women's perspectives and issues were neglected and ignored under patriarchal discourses, even today, almost everything revolves around the Cypriot conflict and the reconciliation process. Central to this is the interrelationship of nationalism and patriarchy. Given the centrality of nationalism in the socio-political history of Cyprus, it is not surprising that the island's historical interpretation is based on nationalism and the processes of patriarchal society. As Myria Vassiliadou points out:

'Cypriot women's relationship to nationalism, within a context which reflects

¹⁰ Quoted in Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 33.

¹¹ Maria Hadjipavlou and Biran Mertan, 'Cypriot Feminism: An Opportunity to Challenge Gender Inequalities and Promote Women's Rights and a Different Voice', *Cyprus Review* (September 2010), p. 265.

¹² Maria Pyrgos, *The Cypriot Woman at a Glance* (Nicosia: Pyrgos Public Relations, 1993). p. 39.

¹³ Griselda Pollock, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

the politicisation of ethnic differences on the island, forms part of the ethno-nationalist agenda of each community, and contributes to an understanding of the politics of separation and the exclusion of women from the political processes.¹⁴

Women's connection to nationalism is complicated.¹⁵ This is mostly because all nationalisms are gendered, with limited access to the resources and rights of the nation-state: 'No nation in the world grants women and men the same access to the rights and resources of the nation-state'.¹⁶ Within Cypriot patriarchal society, the national/ethnic conflict has for a long time overshadowed and disregarded women's issues. This meant that women were excluded from important positions and decision-making.

It is important to point out that women in Cyprus were as oppressed in the private sphere as they were in the public sphere. The 'culture of gossip'¹⁷ is a product of the patriarchal structure, representing women's domination by men both in public and in private. According to Vassiliadou, 'the culture of gossip concentrates around sexual morality, chastity, virginity, dowry, home cleanliness, upbringing of children, church going, dress code, [body] weight, make-up, extra-marital affairs, and pre-marital affairs'.¹⁸

In addition, Cypriot culture embraces an interrelationship between patriarchy, the State, and the Orthodox religion. A significant aspect of this is women's symbolic association with the Virgin Mary and other female saints such as Helen and Marina, who symbolise women as pure, sacrificing themselves to their husbands and their children, God and society.¹⁹ Such association served as a powerful device for women's subordination, placing much importance on women's chastity and consequently enforcing the social code of honour and shame in Cypriot culture.

Jean Peristiany wrote of the phenomenon of honour and shame in Cyprus: 'In a

¹⁴ Myria Vassiliadou, 'Questioning Nationalism: The Patriarchal and National Struggles of Cypriot Women within a European Context', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, (Vol. 9, 2002), p. 460.

¹⁵ For a comprehensive account on women and nationalism in Cyprus see Floya Anthias, 'Women and Nationalism in Cyprus', in Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (eds) *Women-Nation-State* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1989).

¹⁶ Anne, McClintock, 'No Longer in Future Heaven: Nationalism, Gender and Race', in Geoff Eley, and Ronald Suny. *Becoming National: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 260.

¹⁷ I borrow this term from Myria Vassiliadou, *A Struggle for Independence: Attitudes and Practices of the women of Cyprus*, (The University of Kent, Unpublished PhD. Thesis, 1999), p. 168.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹⁹ Maria Roussou, 'War in Cyprus: Patriarchy and the Penelope Myth', in Ridd, R. and Callaway, H. *Caught up in Conflict: Women's Response to Political Strife* (London: Macmillan Education, 1986), p. 31.

country where feminine honour is almost exclusively associated with sexual modesty this attitude assumes a particularly violent and socially significant form. Feminine honour involves not only a woman's total personality but also that of the group she represents'.²⁰ Such phenomenon was strongly supported by religion and patriarchal conventions, which together reinforced women's subordination to the male members of their family. Until recently, a woman's life was always linked to the male members of her family (her father and brothers, and later her husband), who decided what was most suitable for her. This defined her position as an inferior, so little attention was given to her needs and wishes. Furthermore, the prejudice about women's capacities limited their opportunity to get an education or to work. The best thing that could happen to women (according to the patriarchal stereotype) was an early marriage. Since the customs of society at the time required a dowry for a woman to get married (otherwise, she would remain a spinster), most fathers chose to educate only their sons and provide a dowry for their daughters. The institution of dowry became a practice in which parents provided a house and furniture for their daughters upon marriage. Cynthia Cockburn points out that this practice makes a woman 'a marketable commodity and strengthens parental power, making her dependent on the economic status of her father'.²¹ These limitations imposed on women's lives reinforced certain stereotypes regarding gender roles and attitudes.

Women's Position in *The World of Cyprus*

Diamantis described his view on women's roles and gender relations in his 1974 discussion of *The World of Cyprus*: 'In the male-dominated "World of Cyprus" woman holds a second place. In Cyprus, she takes this place either because of man's arbitrariness or willingly. With wisdom and respect she holds this position of mother and mistress in the home'.²² Undoubtedly, *The World of Cyprus* is a male construction of a male-dominated society. The fact that Diamantis suggests women's inferiority to men in his narration reveals the socio-political restrictions on women during and after the British colonial period. Likewise, in his work, the figures of men are dominating the large composition; women hold a second place, barely visible in the background in their roles as mothers with children or as young girls.

²⁰ Jean, Peristiany, *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965), p. 183.

²¹ Cynthia Cockburn, *The Line: Women, Partition and the Gender Order in Cyprus* (London: Zed Books, 2004) p. 119.

²² Diamantis Adamantios, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

The setting of *The World of Cyprus* is significant, as it shows a traditional coffee shop scene. In the 1960s, coffee shops were the second most popular gathering place in Cyprus (churches were the first). Diamantis chose to present his work as a location of the place where, until recently, women were not allowed in Cyprus: the male-dominated traditional coffee shops. During the time Diamantis constructed his work, the coffee shops 'had become a platform where nationalism would be preached, where working class subcultures would emerge, where the Left would organise itself, and where it would eventually confront the Right.'²³ Women's exclusion from the coffee shop meant that they did not have a voice in the political developments. As Maria Hadjipavlou and Biran Mertan highlight, women were viewed as 'apolitical', as they 'usually voted as their husband instructed them to because it was men's opinion on politics that mattered'.²⁴ This is highly significant if we consider that with the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus women were eligible to vote for the first time in the history of the island. However, despite women having the right to vote, they were 'stereotyped as the housewives whose vote could be used for the benefit of those in control: men'.²⁵

Women's exclusion and apolitical stance had devastating consequences during the 1974 invasion and the aftermath of the military occupation. For Cypriot women, living in a patriarchal culture led thoroughly by men had an impact on their own identities as women. The 1974 war impacted the lives of Cypriot women who were caught up in conflict:

'We left these things (meaning politics, war) to men and we had faith in them. They were our men who talked and talked for hours in the coffee shops about this politician and that, [and the English], and the English and the American and the Turks. [...] We used just to listen and hoped for the best. (She shook her head, her voice become louder.) They made a mess. [...] We (women) should not leave everything to men. Men do not give birth and do not care much when killing people, when destroying homes. We know now what is peace and what is war.'²⁶

²³ Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert and Nicos Philippou, 'Aesthetics, Narratives, and Politics in Greek-Cypriot Films: 1960-1974', in Costas Constandinides and Yiannis Papadakis (eds) *Cypriot Cinemas: Memory, Conflict, and Identity in the Margins of Europe*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 71.

²⁴ Maria Hadjipavlou and Biran Mertan, op. cit., p. 256.

²⁵ Myria Vassiliadou, "'Herstory': The Missing Woman of Cyprus", *Cyprus Review* (Vol. 9, 1997), p. 112.

²⁶ Quoted in Maria Roussou, *Greek Cypriot Women in Contemporary Cyprus with Special Reference to the 1974 War and its Consequences*, (University of London, Unpublished PhD. Thesis, 1985), p. 575.

This account, narrated by a 65-year-old refugee woman, highlights the problematic position of women living in a male-dominated society where women's presence in important decision-making processes was marginalised. Women's primary association to the private sphere and 'position of mother and mistress in the home' meant that they had limited knowledge of what was happening in the public sphere. Cynthia Cockburn in asking the question 'How did Greek Cypriot women experience the troubled years of the 1960s?' highlights that political histories are generally written by men and do not differentiate experiences by sex.²⁷

Until today, little is known on how women experienced the troubled post-independence years. As previously mentioned, the conversations on politics were taking place in the coffee shops from which women were excluded. Therefore, the making of the history was created through a male understanding of socio-political events. Maria Hadjipavlou recalls the troubled times in the 1960s:

'As girls we were expected to be taken care of, protected and silenced. Father was the head of the family (as was the head of the State) and his command and word were to be heeded. The men were in charge and women subordinate and our questions remained unanswered. Militarisation and gun shots were men's businesses'.²⁸

The socio-political landscape and conflict were shaped by men who were serving their own political agendas. In doing so, they failed to communicate the reality of their actions to their families, who were dependent on them. Cockburn, after interviewing Cypriot women, both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, who experienced the conflict as children, writes, 'Many of these women say their parents had told them little about what was going on, out of a wish to shield youngsters from adult worries'.²⁹ Cockburn also concludes that, 'This meant, of course, that the children heard the shots and explosions in 1963 and experienced the new rules of caution and curfew, but usually had insufficient information to understand the new reality'.³⁰ Hadjipavlou's account is highly significant to this:

'This was very confusing to me as I knew something was really wrong. I was afraid and unhappy. [...] we lived close enough to [...] hear gun shots and [see]

²⁷ Cynthia Cockburn, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

²⁸ Maria Hadjipavlou and Biran Mertan, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

²⁹ Cynthia Cockburn, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

smoke in the sky but no one told me. [...] I felt the men knew it all but not my mother or us, the four sisters. [...] No one explained.³¹

The oppressive nature of patriarchy in Cyprus produced a strong distinction between gender roles, and dominated all aspects of women's lives and social positions. As I previously mentioned, within this patriarchal society, not only were women's issues overshadowed and disregarded but, moreover, women were excluded from important positions and decision making. Women's passivity and their subordinated role is obvious in Diamantis' *The World of Cyprus*:

'In their communal gatherings solemn senators, priests and men, the men of Cyprus. They govern. The women are in the margin, not humbled, but always obedient, ruling over their own domain with the great strength of the mother, always vital and dominant.'³²

Constructing an alternative *The World of Cyprus*

In 1975, a year after the Turkish Invasion, Diamantis drew on his work *The World of Cyprus* to offer a response to the catastrophic event. For this, he restructured his composition and changed the original title. *When the World of Cyprus First Heard the Bad News* acts as Diamantis' statement about the new conditions in Cyprus. Now, *The world of Cyprus* is represented in action; Diamantis' figures are no longer seated in the coffee shop. In contrast, the figures are on their feet, reacting to the news of the invasion. Some are wondering what has happened, others indicate scepticism and doubt about the news, and some look furious. Similar to the original *The World of Cyprus*, this new account is male-dominated and offers little reference to female presence: a figure of a young girl is shown embracing her younger brother, and some female silhouettes are visible in the far background.

Maria Roussou wrote in relation to Diamantis' work:

'The fact that in this huge mural, women are invisible is significant, in that it accurately reflects the society that the artist is portraying. Do we regret the disappearance of this world? Can it be replaced by a world in which there is more sharing, more equality between people? Can the passive mother figures and the innocent young girls of the painting be replaced by women who are active par-

³¹ Maria Hadjipavlou and Biran Mertan, op. cit., p. 253.

³² Adamantios Diamantis, op. cit., p. 82.

ticipants in the public life of Cyprus, involved in the decision making processes that affect the affairs of the island’?³³

The aftermath of the 1974 war led women to express an outrage towards the male governors who were responsible for the actions that led the events:

‘Why had they not heeded those leftists and assorted eccentrics who had argued that generosity to the Turkish Cypriots should be national policy? Why had Makarios not made a generous offer to the Turkish Cypriots during the five long years of the inter-communal negotiations from 1968-73? [...] Why no ‘olive branch’ to the Turkish Cypriots in those years? ‘What would not we have given the Turks, just to stay in our properties?’ they now said’.³⁴

The generation of women who came to maturity in the mid-1960s experienced significant changes as they gradually embarked upon the public domain. Despite the fact that Diamantis chose to show an image of Cyprus emphasising traditional customs of the patriarchal society, he acknowledges the changed society in his narration:

‘Our world, the World of Cyprus, the world of the villages of Cyprus as they were, which is now being lost, adulterated and changed. Centuries and centuries of a life constrained under the will of others [...] they remained silent and accepted their frugal lot. What they did not accept was the curtailing of the essence of the expression of their life. Language, church, virtue, sustenance, clothing, justice, friendship, marriage. These things they never agreed to renounce’.³⁵

There is no doubt that Diamantis produced an image of Cyprus as he had viewed and experienced it over four decades of observing and generating drawings. *The World of Cyprus* is a world made of figures, people, and buildings which, after the 1960 independence, was gradually disappearing. It is interesting to examine the manner in which Diamantis dissociates himself from Cypriots, and his refusal to accept any of the modern aspects integrated in Cypriot society. As Diamantis states, “This “World of Cyprus” is on its way of being lost. It is being swamped by new, ill-digested ideas and customs. [...] I refuse to help with the change. In any case I have no

³³ Maria Roussou, op. cit., p. 8.

³⁴ Peter Loizos, *The Heart Grown Bitter: A Chronicle of Cypriot War Refugees* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 134.

³⁵ Adamantios Diamantis, op. cit., pp. 81-82.

more time'.³⁶ Diamantis' narration allows little space for social challenges and even less space for women who in Diamantis' words are 'in the margin, not humbled, but always obedient, ruling over their own domain with the great strength of the mother, always vital and dominant'.³⁷

Diamantis was not the only artist to emphasise in his work women's role as mother-wife. Many of his male contemporary artists (such as Telemachos Kanthos, Christophoros Savva, and George Georgiou) also favoured the representation of women as mothers in their work. It is important to emphasise that their actual choice of themes and figures can act as politicised devices of patriarchal society and restrictions over women's role. I agree with Stylianos-Lambert and Philippou that, 'choices of subject matter and aesthetic decisions are essentially political decisions even though, more often than not, their creators do not perceive them as such'.³⁸ Diamantis' choice to represent Cyprus and its people in a traditional way (by 'traditional' I refer to the representation of rural life with traditional costumes and habits) emphasises a close community. It is important to consider that his painting is set in a rural setting (the coffee-house of a village) with men dressed in traditional Cypriot garments. Consequently, the work can be seen as an 'idealised image of community' which 'conceals the deep divisions that existed then, and glosses the uneasy sense of change and transformation that is ongoing'.³⁹ Interestingly, despite the fact that the artist himself was a modern Cypriot dressed in European fashion, he chose to represent his contemporaries in traditional costumes. As Stylianos and Philippou put it, Diamantis 'cast himself as a sophisticated urbanite who set out to record what he repeatedly called "simple villagers"'.⁴⁰

The emphasis on rural life, traditional customs, and rituals can also be viewed as a constriction of an imagined community where people remain fixed in place. The quest to represent a community within a traditional national framework was also expressed in Greek Cypriot cinematography and photography of the same period. As Stylianos-Lambert and Philippou discussed, the creators (referring to artist Diamantis, filmmakers Giorgos Filis, and photographer Takis Demetriadis) skipped

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Theopisty Stylianos-Lambert and Nicos Philippou, op. cit., p. 64.

³⁹ Nikos Papastergiadis, *Annotations: Mixed Belongings and Unspecified Destinations*, (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1996) p. 10.

⁴⁰ Elena Stylianos and Nicos Philippou, 'Greek-Cypriot Locality: (Re) Defining our Understanding of European Modernity', in Pam Meecham (ed) *A Companion to Modern Art* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2018), p. 346.

‘Cypriot modernity by ignoring fundamental social, political, and cultural changes and conflicts that have taken place in the meantime’.⁴¹ During the post-independent years, Cyprus experienced changes due to the rapid economic developments. The island speedily became a tourist destination, and several resorts were developed. The period was also marked by the inter-communal conflict between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. Despite the gravitas of the different happenings, these conditions were not reflected in the work of the three creators, who in their work represented traditional image of rural Cyprus. What Diamantis and Filis also have in common is the way they presented women: they are ‘being obedient, passive, and dependent’.⁴²

Post-independent Cyprus also experienced sociocultural changes in relation to gender roles and women’s attitudes. Even though patriarchal society had remained fairly constant in terms of certain structures, there had been certain outlets for women to negotiate their status in society. Possibly, the most significant outlet was public education, which was a key mechanism for future generations to raise awareness of women’s issues. Considering that elementary education became compulsory only in 1962 and the first three years in secondary education became free of charge ten years later, it is remarkable that in 1974 Cyprus ranked amongst the countries with the highest rates of literacy.⁴³

The sociocultural change was initiated during the British colonial period where a Westernised culture was introduced to Cypriot women. This was broadly adopted, especially by women who lived in the cities: ‘Apart from religious activities and visits to the baths, they were seen going for walks with their female friends or their families; they went to dances, receptions, attended the races and also exercised, rode, and played tennis’.⁴⁴ The national liberation struggle was also a fundamental period for Greek Cypriot women, as they stepped out of their domestic orientation and supported the struggle. Not only were women supporting the struggle but were also active members. The fact that the British undervalued women’s worth gave them the opportunity to participate; throughout the struggle women were employed as couriers, as they were less likely to be body-searched while ferrying confi-

⁴¹ Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert and Nicos Philippou, op. cit., p.71.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Cyprus Social Research Centre, *Cypriot Woman Rise and Downfall* (Nicosia: Printing Office of the Republic of Cyprus, 1975), p. 7.

⁴⁴ Maria Pyrgou, op. cit., p. 48.

dential correspondence and guns, writing slogans on public walls, and participating in hazardous missions. This meant that women gained a kind of independence that was innovative at the time. Previously, women's main public outings were related to the ordinary events of attending religious functions or working in the family's field. Their involvement in the struggle signified a big departure from traditional conventions and customs. Consequently, a significant change was simultaneously undertaken to the national struggle. This change was an acceptance that women's roles reformed to meet the needs of the struggle, something that was for the most part left unrecorded by history and by the male-oriented ideology of the hardship. It is important to consider that women's participation in the national struggle presented a defining moment for Greek Cypriot women: they were able to reconceptualise the power structure within gender relations and, by extension, their status within society. Their participation paved the way for women to challenge patriarchy and laid the foundation for women to be 'active citizens' in the public sphere.

The increased economic developments offered an opportunity for women to enter the workforce in the post-independent Cyprus. However, although women entered the public labour market in great numbers during the period, it remained that women were six times less likely than men to be found in high positions.⁴⁵ Thus, most working women were employed in lower-paid and less prestigious labour. Additionally, a large number of women received salaries equating to half of what men were paid. However, despite the continuation of traditional attitudes towards the stereotypes of women, working women began to define themselves as an active body of workers who gradually came to occupy high positions and command better paid salaries.

Nonetheless, despite the seemingly promising propaganda of gender equality in employment, women's subordinated role largely continued after the years of independence. Significantly, post-independent Cyprus preserved the patriarchal structure, which was:

'Protected in particular by the relatively unaltered practical coherence of behaviours and discourses partially abstracted from time by ritual stereotyping, represent[ing] a paradigmatic form of the phallonnarcissistic vision and the androcentric cosmology which are common to all Mediterranean societies [...].'⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Cyprus Social Research Centre, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), p. 6.

Therefore, it is not surprising that, while traditional roles were being changed by a modernised Westernised influence, gender relations preserved their identities of men equals public and women equals private, positioning women as the sole keepers of the household.

Although women entered the public labour market, sharing the role of the breadwinner, their conditions at home remained the same. Thus, working women in Cyprus were consistently working double shifts: working full time professionally while still being expected to maintain their domestic labour at home. Such a working pattern was common for the majority of working women who entered public employment after the State endorsed full-time employment for them. However, the State failed to develop a functional system that would support married women and mothers.

Conclusion

Diamantis believed that he represented the authentic people of Cyprus he had met in the villages he visited. As he expressed in his narration, 'I tried to draw it and paint it either as a visitor or as a worshipper: with faith in its worth, with enthusiasm and with love. [...] It has been the best of the worlds'.⁴⁷ In 1983, he talked in a documentary about the absence of women in *The World of Cyprus*: 'A lot of people commented on the absence of women – women are not absent, they are just in the margin like their lives are also in the margin'.⁴⁸ If we consider that Diamantis' work accurately reflected the society he represented, little had changed in the years after the Turkish invasion. Moreover, when Diamantis talked about his work *When the World of Cyprus First Heard the Bad News* he explained that the women are 'confused and they remained still and serious'.⁴⁹ This can be seen as a way of reinforcing the perception of women's inactive role in society.

Considering that women experience socio-political happenings in a different way to men, there is a need to explore experiences from a woman's perspective. In terms of gender, Irini Savvides writes that there is 'a record of experience missing in current narratives' in relation to the 1974 war and its aftermath: 'One aspect of the Cyprus problem is that the stories of what women have suffered as a result of the

⁴⁷ Adamantios Diamantis, op. cit., p. 81.

⁴⁸ Digital Herodotus, Online Documentary *The World of Cyprus of Diamantis and Interview* (2018), available at <https://vimeo.com/304868092> (last accessed on 26 Jan. 2020) [translation from Greek by author].

⁴⁹ Ibid.

continued occupations and violence have not been given equal voice in the available literature'.⁵⁰ Importantly, a number of contemporary Greek Cypriots scholars have explored in their research women's experiences.⁵¹

In the 2020 Global Gender Gap report, Cyprus was ranked 111th out of 152 countries, with a score of 11,2% of female participation in the government.⁵² This highlights an urgent need to consider pragmatic ways for political empowerment to ensure that women are included in decision-making. This will help challenge and eliminate the patriarchal mentality that politics are a male privilege. Hopefully, the future generations will live in a society where all citizens are equal and active participants in the public life of the island.

References

- Bourdieu, P. (2001) *Masculine Domination*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Cockburn, C. (2004) *The Line: Women, Partition and the Gender Order in Cyprus*. London: Zed Books.
- Cyprus Social Research Centre. (1975) *Cypriot Woman Rise and Downfall*. Nicosia: Printing Office of the Republic of Cyprus.
- Danos, A. (2014) 'Twentieth-Century Greek Cypriot Art: An "Other" Modernism on the Periphery', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 32: 217-252.
- Diamantis, A. (2002) *The World of Cyprus: A Narrative*. Nicosia: Kailas Printers & Lithographers LTD.
- Digital Herodotus, Online Documentary *The World of Cyprus of Diamantis and Interview* (2018), available at <https://vimeo.com/304868092> (last accessed on 26 Jan. 2020).
- Global Gender Gap Report 2020, available at http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf (last accessed on 26 Jan. 2020)
- Loizos, P. (1981) *The Heart Grown Bitter: a Chronicle of Cypriot War Refugees*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Maria Hadjipavlou M. and Mertan, B. (2010) 'Cypriot Feminism: An Opportunity

⁵⁰ Irini Savvides, 'No Man's Land: A Revisionist Story of "The Cyprus Problem"' in Jan Shaw, Philippa Kelly and L.E. Semler (eds), *Storytelling: Critical & Creative Approaches* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.132-133.

⁵¹ See for example the work of Myria Vassiliadou and Maria Hadjipavlou.

⁵² Global Gender Gap Report 2020, available at http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf (last accessed on 26 Jan. 2020)

- to Challenge Gender Inequalities and Promote Women's Rights and a Different Voice', *Cyprus Review*, Vol. 22:2, pp. 247-268
- McClintock, A. (1996) 'No Longer in Future Heaven: Nationalism, Gender and Race', in Geoff Eley, and Ronald Suny. *Becoming National: A Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 260-284.
- Nikita, E. (1998) *Adamantios Diamantis: His Life and Work*. Nicosia: Bank of Cyprus Cultural Foundation.
- Papastergiadis, N. (1996) *Annotations: Mixed Belongings and Unspecified Destinations*. London: Institute of International Visual Arts.
- Peristiany, G. Jean. (1965) *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Pollock, G. (1988) *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*. London: Routledge.
- Pyrgos, M. (1993) *The Cypriot Woman at a Glance*. Nicosia: Pyrgos Public Relations.
- Roussou, M. (1985) *Greek Cypriot Women in Contemporary Cyprus with Special Reference to the 1974 War and its Consequences*, University of London, Unpublished PhD. Thesis.
- Roussou, M. (1986) 'War in Cyprus: Patriarchy and the Penelope Myth', in Ridd, R. and Callaway, H. *Caught up in Conflict: Women's Response to Political Strife*. Houndmills, London: Macmillan Education.
- Savvides, I. (2013) 'No Man's Land: A Revisionist Story of "The Cyprus Problem"' in Shaw, J. Kelly P. and Semler L.E. (eds), *Storytelling: Critical & Creative Approaches*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan pp.132-141.
- Stylianou E. and Philipou, N. (2018) 'Greek-Cypriot Locality: (Re) Defining our Understanding of European Modernity', in Pam Meecham (ed) *A Companion to Modern Art* Hoboken: Wiley, pp. 339-358.
- Stylianou-Lambert, T. and Philippou, N. (2015) 'Aesthetics, Narratives, and Politics in Greek-Cypriot Films: 1960-1974', in Costas Constandinides and Yiannis Papadakis (eds) *Cypriot Cinemas: Memory, Conflict, and Identity in the Margins of Europe*. London: Bloomsbury, pp. 61-89.
- Vassiliadou, M. (1997) "'Herstory': The Missing Woman of Cyprus', *Cyprus Review*, Vol. 9: 95-120.

Vassiliadou, M. (1999) *A Struggle for Independence: Attitudes and Practices of the women of Cyprus*, The University of Kent, Unpublished PhD. Thesis.

Vassiliadou, M. (2002) 'Questioning Nationalism: The Patriarchal and National Struggles of Cypriot Women within a European Context', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 9(4), pp. 459-482.