

Biographies of Cypriot Women: Voicing the Silences of History Through Scenic Arts

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"Telling her-stories from the perspective of gender awareness: How to narrate women's history in theatrical and performative settings"

LESSON PLAN

Thursday 31/10/2024 13:00-19:00

13:00-13:15 Arrival and Registration

13:15-14:00 Circle of Introductions [45m]

"Tell us a few words about you."

"What does this project mean to you?"

"When was the first time you realised that you were treated in any way differently because of your gender?"

14:00-14:45 Introduction to the Workshop [45m]

- Presentation of the schedule for the visit
- Presentation of the workshop and the visit's learning objectives

BREAK

Activity 3: Introduction to Cyprus history. History of women's history. History of Cypriot women

- Introduction to Cyprus history
- History of women's history

Activity 4: Gender Quiz

QUESTION 1: When did women vote for the first time in any kind of elections in Cyprus?

ANSWERS 1:

Photo 1: In 1905. All women who owned property and paid taxes voted. They voted in the 1905 elections for the election of the school committees of the Greek Cypriot schools. They were given the right to vote by mistake because someone forgot to write that only men had the right to vote. The following year they changed the law so that women could not vote although they still had to pay their taxes. [first was New Zealand in 1893. full suffrage in US was in 1920]

Photo 2: During the early 19th century, Cypriot feminists asked for the right to vote although this was not their number one goal. One of the first women to discuss the issue of the vote in a very clear manner was Persefoni Papadopoulou. She was one of the first feminists in Cyprus. She was a teacher, a writer and a newspaper editor and publisher. She published the first womens' newspaper "Estiades" in 1913 where she wrote many articles advocating for women's rights in education.

Photo 3: The first time the right for vote was actually granted and all Cypriot women were able to vote was in 1960 (with Cyprus independence).

Photo 4: Ayla Halit Kazim, First Cypriot woman MP [elected/appointed in place of her late husband who died in an accident.

Photo 5: Stella Soulioti, First Cypriot woman Minister [Minister of justice]

QUESTION 2: When did women vote for the first time in any kind of elections in Spain?

ANSWERS 2:

Unsuccessful attempts to give women suffrage took place in 1877, 1907, 1908 and 1918. The first time women were given the right to vote was during the Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923-1930).

Photo 1: The first time Spanish women were given the right to vote was in the municipal elections of the 8th of March 1924 (women's international day). They had to be unmarried, over the age of 23 and the head of a household. Prostitutes were excluded. They got the right to vote by Royal Decree. [A month later they were also given the right to be elected in municipal office. Also, during the Dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, 15 women were appointed in the national parliament (Council of Representatives) October 10, 1927, although women still did not have the right to vote for national elections.]

Photo 2: The first time Spanish women were elected as MPs in a national parliament was in June 1931. Three women won seats in the Constitutional Assembly which was to write the new Constitution: Clara Campoamor, Victoria Kent and Margarita Nelken. The interesting thing is that these women were elected by men because women were not allowed to vote in those elections. [Second Republic (1931-1937).]

Photo 3: Campoamor, who was a Spanish politician, lawyer, and writer, considered by some the mother of the Spanish feminist movement, advocated in favor of full emancipation for women saying that women have fought to defend the Republic through their actions these past decades and therefore they won the right to vote. Kent who was a lawyer and republican politician and Nelken, who was a known feminist figure and writer, on the other hand were against women's vote saying that women were not yet ready to vote as they were not sufficiently educated or have the social and political maturity to make an informed decision. They thought that women would submit to the wishes of their husbands and the Church and cause damage to the left-wing parties.

Photo 4: The measure passed, and the New Constitution gave all women the right to vote in National Elections [with 161 voted in favor (121 against and 188 abstentions) 1 October 1931. Article 36 of the new constitution stated that "Citizens of either sex, over twenty-three years of age, shall have the same electoral rights as determined by the laws".]

Women voted only 2 times in 1933 and 1936. [In the 1933 elections more than 7 million women, much more than men, went to vote. The victory of conservative factions in the 1933 elections was blamed on women who were viewed as being controlled by the Church. Campoamor and Kent were not elected. Nelken on the other hand was elected both times although she suffered many attacks from the media and her colleagues in parliament due to her feminist beliefs.

After the outbreak of the Spanish civil war (1936) and Franco's victory neither women nor men would be able to vote in national elections until 1977, two years after his death.

QUESTION 3: When was the first women's organization founded in Cyprus?

ANSWERS 3:

Photo 1: In 1898. It was the organization "Group of the Union of Greek Women" («**Ομάς Ενώσεως των Ελληνίδων**») founded by the feminist Polyxeni Loizias who was influenced by the feminists of Greece.

Photo 2: The first Turkish Cypriot women's organization was founded in 1931 by the Turkish woman, Ulviye Mithat under the name "Lefkoşa Türk Hanımları Cemiyet-i Hayriyesi" ("Turkish Ladies Association of Nicosia").

QUESTION 4: When was the first women's organization founded in Spain?

ANSWERS 4:

Photo 1: According to our research the first women's organisation in Spain was La Unión Femenina in Huelva in 1895. [During the same period other women's organisations were established in different areas such as the Asociación General Femenina in 1897, La Federación Provincial in 1898 in Málaga and Hijas de la Regeneración that same year in Cádiz.]

[More women's associations were established in the 1910s, such as the National Association of Spanish Women (1918), which were putting women's vote as a priority. The reason why Spain did not emerge as a powerful suffragist movement earlier was the delay in the emergence of a Spanish middle class. Suffrage as a topic among this feminist group would largely disappear from 1918 until 1931, as women focused more on social changes than on political goals.

In general, Catholicism played a huge role in Spanish political thinking in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Religion required strict gender roles, which led to the repression of Spanish women and fostered ingrained sexism across the whole of Spanish society. Society, through the Catholic Church, dictated that the role of women was to marry and bear children. They were to be invisible in society outside the domestic sphere.]

Spanish women did not hold the same status as citizens as men from 1800 to 1931. Married women needed the approval or involvement of their husbands to change their address, accept an inheritance, or own property or a business.

Unmarried women over the age of 23 had a few more legal rights than those married since they could sign contracts and run businesses on their own. All women in this period were denied the right to vote or run for political office.

Overall, the first feminist movements were concerned with providing women with an education that was equitable to that of men. Also, they often advocated for changes in laws to protect women from the ongoing social changes as they increasingly entered the workforce.

QUESTION 5: When was Women's Day (March 8) first celebrated in Cyprus?

ANSWERS 5:

In 1943 by the Working Women's Unions. Working Women's Unions were the first Cypriot organisations of which the leaders and members were working class women. The first Union was established in 1939 in Famagusta influenced by the large women's strikes in the spinning mills of Famagusta in 1938. Before that, the women's organisations in Cyprus consisted of only educated, middle-class women.

QUESTION 6: When was Women's Day (March 8) first celebrated in Spain?

ANSWERS 6:

I couldn't find the first time Spain celebrated the 8th of March. But what is interesting is that the 8th of March has a double meaning for women's history in Spain. Apart from being the women's international day it is also the day women in Spain were first granted access in higher education on equal terms with men. The only information I could find was that in 1936, on the eve of the Spanish Civil War, Dolores Ibarruri led a women's march in Madrid.

QUESTION 7: When did a Cypriot woman participate in a theatrical play for the first time?

ANSWERS 7:

Photo 1: In 1891, the student Polyxeni Fysentzidi participated in the theatrical performance titled "Robert the Chief Bandit" which was staged at the Girl's School of Faneromeni.

Up until then all women's roles were performed by men. The men who played women roles in theater were called "zenne" in Turkish. During the Ottoman era, Armenian and Rum women performers/actors were coming to Cyprus to perform.

Photo 2: The first time Turkish Cypriot women acted in a play ("The Merchant of Venice") was in 1924. These first women actors were teachers, the names were Dervişe İrfan and Fahriye Hanım.

Up until 1924 when the first theater performance with women actors were performed, theatrical performances were offered on different days for men and women. Also, in 1924 it was the first time the audience was mixed (men and women together).

QUESTION 8: Who was the first woman to enter the American Circus Hall of Fame, a museum that honors important figures in circus history?

ANSWERS 8:

Lillian Leitzel was not only the first woman but also the first circus artist to enter the Circus Hall of Fame in 1958. Lillian was born in 1892 in Germany. Her mother and her entire family were circus performers. Although she had been well-educated and had prepared to pursue a career as a concert pianist, she joined her mother's aerobatic circus group, the Leamy Ladies. In 1910 she went to America where she performed in various circus companies until her death by accident while she was performing in 1931. Lillian's act included one-armed planges. She was momentarily dislocating her shoulder during each plange. Sometimes she would flip her body over her shoulder repeatedly for hundreds of times.

According to historian Janet M. Davis, Lillian was making up to \$200 a week in 1917 (worth more than \$4,000 in 2020).

Lillian encouraged women to exercise to stay healthy, in spite of lingering Victorian notions that athleticism made women ugly and manlike. "Down with the corset," she told newspapers in 1923.

Historian Janet M. Davis wrote that "In an era when a majority of women's roles were still circumscribed by Victorian ideals of domesticity and feminine propriety, circus women's performances celebrated female power, thereby representing a startling alternative to contemporary social norms." The circus offered a home for some outsiders and castaways and provided independence and adventure for its female stars. For audiences, it afforded titillating, exotic glimpses of the limits of the human body while promising to uphold decency in its ranks. The women of the American circus during its golden age worked tirelessly to perfect their acts, stealing shows and breaking stunt records at a unique time in history that straddled the old conventions with the new promise of suffrage and feminism.

Activity 5: Guess Who?**Instructions:**

- We do this activity to explore how we tell, how we study, and how we write history. We will do this by analysing actual historical sources.

-Note that some sources are in their authentic language, and some are translated but they will not know which ones are translated.

- Guess the answers to the following questions:

- What type of material is this? (article, book, diary, letter etc.)
- When was it written? (year, decade, period etc.)
- What is the gender of the author?

- What is the social class and the level of education of the author?
- What is the nationality/community of the author?

Historical Sources:

Source 1:

I actually had an English lady to dinner today, Mrs Scott Stevenson, wife of an officer in the 42nd Highlanders about whom there was such a scandal last winter in Malta. I did not admire her; her voice was grating and unpleasant and she was evidently a very foolish creature. She had landed yesterday and ridden up today from Larnaca and goes over the hills tomorrow to Kyrenia where her husband has built her a hut with two rooms. She will have a Regt.* to flirt with and to admire her, so I presume that will compensate her for any amount of discomfort. (*Regiment, military unit.)

Answers to Source 1:

- The material type: Diary
- The year it was written: 1878
- The gender of the author: Male
- The social class of the author: Aristocrat (Sir), Military Officer and Colonial Administrator
- Level of education: High
- The nationality/community of the author: British

Information about the text:

This source is cited in its original language (English). The excerpts are from the journal of the first British High Commissioner in Cyprus, Sir Garnet Wolseley, written in 1878, during the first year of the British Administration in Cyprus. Garnet Wolsley (1833 – 1913) was an Anglo-Irish officer in the British Army. His point of view as a British colonialist military man who was wealthy, educated, and privileged are reflected in the text. Mrs Scott-Stevenson refers to Esmé Scott-Stevenson (1853-1925), a British female author of several books which describe her travels. One of her books is "Our home in Cyprus" (1880). Scott-Stevenson was a traveller and an author at a time when British women were not allowed to vote nor had the right to ownership. Despite her achievements Wolseley describes her as a "foolish creature".

Sir Garnet Wolseley (1991). The Journal of Sir Garnet Wolseley, Ed. Anne Cavendish, Nicosia: Cyprus Popular Bank Cultural Centre, p. 95.

Source 2:

If we first examine the woman of aristocracy, we will see that her development is faulty [...]. On the other hand, we have the working woman. [...] She will either study for a few years in school, if the financial situation of her household allows it, and then become a teacher at a kindergarten or school, or she will be occupied in an office [...]. For the peasant girl, there is the path of becoming a servant (maid) which often begins from the tender age of six years old. [...] In her case, the human mind stops before the inhumane treatment [...]. She (the maid) becomes unrecognisable from the hard work [...]. For the woman working in a factory, she is at the mercy of the employer. If she dares to complain [...] she will be scolded and prosecuted [...] because she dared to claim fair demands [...].

Answers to Source 2:

- The material type: Article
- The year it was written: 1942
- The gender of the author: Female
- The social class of the author: Working class
- Level of education: Average
- The nationality/community of the author: Greek Cypriot

Information about the text:

This source was translated from Greek. This is an excerpt from an article titled "It's up to us" published in the first newsletter of the *Working Women's Union of Limassol* in 1942. Working Women's Unions were the first Cypriot organisations of which the leaders and members were working class women. This text represents the point of view of a Greek Cypriot working-class woman writing in a Marxist-Leftist brochure/leaflet with the intent to organise women. Here, the author sympathises with working-class and peasant women and is critical towards the women of the higher classes. *Αντιγόνη Αρτέμη (1942). "Στη δική μας θέληση στέκει...", Δελτίο Ένωσης Εργαζομένων Γυναικών Λεμεσού, Αριθμός δελτίου 1, Αρχείο ΠΟΓΟ, 1942.*

BREAK

Activity 6: Still image

Ask the participants to create a Still Image representing the feelings, thoughts, images they are left with after this workshop.

Activity 7: Reflection

One word circle