# GENDER EQUALITY IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE OF CYPRUS



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# Abstract

In this research, I investigate the reasons for women's underrepresentation in the political sphere of Cyprus as it is interpreted from the experiences of eight women politicians from a wide political spectrum. The interviewees were asked to assess the lack of women in politics, the gender equality policies from the UN and EU and mostly the gender quotas strategy. The thesis starts by introducing the participants in details indicating their diversity. From the very start the participants made clear the main factors of women's underrepresentation in politics. The impact of culture and stereotypes, the ineffective ways in which policies are being implemented by the government and the lack of state infrastructures regarding childcare can prevent women from getting involved with politics.

To unravel and examine each factor separately, I started the analysis by examining the Cypriot culture from a historic perspective and the social roles of Cypriot women since the 20th century. That lead me to dive more into what prompted the shifting of social roles throughout history. Women altered their roles during conflicts from solely mother/wives to agents of peacebuilders and then strikers. By taking the role of strikers, they functioned in a peaceful manner to state intensively their demands. Demands emerging from the frustration towards the government of Cyprus and its failure to implement ratified policies from the UN and EU aiming for gender equality. The interviewees in this research interpreted gender equality policies created by the UN and EU, making explicit that it's debatable if and how gender quotas will succeed, since the strategy can stigmatize women and portray them as the vulnerable group in need of assistance. Lastly, the interviewees provided insight into the political life as a woman and a mother, pointing out the various barriers they had to overcome. The thesis indicates a set of various causes for women's absence in the decision-making process which are hard to be resolved solely with policies implementations.

# Table of Contents

# Introduction

There is a global discussion around women's underrepresentation in the decision-making process the past few decades. A lot have been written within the scholarly world and various suggestions have been made from international organizations to resolve this issue. However, little attention has been given to the underrepresentation of Cypriot women in the political filed. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to fill the literature gap, having as a core the political experiences of eight women politicians across the political spectrum of Cyprus. My intention is to present the experiences of these women and analyse the impact of international gender policies by taking into consideration women politician's interpretations.

Cyprus is located between three continents since it lies at the crossroads of Europe, Africa and Asia. The island is among the countries with a special geopolitical position, and it is isolated from the rest Western European culture something that can offer a more clear picture of the impact of EU policies. Europe and the EU as a whole is not homogenized, something that no matter the efforts cannot change. Cyprus is among the examples that proves that EU is not possible to be homogenized through policies and/or regulations. Cyprus's story is worth to be present in the literature of gender analysis since the country is being present in the scholarly world mainly due to the Cypriot issue after the Turkish invasion (1974). Up until this day, Cyprus is the only EU member that is occupied and divided. The country is being examined in the literature from a historical and political perspective with the main characters being mostly male. Little has been written for the role of women in the Cypriot society and its main conflicts. The usage of Androulla Vassiliou's book (2019) is being used in this research as a base to unravel women's roles, social expectations and gender stereotypes that emerge from history.

Although Vassiliou is providing a crucial description on the socio-political history of Cyprus since the 20ᵗʰ century, policies from supranational organizations and their suggestions for gender equality are being left out. This research, is analysing and explaining the impact of two UN policies and their suggestions to apply gender quotas system for parity democracy. This thesis is based on the understandings of eight female politicians who are expressing their beliefs on these policies through their experiences. The research as a whole answers to the way women politicians in Cyprus assess the lack of women in politics, how do they think about gender equality policies

and what are their experiences in the political sphere. Each chapter is providing the necessary pieces to answer the research questions.

The first chapter of this research, is providing basic information about the participants, and the methodological approach that has been followed in this research. The second chapter focuses on the historical background of Cypriot women and their social roles since the 20th century. Chapter three analyses the political activism of Cypriot women, by indicating their actions during conflicts that are often being left out from the historical-national narrative. The chapter starts by describing women's contributions to the national liberation struggle (EOKA 1955-59) and their efforts to be part in peace negotiations after the Turkish invasion (1974). However, the latest strike *'It is Time'* is being characterized by the participants as a milestone, since it is the first time women are protesting to ensure their own rights.

Passing from Cypriot women's efforts and contributions for social change, the UN and EU policies are being examined in chapter four, to indicate supranational organizations' impact on the Cypriot society and politics. Emphasis is being given to two United Nation's policies, the *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)* and the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995),* which are the two major policies addressing the female underrepresentation. They are combined with the efforts from the Republic of Cyprus to implement them. The second section of this chapter, encapsulates the perception of Cypriot female politicians on the UN and EU policies. It also engages with the controversial strategy of gender quotas, what quotas 'do' in politics, and how this system can affect parity democracy.

The thesis as a whole is guided by the interviews and the interpretations of the participants regarding the reasons of women's underrepresentation in politics. Hence, the last chapter encapsulates the main contemporary issues women have to face, and analyzes the impact of existing barriers through the experiences of my interviewees. Eight Cypriot women politicians from a wide political spectrum, provided various of points that gives the opportunity for a fruitful discussion around the issues of gender stereotypes, gender roles and women's representation on media. The final aim of this research is to indicate that, there is a set of various factors that can be the cause of women's absence in the decision-making process and it is hard for the issue to be resolved solely with policies implementations.

# 1.0   Who Tells the Story

In this chapter basic information about the participants are provided, such as to what party they belong to, what their position in the party is, some personal information about them and their views on gender equality in Cyprus. Throughout this chapter, the causes of the underrepresentation of women, as they are emerging from the interviews I have conducted will be pointed out, and will act as an introduction to the  following chapters. The epitome of the interviews functions as guidelines in order to carry out this research.  Overall, according to my interviewees, gender inequality emerges from the pre-existing stereotypes and society's beliefs that women do not belong in the political sphere because it is predominantly a male-dominated area. The lack of state's infrastructures which preserves this inequality, is basically keeping the women away from the decision of seeking out higher positions in politics, and only those who have the support and help from their partners and/or family can deal with this problem. The majority of them referred to the policy of quotas and their perceptions are going to be analyzed further on in order to examine if it is efficient and desirable for gender equality.

To begin with, the first interview I have conducted, which was with Efi Xanthou, was used as a base to find resources that would either contradict or compliment the conversation we had on the position of women throughout the history of Cyprus. As a starting point we used the national liberation struggle (EOKA 1955-1959). Because it was the first interview, direct questions were asked about the roles of women in Cyprus throughout history, but with the rest of the interviewees a different approach was used. Questions concerning the historical position of Cypriot women were not asked directly but rather, the participants were asked if specific incidents they have mentioned, that still exist today, were present in the past.  For example, we have talked about domestic violence, inequalities and women's undervaluation. There I noticed a pattern on their beliefs. Each of my interviewees pointed out examples from history and expressed with great disappointment that no significant changes were made when it comes to gender equality, in the society as a whole, since the independence of the island (1960).

To undertake this research a total of eight interviews were taken with women politicians from a wide spectrum of the political sphere. Two of them, Efi Xanthou and Alexia Sakadaki are from the Movement of Ecologists — Citizens' Cooperation, which is a Green Political Party, oriented at Centre-left. The third participant was from Irene Zorpa from the Solidarity Movement known as *Kinima Allilengyi*, oriented at the right-wing. The fourth interview, was with Roulla

Mavronicola from the Movement for Social Democracy known as EDEK, which it is positioned in the Centre. Skevi Pashia was my fifth interviewee who is a part of the women's organization POGO of the left Progressive Party of Working People known as AKEL. Rena Yiavasi was my sixth participant from the Citizens' Alliance known as *Symmachía Politón* which is a Centre-left wing political party. The last two were Mariella Aristidou and Xenia Constantinou from DISY which is the Democratic Rally and is positioned in the Centre-right wing. Due to their amount of work and the short time I have spent on the island, the questionnaires for Aristidou and Constantinou were send via email. That gave them an ease of time to answer the questions, but it removed a face-to-face open discussion, so the data collected from the last two interviewees were limited.

During my visit in Cyprus for the Christmas holidays, I arranged to conduct one interview. The rest of the interviews were conducted during my one week trip in March of 2020, which I had arranged in order to be present for the strike *'It is Time'* (6th of March 2020). That was the first strike in the island organized by women politicians and women's organizations across the political spectrum to protest for women's rights. All women I had approached were willing to discuss gender equality in the political scene. The participants were able to give me a clear image of what gender equality means for them and why there is an absence of it in the political scene. Hearing opinions from different parties across the political scope, I have noticed that the general beliefs on the matter are similar and sometimes even the same. That means, that despite the ideology of the party, the issue of gender (in)equality is perceived and understood in the same manner. But this cannot be generalized because of the small sample of this research. It is nonetheless, an indication of common beliefs despite political factions (left-centre-right).

My first interviewee was Efi Xanthou, the *Deputy Leader of the Green Party* since November 2017. She counts eighteen years in politics and started as a member of the Central Committee of Cyprus' Green Party since 2002, and has been a *Parliamentary Assistant in the House of Representatives* since 2009. The Green Party was created in 1996, and since 2016 the party has two representatives in the Parliament. It is a relatively small one compared to the major parties (DISY, AKEL, DIKO) and it is oriented at the Centre-left wing. Efi Xanthou was the only participant who gave extensive details about her background (where and how she grow up) and about the role of women through history with a main focus on the 20th century.

Xanthou believes that her background influenced and shaped her character to see both men and women as capable of doing the same things. She is the first child among 4 siblings, and for her, that was the reason she did not have a fixed gendered role as a girl growing up. As she noted

> I was the first daughter, so the roles I typically took in the family were not just classic women's roles. I was helping my mother and my father who was a builder. We have built our house slowly and we had finally a house when I was already 16 years old. For me it is very normal to hold a shovel and do agricultural work. There was no difference between me and my siblings, something I think helped me because there is nothing a woman cannot do. One may not be able to do something, either male or female due to physical strength but it is not related to gender.

The fact that, she is coming from a large family is not the only thing according to her that determined her views around gender roles. She was raised up in rural areas from 11 years old up until her early 20s, and as she noted, the situation affected her external influences which were coming mostly from school and social gatherings. Xanthou was also moving constantly throughout the years, "I have changed 6 elementary schools so I was constantly changing my environment" and that affected her perceptions as well.  Efi Xanthou, influenced by her social and educational background, believes that there is nothing a woman cannot do. It impresses her that up to this day some people believe that

> some things are restricted to the role of gender, as a mother, as a daughter (...). I recognize that it is a social construction and I try to persuade people not to lose their potential because of their own mind blocks and objectives, and mainly I see this in women.

Even though she believes that often women hold themselves back because they consider themselves primarily as mothers and wives, deciding to invest later on in their career and professional development, Xanthou believes that women, who do enter politics and pursue a political career change the way politics are done. Specifically she stated that

> Through my experience I have seen that women who entered the political arena have changed it and they will continue to do so if their number is increasing. In 2016 new women entered, even though their number has not been increased we have new personalities in the field. I noticed also a change when it comes to the culture in the committees, minor but still a change.

Women do not participate as much as men in politics not only because they are holding themselves back, but since the majority of women has family, they find it extremely difficult to balance politics and family obligations. The balance between politics and family is also hard to establish for Efi Xanthou, who believes that if she did not had her husband who understands and supports her, she could not have been able to exceed this obstacle and succeed in the political scene.

Xanthou pointed out that the life of women, and the way women perceived themselves, changed since the arrival of the television in every household. This comment intrigued me to examine more the role of television and how this affects gender roles in the society (Chapter 5). During our conversation she spoke about quotas and the resistance of the traditional political parties to accept this policy. She also referred to the undervaluation of women that exists in the parties, not only from men but also among women. Finally, she referred to the absence of state mechanisms, such as kindergartens which are no longer provided by the Ministry of Labor, to support single parent families and working women, as well as the failed way the state is working to manage the international policies for equality.

Alexia Sakadaki is counting twelve years in the political arena. She entered the Green Party in 2008 when she served the Ecologists' Youth from the position of General Secretariat from 2008 to 2014. As a member of the International Relations Committee since 2009, Sakadaki has been developing European action and is representing the Movement in international and regular conferences of the European Green Party. She has currently the position of the organizing director of the Green Party and is a Parliamentary associate since 2015. Sakadaki is a member of the human rights committee, in which she produces policy papers on issues of equality, human rights, social policy, migration and environmental policy.

Once our discussion ended, she commented that she was glad that the day was not going to be as long as the previous ones, so she can spent time with her daughter. When I asked what she means exactly she replied that "the past few days we have constantly meetings and yesterday I went home at midnight". At that point I realized how much effort, energy and time politics need. Her statement made me go back to her comment

> fortunately my partner is really supportive which makes everything run smoothly, but it is difficult when you have one or more children and you want as a parent to spend quality time with them. Many times is difficult to combine politics and family because

> in politics we have meetings, events, we have to be at the office during afternoons or weekends. Basically we are losing the family part.

Sakadaki observed a social criticism against female politicians through her conversations with women from different parties. This criticism is based on the belief that women should focus on their family and children and not engage with politics. She noted that, society's beliefs along with the lack of state infrastructures and the existence of stereotypes, leads to the preservation of gender inequalities in all aspects of life.

Alexia Sakadaki expressed her view on the perception men have on gender equality, as well as factors that affect the low representation of women in politics. She also referred to three dominant views on quotas. The first view, is negative towards quotas because there is the belief that women do not want to be voted just because of their gender but rather, because they deserve to get elected. The second perception, is that the policy should be implemented as a transitioning process until the political parties adopt the habit of including more women on the ballots. Lastly, there are those who believe that the policy of gender quotas should be implemented permanently in order to regulate the gender inequality. She comments that in all three aspects, the culture of Cypriot society is of great importance. Sakadaki offering her personal view on the matter, she commented that

> let's say that a party is implementing quotas and its ballot is 50-50 (men-women) but the mindset is 'let's just put ten women' and at the same time the party is supporting the men more. So they are putting women just because they are women. This for me is a really bad job, even the quotas system will not help because the point is not to just put women on the ballot.

Sakadaki also gave a comprehensive description of the strike *'It is Time'*, analyzing the objectives and the organizations involved in the strike. For her the strike is a product of the efforts women from previous generations have done, by participating in various committees and meetings in Cyprus and abroad.

> There has been an intensive work to reach the stage we are now as a society from our previous generations, and I believe that now the circumstances are mature enough to create this strike. (…) And as organizations, we are more mature now than before, because we have realized that without cooperation on this kind of matters, change will not be achieved.

The third participant was Irene Zorpa, who holds the post of President of Local Government[1] Pancyprian. Zorpa's story on how she has entered politics differ from the others. As she said, "I did not choose politics, politics chose me". For 12 years she was working in a municipality of Nicosia, and on account of her experience in local self-government, she received in 2016 proposals from different parties as municipal elections were approaching, which she had turned down. When she was personally invited by the leader of the Solidarity Movement Eleni Theocharous, Zorpa agreed to meet her and discuss her potential involvement in the municipal elections under the Solidarity Movement Party (Right-wing)[2].

Irene Zorpa admits, that she was reluctant in the beginning due to her lack of experience with politics. It was challenging for her and she was not surprised that she was not elected. After the elections she distanced herself from politics until the party approached her again in March 2017. She began her cooperation with the party with caution. As she was continuously making progress, she accepted a proposal to take over as President of Local self-government of the Municipality of Geri (town in Nicosia) and then became President of Local self-government Pancyprian. Zorpa is practicing social policy which excites her, and has the opportunity to communicate and cooperate with all municipalities and individuals around Cyprus regardless of their political beliefs.

In our discussion, she referred to the difficulties women face in politics and to the reaction of other women during her first steps in the Solidarity Movement. She referred in detail to the way in which her life has been shaped by her integration into politics, the support she receives from her husband, and her perception of the way family and politics should be balanced. Characteristically she emphasized that "First comes the family and then the politics". Irene Zorpa thinks that to achieve anything in life, especially in politics, slow and calculated steps are needed to allow you to grow as an individual and to benefit the party as well. She referred to the devaluation of women in the political scene and the usefulness of quotas, if the knowledge and experience of the individuals entering politics are the first criteria.

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[1]Among the important advantages of the Local Government are the various forms of inter-municipal and inter-community cooperation, which face common problems of neighboring Municipalities and Communities (e.g. garbage complexes), but also the informal forms of inter-municipal cooperation. Local self-government organizations are legal entities under public law, each of which has been set up in a specific territorial region and aims to manage local affairs, and its bodies are elected by universal suffrage by the citizens of the region. *Source*: Ministry of Interior. n.d. "Local Government." http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/moi.nsf/page37_gr/page37_gr?OpenDocument.

[2] The Movement is a Greek-Cypriot nationalistic party founded by Eleni Theocharous in 2016. The party was created because Theocharous departed from DISY (Centre-right) in protest against DISY's approach to the Cyprus problem.

Roulla Mavronicola, who was the fourth participant, is engaging with politics since her early 20s as she has been a member of the Socialist Youth Organization EDEN (1981-1990), and she is a former member of the Parliament from 2006 until 2011. She is a member of the *Committee on Equal Opportunities of the Party of European Socialists (PES)* and *Head of the KISOS/KS EDEK Committee on Equality, the Family and the Child since 2000*. Mavronicola is also member of the board of the *Cyprus Gender Equality Observatory* since 2005 and member of the *House Standing Committee on Human Rights and on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women* and of the *House Standing Committee on Labor and Social Insurance*.

Roulla Mavronicola initially provided some background information regarding her studies and the way she entered politics. She studied English Literature and spent five years in England where her husband was specializing in medicine. With her return in the Republic of Cyprus she had already two children. She had received an offer to work at the Movement of Social Democracy (EDEK) as during her student years she was engaging with the student movement in a political manner. The party is oriented in the Centre-left wing and is one of the oldest (founded in 1969).

Mavronicola entered the party as a part-time worker. She then took over as an organizational secretary of women's organization of her party and has been the President of the Socialist Women's Movement since 1998. During the interview, Silia Kyrmitsi, the former *Social Security Committee Adviser to the Ministry of Labor and Social Security* (during 2010) was also present, commenting on and contributing to the discussion. The conversation initially evolved around the period of establishment and the reason of the existence of women's organizations in Cyprus, with references to the social and historical context of the 1980s. Mavronicola mentioned the fact that there are no major changes between the '80s and now as the lack of state infrastructure continues to exist, and the fact that "the policy is cut and sewn for men", having as an example the time arrangement of meetings and events that are not appropriate for a mother politician.

She pointed out the absence of gender budgeting, which for several years there are efforts to implement this in Cyprus without results. As to the difficulties that a woman can face in politics, she says,

> Politics is tough (...) I think it's even tougher for women because there are no women role models (...). The women role models that exist are minimal and for us, who really need to be the role models is very difficult to do so.

She also referred to the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (1995) where she had participated during its discussions, holding the position of the organizational secretary of the Socialist

Women's Movement (1987-1999). The Declaration was a resolution adopted by the UN and outlines a set of principles regarding the equality of men and women. Roulla Mavronicola expressed her disappointment as the Cypriot government has not done any progress since then. Both Roulla Mavronicola and Silia Kyrmitsi referred to the European Union instructions and their inadequate implementation by the State.

The interview with Skevi Pashia was conducted in her office a couple of hours after the discussion I had with Mavronicola. Pashia is the organizational secretary of the women's organization POGO from the left political party AKEL. She has studied microbiology in Athens with her husband who was studying journalism. When they finished their studies, her husband had accepted an offer to work as a journalist in a Cypriot newspaper. So they returned back to Cyprus during the 1980s. After several difficulties and dealing with different jobs trying to balance the financial budget of the family, she started writing in the same newspaper her husband worked in, due to her journalism experience during her student years. Later she joined POGO, the women's organization of the left-wing party, and participated in all the organization's activities with continuous development. She was involved in the publication and writing of the magazine *Cypriot Woman*, which lasted 25 years, and subsequently became the organizational secretariat of POGO. During the discussion, Pashia argued that she was experiencing gender discrimination from her teenage years without understanding the reason, and during her involvement in the organization she realized that the main cause is stereotyping, mentality, prejudices and the patriarchal Cypriot society. That's why she thinks the society has

> implanted in the mind of a woman that she's a second-class citizen, she is not made for leading roles, she is not for the public space, she belongs to the private space having secondary roles.

Regarding the difficulties she encountered as a woman in the field of politics, she says that it was difficult to balance family and politics as the timetables are not fixed and the absence of state infrastructure forced her to take her children to her workplace, especially when they were in younger ages. She considers that for a woman it is more difficult to get into politics, not only when it comes to balancing family and politics, but also because women are not encouraged. Pashia argues that "women cannot imagine that they can respond to the demands of the job so they are stepping back". Her belief about quotas aligns with the perception of POGO and AKEL, which see quotas as a tool that defines women as a vulnerable group that needs assistance. For

Skevi Pashia, women could benefit only if the appropriate government infrastructure for child care and employment is created.

Rena Yiavasi comes from the Citizen's Alliance which is oriented to Centre-left wing. Yiavasi is the president of the women's organization inside the party, called Women's Alliance. She studied Greek philology and then started writing columns in different sites. A proposal to become a columnist was received from a Cypriot newspaper *The Citizen*, in which she worked for seven years as a columnist and journalist. In 2012, she accepted a proposal by the political party of Giorgou Lillika to take over the press office. Since then, she has been in the Citizen's Alliance. She is a deputy spokesperson for the party, and took over the presidentship of the Women's Alliance in December 2019. Yiavasi referred to her workplace as very creative, providing to her the space and opportunities to fight for things that she believe in; and the freedom that is given to her from the party excites her. She believes that if there was a strict political line, as it is common in the large parties, she would have left the political scene.

Through the interview, it appeared that she is aware of the imbalance between men and women and emphasized the main effect on women. In particular, she argued that it is much harder to get gender-related issues through in discussions, to hear the voice of women who are thinking differently from men, especially when the majority is men. It is also hard to convince women to participate in politics, because women "fear the commitment of time". She also stressed the difficulties that exist if you are a female worker, a woman politician, and a mother due to the inability of the state to provide support. Yiavasi also addressed the fact that a woman is much more difficult to pursue and stay in politics if she has no help and support from her partner.

My last two interviews with Mariella Aristidou and Xenia Constantinou were not conducted face-to-face. Rather, the questions were send via email, so I did not had the opportunity to discuss extensively things that are coming up through a face-to-face discussion. Nonetheless, both of them provided answers to the core questions. Mariella Aristidou and Xenia Constantinou are coming from the  Democratic Rally (DISY) which is one of the biggest parties in Cyprus. It is oriented in the Centre-right and was founded in 1976. DISY is currently the leading political party (the President of Cyprus belongs to DISY).

Mariella Aristidou has studied French philology and journalism and is a member of Parliament since 2016. She commented that politics is never easy and being a woman makes it even more difficult. The main causes of this problem for women are culture, the patriarchal structures of society, and the civil stereotypes that are deeply rooted; effectively preventing women from

engaging in politics. Aristidou was supported by her family and husband to be able to meet the demands of the political progress. She stated that

> despite the increasing active participation of women in politics and public life, women are still under-represented in important decision-making positions (...) Cypriot women are more burdened by taking a disproportionate share of the household, childcare and family responsibilities.

Finally, Xenia Constantinou, is a member of the party's Parliamentary Committee on Internal Affairs, a Member of the Parliamentary Committee on Institutions, and Member of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights. She is also Member of the National Assembly of the Republic of Cyprus since 2019. Constantinou pointed out the same issues that the previous participants argued on, for example the difficulty to harmonize family-political life and the underrepresentation of women in politics. She added

> I believe that one of the main reasons we do not have more women in politics and especially in top political positions within the political parties, is because of family obligations and especially that of caring for children, which remains largely a women's responsibility.

Constantinou believes that to a significant extent, male presence prevails in politics because the structures of political parties are quite male-dominated. When it comes to the way women's underrepresentation can be solved through gender quotas, she argues that the specific system is more like a "philanthropy" towards women. Constantinou stated that

> from the stage of political correctness to the stage of real equality and objective judgment, evaluation and utilization of men and women, there is a long way to go.

So far, the outline of the comments of the participants, can pinpoint the major issues Cypriot society has to deal with, in order to increase women's participation. All of the participants understand that the Cypriot culture which creates gender stereotypes, in combination with the lack of implementation of policies aiming for gender equality and the lack of state infrastructures, are the main causes of women's underrepresentation in Cypriot politics. The method that has been used to collect these data, made possible to have clear indications of what exactly is the problem, the views of women's politicians and their understandings on the causes.

## 1.0.1  Methodology

The investigation of the underrepresentation of women in Cypriot politics is studied through snowball sampling. A friend of mine, Efi Xanthou, who was my first interviewee, was able to provide me with the connections to the other interviewees. This proved to be really useful because even after getting introduced to some of these politicians, communication was still difficult. Some of the politicians I have been introduced to, did not reply to my request of being a participant in my research. Fortunately I have been able to interview politicians from around the political spectrum.

To carry out this project I have chosen to use qualitative research for to grasp better the perceptions and experiences of Cypriot women's politicians. The questionnaires were semi-structured having -as a starting point- background information about the participant and questions engaging with their personal experiences in politics. Those particular starting points helped me navigate the discussion and find the reason why and how each one of them entered politics and what were the barriers they had (or not) to overcome.  I intentionally have not used theory as my starting point to build the semi-structured questionnaires, because I wanted to start the research open minded. I tried to take everything my interviewees were stating into consideration. The theory that is being used throughout the research aims to give a better understanding and explain what is behind my interviewees sayings.

The general aim of the questionnaire was to provide answers to my research questions on *how do women politicians in Cyprus assess the lack of women in politics, how do they think about gender equality policies and what are their experiences in the political sphere*. I have focused on the Cypriot society not only because is my country of origin but also because I have the background knowledge that is needed to understand the social, cultural and traditional gender roles in the Cypriot society. Having in mind the gender quotas policy from UN and EU, and the heated debate around the concept, I wanted to add the topic of quotas as a sub question in an effort to understand if quotas can benefit and increase women's representation in Cypriot politics. An additional sub question concerned the first Women's Strike *'It is Time'* that ever existed on the island. Thus, the participants of this research were called to  respond to a set of questions that were mainly focused on the following issues:

1. Personal experiences regarding their background and progress in politics
2. Their opinions on quotas and European Union's policies

3. The recent Women's Strike on the island called "It is Time" (*Einai I Wra*)

4. Their interpretations on the causes of women's absence from the political scene of Cyprus

Talking with women who are engaging with the government and politics gave me the insight of an institution that controls and regulates the Cypriot society. It has also helped me to have a better understanding of the matters that are not easily noticeable, and as a society we might be paying little attention and outstrip the gender inequalities inside the government. During my visit to Cyprus I have conducted a total of 8 interviews of which 2 of them were not tape-recorded. Because of my short visit and the heavy-loaded schedule of my participants, the interview questions I offered to the last two of my participants (Aristidou and Constantinou) were sent via email to be answered. Thus, the questionnaires for Aristidou and Constantinou cannot be considered as semi-structured questionnaires, due to the lack of opportunity to expand and discuss their comments in depth. I have asked all of the interviewees the same ten questions[3].

These ten questions are divided in four sections:

a) Background information and family status (where are they from, why and when they entered politics, if they are married or single, if they have children or not, how do they balance family and politics, what were the barriers (if any) that they had to face entering politics)

b) Information about the Women's Strike (why it happened now, what were the aims)

c) What are the EU policies that aim to increase women's representation in politics and what the state does to apply those policies

d) How the participants are experiencing politics and what are the barriers women often have to face

Throughout some interviews with the interviewees more questions were asked relevant to their given answers. The participants would answer the questions directly or by pulling the discussion with stories and examples either from their experiences, or incidents they have heard, or stories regarding the position of women through the history of Cyprus providing a fruitful discussion. During my visit in Cyprus (3rd-10th of March), I had also the opportunity to take part in the final meeting concerning the last steps to organize the Women's Strike (*"It is Time"*) and take part in the strike itself. For the analysis of the event, I have collected newspaper articles, press releases

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[3] All ten questions have been added to the Appendix 1, p. 96.

and discussions on television panels (2019-2020) regarding the gender inequalities and the Women's Strike, which have complemented the findings.

### 1.0.2  Note on terminology

All of the interviews were conducted in the Cypriot dialect, and because of this the meaning of certain phrases and words could be conveyed differently.  Wherever applicable a further explanation of a phrase or word would be given in a form of footnote, for better understanding and further explanation.

## 2.0   Historical background of the position of women in Cypriot society

The aim of this section is to provide information regarding the social role of Cypriot men and women since the beginning of the 20th century, in order to expand on the society's beliefs and stereotypes further on in the research. As a main source, the book of Androulla Vassiliou *Woman of Cyprus* (2019) is being used, combined with the story telling from my interviewees. Androulla Vassiliou was the First Lady of Cyprus from 1988 to 1993 and has served also as a Member of the Parliament from 1996 until 2006. I have chosen to include her book, as a base for this chapter because it offers an extensive and detailed analysis of the position of women from the beginning of the 20th century. It is also the only literature source I have found that focuses on women's roles, problems and position in the Cypriot society from a historical perspective. For that, I believe that the book offers the most detailed, holistic and politically neutral approach to understand Cypriot women's role and the Cypriot culture. Additionally, throughout the interviews, examples on the social role of women from a historical and cultural perspective were given. Those examples are complemented and enriched from Vassiliou's book.

According to all my informants, women's position and roles in Cyprus throughout history, were the result of the mainstream notion that men are presiding in all areas of life. In people's perceptions, women should only be wives and mothers, a social belief that is still to some extent dominant. Women were asked to obey strict rules which produced discrimination against them. They were first and foremost housewives, if it was necessary they could work in the fields or other occupations as unskilled workers (Vassiliou, 2019: 25-37). All women who worked in the fields were putting the same effort and time as men.  Efi Xanthou (Deputy Leader of the Green Party) drawing from her knowledge from other historical sources about women who had the same working occupation as men, stated that

> the working conditions were horrible for the male workers, and for the female it was even worse. Women were paid less, they were working just as hard as men did, in the fields, in the mines; the only way to distinguish them was from of their clothes.

A different type of discrimination is being pointed out by Vassiliou, who argues that women in rural areas were considered from the rest of the society (especially the middle class women in urban areas) as having limited abilities. That had a negative effect on their education. The role of women (particularly in rural areas) was predetermined: cooking, cleaning, family care, washing,

aid for agriculture and animal farming. Efi Xanthou, also commented on the fact that women's roles were revolving predominantly around the house. Specifically she noted that

> Our society was a weird combination because matriarchy was dominant inside the house, everything that had to do with the 'inside' and the family was strictly matriarchal.

Aside from the distinction of the matriarchy that existed in the private space, and patriarchy in the public space, women had restricted framework of freedom (due to workload) and no time for social life and entertainment. While the woman's life revolved around a male-dominated society, the men held the privilege of entertainment. Xanthou brought an example from the daily activities of men stating that

> men were coming exhausted from work and they were going straight to the *kafeneio*[4] because in the house the dominant element was the female (…) man's job was to be the carrier, the provider of the house and the breeder. So during afternoons he was outside of the house, in the evening was going home to perform his marital duties, to sleep and the next day to do the same all over again.

The comments from Xanthou are complemented by the descriptions provided from Vassiliou's book, regarding the private and public division and opportunities for entertainment. Vassiliou also argues that when women had the opportunity to rest from their daily work they turned to integration into ideological groups, to sports, and other opportunities of entertainment (Vassiliou, 2019:60). Specifically, the process of women's integration into ideological groups acted as a mobilizing mechanism to release women from society's restrictions. There were villages with educated habitants who formed associations from the early 20th century. Through a passage of Vassiliou's book, a woman who later joined a political party, explains how women were influenced. In particular, the interviewee said that "women from the cities came and talked to us about women's rights". They have been informed about a teacher who was a member of the left-wing party of AKEL and "we were told about the injustices that teachers were suffering, especially about unequal pay. We, the party group of our village, took on to organize the women" (Vassiliou, 2019:77).

Women from ideological groups and especially the left-wing party AKEL, which was the most active (early decades of 20th century), tried to convince more women that were capable and

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[4] Traditional café where up to this day only men are going

intelligent to be educated, employed and equally payed (Vassiliou, 2019:76-80). Women from the groups were visiting others in their houses to initiate them, but most of the time they were unable to convince other women due to their worry about the community's opinion. The society's opinion was valued more and determined their lives. When the left-wing political party AKEL was declared illegal in 1955, by the English colonizers and during the struggle of the EOKA (national liberation struggle 1955-1959), women who took part in the liberation struggle were risking their lives. According to Efi Xanthou, women in Cyprus during that period were divided into two categories based on their social class.

> From the one hand you have the women who were raised up in urban areas and they were educated, usually women from the middle class. Women from aristocratic families were often interlinked with the colonizers so it was rare to find those families engaging with the struggle. Very few women were involved in general, but most of them was because someone from their family introduced them. Many of them took the responsibility to carry leaflets, others offered more. They were writing and printing revolutionary leaflets, others risking their lives were hosting Cypriot fighters in their homes and because the house was matriarchal, they were fully responsible to protect the people they were hosting from the authorities (English authorities).

Vassiliou's book provide more information about the role some women took during the liberation. Some of them had hideouts in their homes to hide militants, guarded and carried weapons, and distributed leaflets carrying messages. Some of those women, who participated actively in the liberation struggle, have been tortured by the British military, which Vassiliou describes through testimonies of women in her book (Vassiliou, 2019:207-233). As the time progressed, attitudes gradually began to change and the Cypriot woman emerged from social constraints in an attempt to regulate her life as she began to be concerned about politics and more interested to invest on education. Through the arguments of Vassiliou, the British colony had reinforced the education of girls. Knowledge through constant education has been the foundational stone for the development of Cypriot women. By the early decades of the 20th century, only basic education provided by primary schools was considered acceptable and fitting for women, with only few wealthy families providing secondary education to their girls and later on an opportunity to study abroad (after 1940). With the Turkish invasion (1974) and the displacement of 1/3 of the population, advanced education became a necessity.

According to Efi Xanthou (Deputy Leader of the Green Party, oriented in the Centre-left)

After the invasion, for the first time, you had people from different geographical areas of the island. These people had a different culture. For example, they used to marry people from their own or their nearest village. Because these people merged with the people from the south, there was a greater selection of individuals to choose for marriage. Due to the situation, houses and pieces of land were lost, so families did not have dowries to give. The only distinction that defined which woman is more suitable for marriage than other is the educational level and their job. If someone had a job they were suitable for marriage. For women this opened the way to education and to find a job.

Additionally, the contribution of early female teachers[5] was crucial to the liberalization and development of Cypriot women to be seen as equal with men. The State, the Church, the Greek Government and charitable organizations were interested in offering their help for girls' education. The UK Government has played an important role in developing girls' primary education. Specifically, the English colony provided a new educational policy in 1935 and reinforced the secondary education for girls and boys. After the 1940s the UK government saw the education as a social service, and their interest on girls' education increased (Vassiliou, 2019:86-91).

Hence, the position of women started to change. From being the obedient and submissive subject of men prior the 20th century, the global changes influenced the Cypriot society through the English colony, and the role of women has started to change through the expansion of the educational system. The desire for success on an educational and employment level was increased and preserved after 1974, when the need from the society to have women capable of working and educated emerged. Despite the progress of women, stereotypes and patriarchal social structures still exist. As it was showed from the interviews up until this point the undervaluation of women continues as women are considering to be suitable only for the private domain. The role of women started to change a century ago, and as Irene Zorpa (President of Local Government Pancyprian from Solidarity Movement) stated

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[5] Between 1885-1886, the number of male teachers was 186 and female teachers were 25, while between 1944-1945 the number of female teachers reached 329 and male teachers were 679. Since then, every two decades (according to the statistics up until 1996) the number of female teachers was increased more than the number of men. (Vassiliou, 2019:107-109)

> For many years men were everywhere; in the parliament, as prime ministers, as school principals, as electricians. Everywhere was male-dominated. They [society] believe that the role of the woman is something else. It does not matter if you are well educated, if you graduated from universities, woman's duty is to find a job in order to keep herself occupied for a couple of hours, preferably until noon. Because her job is to take care of the kids as our mothers, grandmothers and other women before us have done. This way of thinking still exists.

Throughout this section the women's role was presented on a grounded historical level in order to provide the reader with a basic background knowledge for a better understanding of the research. It provides a wide-raging contextualization that aims to pinpoint key points such as culture, tradition, gender norms and stereotypes, which will serve the starting point for the analysis of gender inequality in the political sphere of Cyprus. The political and social changes that took place on the island, both from British colonialism and the Turkish invasion, did not affect the traditional ideological beliefs of the Cypriot society to such extent as to establish a gender equality welfare.

# 3.0   POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN CYPRUS

Having in mind the historical position of men and women in Cyprus from the previous century, and the beginning of change of women's roles in the society, this chapter goes a step further to analyze the political activism of women in Cyprus. The chapter acts as a historiographic discussion of authors who have written about Cypriot women, and women's movements in Cyprus. Drawing from authors who are engaging with the concept of political activism, the aim of the chapter is to explain the impact and the importance of women's mobilization. By comparing political scientists about women's activism (Alison; Arruzza; Afshar; Callaway; Hunt & Posa) with what historians have said about women's movement, and with what the participants of this research discussed, the chapter offers a deep inside to women's history in Cyprus; a history that often is left unsaid. The chapter begins by summarizing the analysis of Kaufman and Williams (2010) and A. Vassiliou's book (2019) for a better understanding of their contribution to literature and to better grasp women's activism in Cyprus. I continue with women's involvement in the national liberation struggle EOKA (1955-9), and emphasize on women's political activism in Cyprus after the Turkish invasion (1974). The latest strike *'It is Time'* (2020) follows,  in comparison with the previous political activism from Cypriot women, and it is defined as a historical starting point from the Cypriot women's movement. In an effort to analyze political activism as a phenomenon, a way of gaining fundamental rights, and apply theories in the case of Cyprus; the book of Kaufman and William *Women and War* will be used as a starting point. The authors are trying to find out the cause that prompts women to take political action during and/or after struggles.

Colonialism and religion in Cyprus contributed to the way struggles began and the way society is functioning up to this day. During the 13th century Cyprus was Orthodox. In the course of the 13th century, Amery of Lusignan I, was crowned as the first King of Cyprus from Henry VI, the Holy Roman Emperor. Thus, the Catholic church gained more power and control over the island. With the conversion to Catholicism, the number of orthodox bishops was reduced from 14 to 4[6]. The Ottoman empire (1571-1878) actively worked on assimilating Cyprus into Ottoman culture in multiple ways. One of them was by giving Ottoman soldiers *timars*[7], which were land grants, on the condition that those soldiers would emigrate to Cyprus. They also actively persecuted the

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[6] "The History of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus." n.d. http://www.atlantaserbs.com/learnmore/history/Cyprus.htm.

[7] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopedia. n.d. "Timar OTTOMAN LAND TENURE." https://www.britannica.com/topic/timar.

crypto-Christian community (Catholic origins) in Cyprus, called *Linobambaki*[8]. With the Ottoman empire in 1571, the Christian Orthodox religion was established as the only recognized religion with the use of millets[9] and the Catholic community was excluded to avoid Latin influences. This meant that only the Orthodox community had their own court of law. Hence, the Ottoman Empire caused the Orthodox religion to be the major religion of the country.

The remains of colonialism, are still noticeable, in the structure of the social system and the gender roles which are nevertheless, changing through the years. Through my interview with Rena Yiavasi, who comes from the Citizens' Alliance party (Centre-left wing), regarding the culture of Cyprus and the external influences, she noted that

> we should not forget that Cyprus (…) was under the Ottoman Empire, they had a
> different mindset. Turks were always part of our lives, as well as Arab people, we had
> oriental influences that are not easy to eliminate. It needs time, education, knowledge,
> to get involved with nations that are more developed than us. Despite the fact that we
> are part of the EU, deep down we are oriental. We are in the EU by luck and effort but
> we carry inside us a lot of oriental influence[10].

The Ottoman empire changed the culture of the island and primarily the religion which had a major impact on the gender roles in the Cypriot society. The establishment of Orthodoxy set a more traditional way in which gender roles function in the society. A research from Ariana M. Salazar and Michael Lipka[11] show that Orthodox countries tend to think women primarily as mothers. Specifically, they examine 18 countries from the Central and Eastern Europe with a main focus on 10 countries that have orthodox majorities. The average percentage of the countries who agree on the view that women are responsible for childcare is 69%. On the contrary, for the same view, the average percentage of Catholic majorities and unaffiliated countries reach only 45%. Salazar and Lipka's findings indicate that a median of 42% of the Orthodox-majority countries believe that a wife should always obey her husband. In contrast, 25% of non-orthodox population in those countries believe that a woman should be submissive to her husband.

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[8] Linobambaki or Linovamvaki, Source: Captain A. R. Savile (1878). *Cyprus*. H.M. Stationery Office. p. 130.

[9] Millet = religious community, Source: Sachedina, Abdulaziz Abdulhussein (2001). *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*. Oxford University Press. pp. 96–97. ISBN 978-0-19-513991-4. And https://www.britannica.com/topic/millet-religious-group

[10] Oriental: Middle Eastern

[11] Ariana Monique Salazar and Michael Lipka. 2017. "On Gender Issues, Many in Orthodox Christian Countries Have Conservative Views." FACTANK. 2017. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/16/on-gender-issues-many-in-orthodox-christian-countries-have-conservative-views/.

According to their research, Orthodox-majority countries tend to have a more conservative gender roles stereotypes.

Colonialism and religion has shifted the perceptions of people in the island. As Kaufman and Williams argue, "in many cases the patriarchal structure of the country was the legacy of the colonial past, in which men were privileged and women were expected to play a more traditional role" (Kaufman & Williams, 2010:60). These roles kept women submissive to the traditional mindset and their obedience towards men. After the independence of Cyprus from England (1960), the Cypriot society gained the right to vote for their own government. But the traditional gender roles still existed because women were still oppressed by having to follow the vote of the husband. On that matter, Roulla Mavronicola from the Movement for Social Democracy which is located in the Centre, pointed out that

> from the day a woman was born, society's perception was that: 'You are a woman. You don't have anything to do with politics. You don't know' (…) I remember when I entered EDEK (1981) they were counting the votes, because it was certain that the women of a family were going to vote the party of the man of the house, were going to vote EDEK. The wife and the daughter(s). There was no chance that those women were going to choose something else.

Depside the fact that women in Cyprus were obedience, there are incidents throughout history where women stood up to claim rights, firstly regarding work and sexual harassment. They were also supporting the national liberation struggle against the British colonial rule, having a secondary role. Even after the independence many years had passed for women to lay claim on their fundamental rights and their involvement in the political sphere. Kaufman and Williams argue that women are often infused with characteristics such as 'peaceful and collaborative'. There are characteristics which are considered as disadvantages for women when it comes to politics and decision-making. Many times though women have used this type of characteristics for peace-building, reconciliation, or to prove that they are not only peaceful when they act as belligerents (Kaufman & Williams, 2010:64).

Through times of conflict women have according to Kaufman and Williams, four options on how to deal with conflict. They can stay passive and do nothing, they can become politically active to resolve the conflict, they can actively participate in combats as fighters or they can flee and become refugees. Women are affected nonetheless, and by choosing their approach to the conflict

proves that they have agency to make a conscious choice. "They are (women) affected by conflict and war in ways that are different from men who are engaged in the actual fighting" (Kaufman & Williams, 2010:1-2). An example of that is the way in which women were affected during and after the Turkish invasion in 1974. They had suffered not only the loss of their loved ones, but also with their displacement, they had suffered the loss of the house which was crucial for women, as it was their main domain (private).

During the national liberation struggle (EOKA), some women chose to engage actively by providing support. The manner they chose to engage in activism after the Turkish invasion was more dynamic compared with their role during EOKA, which was mainly secondary, functioning according to their roles as mothers and wives. Women after the invasion, tried actively to resolve the dispute through a peace-building marching towards the buffer zone. Women in 1988, by conducting a well-organized march towards the buffer zone showed that "women can make the conscious choice to move beyond the private sphere and into the public realm by becoming politically active and engaging with the formal political structure" (Kaufman & Williams, 2010:58). It was a form of political activism that involved something more than working within the political system. Women chose consciously to create networks, national and international, to bring the Cyprus dispute to the front of the international discussion and make their voices heard. It is more likely that women through their acts, wanted to pressure the international organizations, especially UN, which had set UNFICYP bases on the island since 1964 and expanded across the buffer zone with the Turkish invasion[12].

This is due to the fact that

> women are motivated to take political actions when a conflict touches them directly in some way. In those cases women's political activism is guided not only by the conflict, but by social, economic, and cultural factors that have undoubtedly divided the society as well (Kaufman & Williams, 2010:62) .

The entire social, political and economic system of Cyprus crashed by the invasion. With the Turkish invasion in 1974, around 3.595 were the casualties for Cyprus with 992 missing people. The displacement of 265.000 Greek and Turkish Cypriot people caused chaos, because the free part of the island was not able to accommodate the refugees. The

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[12] UN. n.d. "About the Buffer Zone." Accessed March 30, 2020. https://unficyp.unmissions.org/about-buffer-zone.

loss of 36.2% of the country caused an economic collapse and the independency of the Republic of Cyprus was violated.

## 3.1 Women during EOKA

The national liberation struggle EOKA[13] (1955-59) affected the portion of women who were involved either through their relatives' action in the struggle, as Efi Xanthou from the Green Party (Centre-left) mentioned, or through direct engagement with the conflict as Vassiliou argued in her book (2019:207-233). Women were supporting the struggle with their identity as mothers and wives. As often happened in the more traditional societies such as Cypriot, women might take motherist positions as a form of a political action. Taking action from a motherist position is under more personal terms, because the general belief is that 'our sons' (Cypriot sons/husbands) must be kept alive and protected during the struggle.

The motherhood identity was used to take care of the participants, but this does not mean that they have considered themselves as activists. Hellen Callaway notes that women tend to put "others – their children, husbands and community—ahead of themselves"[14]. Kaufman and Williams address also the fact that

> during conflict, women often coalesce around and more traditional gender identity, allowing them to pursue issues as 'wives' or as 'mothers', identities seen as less threatening in a patriarchal structure already deeply divided (Kaufman & Williams, 2010:5-6).

To understand more the role of women in the national liberation struggle, I will use Miranda Alison's concept of "nationalistic fervor". Alison refers to the Tamil Tiger, the female combatants in Sri Lanka who were motivated by the "nationalist fervor" in order to obtain the freedom of the Tamil nation. The concept of "nationalist fervor" can be applicable to women's participation during EOKA because there was a "communal perception of suffering, oppression and injustice"[15]. Emotions like anger for the deaths of their loved ones, can lead women to actively participate in a struggle. Taking action in any form (peacefully or aggressively) it is a way of gaining agency. Something that has been stated from literature but also from Skevi Pashia (from AKEL located in the left-wing), is that women often are seen as a second class citizen. During

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[13] EOKA is the acronym of the organization's full name in Greek, Εθνική Οργάνωση Κυπρίων Αγωνιστών, *Ethniki Organosi Kyprion Agoniston* (National Organization of Cypriot Fighters)

[14] Callaway, Helen. 1986. "Survival and Support: Women's Forms of Political Action." In *Caught Up in Conflict: Women's Responses to Political Strife*, edited by Rosemary Ridd and Helen Callaway, 228. London: Macmillan.

[15] Miranda, Alison. 2003. "Cogs in the Weel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam." *Civil Wars* 6 (4): 40.

our conversation she remembered her inability to understand the gender roles in the Cypriot society as she was growing up. Pashia noted that

> I was not aware of the stereotypes and perceptions that defined the woman as a second class citizen. I was listening as I was growing up my mother, my aunts saying "my husband did this…but is the provider of the household" and it was always frustrating. I could not accept this submission. (…) we live in a patriarchal society and this is the situation. The society but also the women, we maintain this patriarchal society because we accept a lot of things. (…) the stereotypes and the perceptions are so difficult to erase and the mindset that is created is very hard to change it. (…) that is the reason why it is implanted in the mind of a woman that she's a second-class citizen, she is not made for leading roles, she is not fit for the public space, she belongs to the private space having secondary roles.

This perception did not prevent women to take action. As Hunt and Posa argue, being perceived as a second class citizen "is a source of empowerment, since it has made women adept at finding innovative ways to cope with problems"[16]. This way of empowerment of women has been discussed also from Haleh Afshar who argues that "Conflicts can both empower and disempower women, since women can be at the same time included in practice and yet excluded ideologically, or they may be both victims and agents of change"[17]. Women during EOKA were excluded ideologically since they did not take the vow as men did, which was the official way to be part of the struggle. Nonetheless, the struggle gave them the opportunity to find alternative and often more dangerous ways to engage with the action, that contributed to their empowerment. During these four years though (1955-59), the demands of equal rights of women had been put on hold. They had to redefine their identities, and from women who tried to claim their rights, they went back (not all of them) to the role of mothers/wives to exercise a motherist approach and support. With EOKA everything was put on hold until the independence day and the establishment of women's right to vote.

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[16] Hunt, Swanee and Posa, Christina. 2001. "Women Waging Peace." *Foreign Policy* 124.

[17] Afshar, Haleh. 2004. "Introduction, War and Peace: What Do Women Contribute." In *Development, Women, and War: Feminist Perspectives*, edited by Haleh Afshar and Deborah Eade, 2. Oxford: OXFAM GB.

## 3.2 Women Walk Home and the Human chain of Freedom (1988 and 1993)

With the independence of the island and the gain for the right to vote for all citizens, Cypriot women started to get organized once again[18]. In the same period, the left-wing women's organization POGO became legal with goal to mobilize women as a mass and to encourage them to get involved in the development of the island. In particular, POGO's primary goal was to ensure women's equal pay for equal work with men. A comprehensive maternity protection, state and social welfare for working women and mothers, state social institutions for children, adolescents, infants and toddlers whose mothers worked. However, the obstacles to the organization, were the distrust of the people and the stereotypes about the role that women should play in the society. The action of POGO and the efforts to reshape the mindset of the Cypriot society by eliminating stereotypes against women, affected the perception of women for themselves and thus the actions they took after the Turkish invasion. With the two political actions Cypriot women took in 1988 and in 1993, they showed their persistence to take back the lost land and their homes.

After the Turkish invasion, women organized a public march called *'Women Walk Home'* (1988), in a national and international level. Hence, from the traditional role of mothers and wives, Cypriot women obtained a more active political activism. By taking a political action, the public-private dualism is not so clear anymore, that is where political and social empowerment of women takes place. But even with this empowerment, women were still perceived as peaceful with their traditional roles of mothers and wives. For example in the *'Women Walk Home'* according to Efi Xanthou from the Green Party (Centre-left), women who marched to the buffer zone were seen as harmless and their imprisonment in 1988 shocked the Cypriot society. Yet women's political actions did not change the pre-existing condition of the country. Xanthou stated that

> The first times we had women's mobilizations was during 1986-1987. It was the well-known mobilizations for the freedom of Cyprus. Women went to the buffer zone, it was a peaceful intervention. Men were excluded to avoid any problems, and for their (women's) own safety because they were aware that the Turkish soldier will shoot them. If they had men with them, it would have been considered as soldiers or camouflaged spies. The role of the woman was so undervalued, they were seen as harrmless. They

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[18] They began their mobilizations for women's rights through the left-wing women's organization POGD (1950) which was declared illegal during the liberation struggle. After the independence the organization was renamed as POGO.

wouldn't go to the occupied land and violate the buffer zone. When many women from the 'Women Walk Home' mobilization were imprisoned from the Turkish army, the Cypriot society was shocked. The memories of the invasion, the missing people, the tortures and the deaths were still fresh. The Cypriot society was expecting the worst scenario and there was a general fear across the society for these women. In some cases there were humiliating behaviors towards them, there were no incidents of rapes at least of what we know.  But overall, a different kind of respect was created towards women and I don't think it is pure luck that women were engaging with politics from the beginning of 1990s.

Women in Cyprus, tried to make their voices heard despite the undervaluation and the war crimes against them during the invasion. Kaufman and Williams argue that in times of conflict, women are becoming "the head of the household", caring for survivors and children, find access to food, endure sexual violence and exploitation (2010:57). As Efi Xanthou continues, during the invasion

There were mass rapes, women were taking roles which were traditionally male, either they were refugees or not, the whole island was affected. The war used women as pressure lever, armies were always doing that. Women had to keep the family together as refugees, they were worried for the men and for the children…they lost everything. Everything was involving around the house, when they lost it and they were constantly on the move, it was a *psychrolousia*[19]. But it was something that might helped with the new roles they had to take and their new positions in the society.

Women can also be benefited from destruction because as she mentioned in our discussion

However distorted it might sound, the biggest gain women had were the mass abortions that took place. Because of the massive rapes, our society accepted silently the fact that women had to make abortions. And when this happened the mindset of the society changed subconsciously. There was a dichotomy because our law said that abortions were illegal, but the society realized that it was acceptable when the circumstances demanded it. The mind frame of our society opened.

It seems that conflicts can change aggressively, drastically and efficiently gender roles and the mindset of a society. No matter how traditional a society is, with the absence of men, women have to take up new roles and act differently, since during and even after the conflict women can

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[19] Psychrolousía = cold shower= a negative event that happens suddenly

go through a violation not only of their land and home, but also of their bodies. Regarding the mass rapes, Rena Yiavasi from the Citizen's Alliance (Centre-left), noted

> We all know about it. There were villages with testimonies about this. There are testimonies in written about girls coming from a specific village, Asha,[20] and they were getting out of the busses, all of them molested from rapes. We are talking about mass rapes that were silenced. Maybe because it was a taboo or because that was the time when we had a lot of deaths and always the death is above the rape. We had also the missing people as we still do. We had the displacement, it was a bane which contributed to silence the rapes.

Regardless of the aggressive violation of women's bodies as a tool of war, and the effects the invasion had on their lives, Cypriot women choose to organize a march on national and international level in 1988, with a nationalistic character. As Myria Vassiliadou argues "Cypriot women's voices were generally hidden under the patriarchal discourse (…). It was only through nationalism (…) that women's voices began to emerge" (Vassiliadou, 2002:460). Their empowerment emerged from their position of the 'peaceful' woman, who was under social regulations. The incidents of rapes had to be silenced to avoid the stigma, so they turned their demands towards the displacement which was an issue that affected the community as a whole, bypassing the fact that women have been violated.

Kaufman and Williams writing about women's struggles for recognition as equal members of the society, are focusing on the way women respond to conflict situations having as case studies many countries. The authors include in their book a section on Cyprus in which they state that "women's political activism became an important facet of cross-communal cooperation and reconciliation, although it did not lead to a successful conclusion of the issue". As it was stated before when women are excluded from the political decision making process they turn to alternatives in order to contribute to peace-making, cooperation and reconciliation. In the case of Cyprus

> Women were willing to be trained and educated in conflict resolution and negotiations techniques (…) women were largely excluded from the political decision that divided the island and kept it divided, they played a significant role (…) primarily informal and existed outside the bounds of the formal political structure and process (Kaufman & Williams, 2010:79).

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[20] Asha, is a village in the Famagusta District

Women started to obtain new political identities with their entry in the labor market. Specifically for Cyprus, given the fact that women participated first time in a strike demanding their rights as workers under a women's organization during the 40s[21]; Cypriot women started to shift their political identities around that period. They continued to shift their identities (intentionally or not) before, during and after the conflicts in Cyprus (1955-9, 1974).

Aside from that mobilization, a second example of women trying to be heard and participate in the peace negotiations was the human chain they formed in 1993. It was a

> Peaceful demonstration by Cypriot women(…)A 'Human Chain of Freedom' greeted the more than 1000 delegates from 47 Commonwealth countries, including 35 heads of government, 31 foreign ministers and 15 cabinet ministers, who were attending the summit. The 'Freedom Chain' was composed of 40.000 Greek Cypriot women, aged nine to 80, who stood along the 30-mile highway between Nicosia and Limassol, where many of the Commonwealth deliberations were held. Some women refugees held placards asking to be allowed to return to their homes, while others held photographs of their husbands and sons, who are among the 1.619 persons missing and unaccounted for since Turkey's 1974 military invasion of Cyprus[22].

Women protesting, asking for their homes and land back, covering an entire high-way for men leaders to see and hear them calling for justice. Women who many of them lost their loved ones, their shelters, their security, their peace but still they were referred only briefly. The most important was to satisfy and act according to political regulations. The emphasis in the literature is given to the negotiations and not to the people who were excluded from them and why. Women tried to find an alternative way to be heard, they had covered 48km of human chain and still were excluded not only from the negotiations but also from the history. There is an absence of the movement, and the contribution of women in general, from the basic history books of the

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[21] Women started to participate with determination in the mobilization for the working class before the end of 1930s. That led to the strike of 1944. It is a historic incident that is almost forgotten because of its absence from history books. The emerge of the numerical increase in consumer goods after the W.W. II mobilized Cypriot people. One of those mobilizations was the '1st of March of 1944' strike which lasted for 23 days. The strike initially involved public works workers but as a gesture of solidarity and support for the strike, a large portion of the population (men and women) participated. For more see: Vassiliou, 2019:117

[22] Despite the magnitude of this protest, limited reference exists on the matter. I was able to find this small piece that describes the protest with great difficulty. None of the interviewees was present at this protest and it is an incident (like the strike of 1944) which has been almost forgotten. Source: *Cyprus Newsletter*. 1993. "Cyprus Hosts Commonwealth Summit," November 4, 1993. https://books.google.nl/books?id=C1Wfov4cHK4C&pg=PT14&lpg=PT14&dq=human+chain+women+in+cyprus&source=bl&ots=y8PVF N8cYp&sig=ACfU3U39Gr8qguLYvpK3-DqPSLbfqhtgYQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj3xuvynuXoAhWEqaQKHd8fBYQQ6AEwDHoECAsQLA#v=onepage&q&f=false.

educational system in Cyprus. This can be an example of the efforts to minimize the attempts of women to achieve peace and claim rights of engaging with the political-public-sphere, to claim what is also theirs. There is an invisibility of their actions during the 1974 despite the fact that many of them were affected physically (rapes), were displaced and became refugees. Regardless, the human chain was achieved because women established essential networks.

According to Kaufman and Williams, women who continue to engage with the public domain after the conflict ends, it is because of the networks (women's organizations) they have built during the conflict. Their networks helped them to be empowered and gave them support. Building a network does not mean that the ultimate goal is only to end the conflict but also expose the national conflict to the international community. For some authors like Bernadette D. McAliskey, the cooperation and creation of networks across differences to resolve or to bring awareness on an issue, is a "feminine way of working"[23]. Women have common goals which can mobilize them regardless their differences . The dialogue across difference is an advantage of women according to Elisabeth Porter, and it is a way in which women in the strike of 2020 eliminated the political boundaries of left-right wing to address common issues. They have found a mutual ground to work together.

## 3.3 It is Time

The collaboration of Cypriot women in the recent strike, was extraordinary and unique. It was a well-organized effort of women to address once more their struggles by setting aside their political beliefs. The exclusion of women from decision making and the violent incidents against women in Cyprus caused the strike of 6th of March in 2020. The absence of women from decision-making process, the end of sexism, discrimination and sexual harassment were some of the demands from the strike *'It is Time'*. Mariella Aristidou from the Democratic Rally (DISY) that is positioned in the center-right wing, stated that

> Through various actions and political initiatives, we see a struggle to improve the position of women. Numerous women's organizations and networks began sending their own messages and claiming the obvious, such as when it took place. The goal of all of us is to achieve gender equality. For the first time in Cyprus, women's and trade unions, non-governmental organizations, public and private bodies, independent

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[23] McAliskey, Delvin Bernadette. 2008. "From Rural to Urban: A Rural View." by *talk given at Peace by Piece: Three Day International Women's Conference*. Belfast, Northern Ireland.

women have joined forces to claim the obvious. There are issues that the women of Cyprus are facing. Such as unequal representation in decision-making centers, unequal access to work and pay, to end violence, for legislation and structures.

The women's movement in Cyprus includes all women's organizations under political parties, women's trade unions and NGOs that engage with women's struggles. The movement, started to inform the public about this mobilization and call for support since the beginning of February of 2020. With statements in the media (television, newspapers) and in social networks (facebook, twitter), women's organizations were trying to inform for the reasons of the strike and their demands which are claiming for many years now but in vain. With the slogan *'It is Time' to claim equal rights, equal opportunities in all aspects of life"* women wanted to show at least for an hour, their presence through their absence from all working areas. Alexia Sakadaki from the Green Political Party oriented at Centre-left, noted that

> The target group of the strike is every woman of Cyprus regardless ethnicity and occupation. We believe that all women are workers and even the housewife is a worker, she is cleaning, cooking, taking care of the house; unpaid. (…) the message is that they are going to show their presence through their absence (…) we cannot force anybody, we have just called all the organizations to respect the strike and support it. (…) the point was to make a strike as peacefully as possible where women would participate unhindered to feel that they are part of the mobilization and that their right to strike is respected.

The strike was an initiative from the Cyprus Equality Observatory (PIK)[24] and immediately was accepted and embraced from all women's organizations. The women's movement had talked with the trade unions for their support, they were in communication with the Minister of Economics regarding women who work as civil service workers, to ensure that their salary is not going to be affected from their absence or to avoid any other consequences. The same process has been done for the bank sector and semi-government sector. The requiring efforts and steps had been taken to ensure that the strike would have been made peacefully and all employers will respect it.

The Women's strike in Cyprus was organized by political women organizations and trade unions to bring attention to many issues. They wanted to address the discrimination women face in the

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[24] PIK=ΠΙΚ (Παρατηρητήριο Ισότητας Κύπρου)

workplace, the inequality in the decision-making process, the existence of gender stereotypes, and the need for state infrastructures that are supportive towards women. Regarding the sexual harassment and violence against women which was among the addressed issues, Irene Zorpa, from the Solidarity Movement oriented at the right-wing, stated that

> The strike emerged because of the last events and the increase of incidents with domestic violence, in the workplace and especially in the civil service sector, in politics, in the house, it is everywhere! There was recently an escalation of incidents of violence (…) in the past women and children were raped often. Especially the girls who were send to wealthy families to work as maids, they were getting pregnant from the men of the house. These cases always existed! But men were threatening women with violence so women were always silent.

With the comment "there was recently an escalation of incidents of violence" Zorpa refers to the 'Orestis case'. Nikos Metaxas was going under the online name Orestis and was a Greek-Cypriot army officer, who was convicted in 2019 as a serial killer, after the murder of 7 women and girls over the period of three years. Three of the women he killed were from the Philippines, one from Nepal and one from Romania and most of them were housekeepers. Two girls were also killed aged six and eight. The murders of these women, the fact that there were reports from their friends stating their absence, and the inaction of the authorities caused a shock in the Cypriot community. Rena Yiavasi from the Citizen's Alliance (Centre-left) noted that

> after the tragedy of 'Orestis case' something broke in the society and men started to listen and take into account domestic violence. It was something shocking for the Cypriot society and it opened a space to discuss domestic violence.

International media criticized the ignorance of the police towards the fate of those women. *The National Herald* announced that Scotland Yard was called to step in and investigate the incident "That came after Cypriot police were blistered with criticism for ignoring the disappearance of as many as 30 women, foreign workers, accused of not caring and acting indifferently until a tourist found a body in a mine shaft, setting off an intensified investigation"[25]. The BBC which was also covering the case noted that "The country's police chief was later sacked and the justice minister

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[25] "After Cyprus Police Criticized, Scotland Yard's Steps Into Serial Killer Case." 2019. The National Herald. 2019. https://www.thenationalherald.com/archive_general_news_cyprus/arthro/after_cyprus_police_criticized_scotland_yards_steps_into_serial_killer_case-13435/.

resigned over the failure to properly investigate following the missing persons reports"[26]. The lack of concern from the authorities on the fate of those women caused a feeling of anger and frustration among the Cypriot community, and mostly among women who were demanding for years for support of victims of violence bringing attention to vulnerable women and especially foreignness.

In contrast with the previous mobilizations of Cypriot women, this time the identity of 'woman' took priority over race, ethnicity, social class and religion in Cyprus, and the target groups were based on gender identity. Skevi Pashia from the left party AKEL, stated

> The strike was a big success of the women's movement from the aspect that after all those years women were united once again. I remember when women were united in the past, for national issues to resolve the Cyprus issue, it was not women's movement. That is why we say that for the first time(!) the women's movement was united to demand its own requests (!). From that aspect we see it as a historical point. And if we manage to keep this union among women's organizations despite political beliefs I personally believe we are going to achieve change faster.

With this mobilization, women showed that they are willing to unite despite political beliefs and open a national conversation about empowerment of women all around the island, covering demands for a wide spectrum of women, from housekeepers to politicians, from local women to foreigners. As Cinzia Arruzza discussed, women who are establishing networks to demand their fundamental rights are aiming to increase "awareness of the need to rebuild solidarity and collective action as the only way to defend ourselves against continuous attacks on our bodies, freedom, and self- determination, as well as against imperialist and neoliberal policies" and to "to emphasize the work that women perform not only in the workplace but outside it, in the sphere of social reproduction"(Arruzza, 2018:194-196).

According to Kaufman and Williams, women's exclusion and neglect can be the result of "the patriarchal nature of most social and political systems" which "often provides barriers to women's involvement in the formal political process, a place in which women could affect significant change"(Kaufman and Williams, 2010:1). The authors argue that feminists activists try to change the patriarchal state (social structure) and bring equality after the conflict. But do the strikes like

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[26] "Cyprus Serial Killer Nikos Metaxas Handed Seven Life Sentences." 2019. BBC News. 2019. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48744157.

the Women Walk Home, 'It is Time' and other efforts of women to change the social structure are feminism? According to Silia Kyrmitsi, the former Social Security Committee Adviser and member of the Centre party EDEK, there were individual efforts with a feminist approach before the 1980s, where journalists were writing in newspapers with a feminist discourse, efforts to be organized as a feminist movement were made by people, and as she noted

> We [Cyprus] also had examples of extreme feminism sometime in the 80's, imitating the trends abroad where people got to the extreme point of 'I take off my bra', 'I grow body hair', 'we do not need men'

And on the matter of feminist discourse, Roulla Mavronicola who served as a MP from 2006 until 2011 under the political party EDEK, argued that

> Feminism is a different concept, which is why we left behind the term feminism and adopted definitions such as equality, equal opportunities, parity, isonomy [egalitarianism].

Irene Zorpa believes that individuals have to build their own character, to be trustworthy in order to enter politics and if they are suitable, only then it is okay to be helped. Specifically, she stated that

> I am not the type of the feminist woman who is going to follow or do anything a woman says just because is a woman. When I see a woman who put and effort and for various reasons has not succeed then I will help her. But I will not do it for a woman who expects from other people or the state to save her. She should stand up like we all did, and we moved forward. I will support women whenever is needed because the society has to go forward, to have equality in the workplace, in the political sphere. There are women who are worth it, who are educated, women who know what they want.

All of my participants expressed the desire to work within the differences of both genders and not against them. They do not erase the nature of the genders. They try to find a way for both genders to work along, side by side as equals. And I strongly believe that the strikes of the past, and the strikes that might come in the future, are a product of social change towards equality.

Concluding from the statement of the participants, there is a more humanistic approach. Throughout the preparations for the strike the term 'women' characterized everyone that identifies as a woman regardless class, race, ethnicity, color, wage, social/educational status and occupation. Women of the upper-class (politicians), with higher income were supporting and inviting women from all the levels of society, to claim fundamental rights for all. Sexism and

discrimination is encountered in all aspects of the society. They wanted to bring in the front of the discussions gender inequality issues that are being silenced, along with the need to apply existing laws and policies that ensure the security and equality of women. Alexia Sakadaki, the organizing director of the Green Party which is positioned in the Centre-left wing, stated that

> This is the first time a strike like this is happening, maybe because the circumstances are more mature. A lot of work was done by our predecessors to get the Cypriot society where we are now, and I think the conditions have matured a lot. We as women's organizations are more mature to cooperate with each other, because we have realized that without cooperation such issues cannot be resolved. So we know that with the cooperation between us, leaving behind anything else ideological that may separate us we can bring out this action.

The interviewees who have also participated and organized the strike, shared their opinions on the impact of the strike for the nearest future, and emphasized its importance as a historical point due to the fact that it is the first mobilization organized by women from women. Specifically, Roulla Mavronicola emphasized that

> It is very important that we have young women who are showing interest for politics. And the strike that happened was very important for the women's movement, I believe that it was a milestone for the movement. It was the first time that all women's trade unions did something for our rights. Neither for the Cyprus problem, not for our commonwealth, but for us(!), and this is a very optimistic message. Now is the time to think how to moderate it in order to move forwards and continue.

So far, the political activism of Cypriot women has been examined from the mid-1950s up until the 2020. The chapter served as a historiographic discussion bringing together authors who wrote about Cypriot women and their mobilizations, authors who evaluated and analyzed the concept of political activism, along with the statements and perceptions of the interviewees. In an effort to break down the causes of the traditional gender roles and their effect on women's activism, it became clear that, religion was and is regulating the behaviors of women and men through deeply rooted stereotypes. Regardless, throughout time, Cypriot women choose to engage with conflicts by navigating their actions alongside with their social roles, either acting as mothers/wives, as peaceful protestors or as strikers. Women's mobilization throughout these historical events helped to shift the social roles of Cypriot women, in a way that they were no longer seen as harmless and

incompetent to engage with the political life. As it will be made clear in the upcoming chapters, despite their efforts so far, women are still underrepresented in the decision-making process and even though the government of Cyprus has ratified UN and EU policies to eliminate this issue, little change has been made.

# 4.0 United Nation & European Union's policies: Quotas and Women's Politician perceptions on the strategy

United Nations' and European Union's policies are among the tools societies are being given to try and reach gender equality on every aspect of daily life. This chapter intents to point out how Cypriot government is using and implementing these policies, and focuses on the perceptions and interpretations of the participants regarding the debatable strategy of gender quotas in politics. the first section provides a brief overview of two United Nation's policies, the *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)* and the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995),* which are the two major policies that are addressing the female underrepresentation and the need for gender equality in the decision-making process. In that framework, the implementation of these policies by Cyprus, and the efforts to be put into action will be reviewed and examined in the second section of this chapter. The section encapsulates also the perceptions of female politicians on the UN and EU policies. The last section of this chapter dives into the question of what gender quotas 'do', by combining authors and insights from the participants. The goal is to try and understand the (un)necessity and usefulness of gender quotas and how this system can affect parity democracy. I have chosen to emphasize on the gender quotas system because the interviewees expressed a strong opinion on the matter, and in the literature the controversiality of the strategy is being pointed out. Authors (Ruiz; Lépinard; Rubio-Marín; Krook) are analyzing the system of quotas and the advantages or disadvantages of supranational policies will be combined to produce a fruitful discussion and give a broader image on these matters.

## 4.1 United Nation's policies for gender equality

During the interviews, the interviewees have been asked whether Cyprus is receiving policies from the EU and what efforts are being made to implement them. Almost all of them mentioned explicitly the *Beijing Declaration* (1995), which contain policies that apply to the countries that ratified it, and Cyprus is one of them. This policy contains regulations to help countries on how to manage gender equality. When looking into this declaration I also found the *CEDAW* Convention (1979) to which none of the participants referred to. The Convention formed the base for the creation of the *Beijing Declaration*. The *CEDAW* also contains policies that could help

gender equality in Cyprus. Thus, I believe that by focusing on these two UN policies, a more clear image will be provided on how supranational strategies help for gender equality.

## Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (*CEDAW*)

To begin with, the *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women* has been characterized as the most important human rights treaty for women[27]. *CEDAW* was orchestrated by the UN Commission regarding the Status of Women and was adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 18, in 1979. The Convention has been put into effect two years after its adoption from the UN General Assembly (Mullins, 2018:257-58). The *CEDAW* clarified that all member states of the Convention have the obligation to ensure equal rights for men and women to enjoy all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. In order for every member state to ensure these rights there is a need to "To embody the principle of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation" (*CEDAW*, 1979:4). In other words, states that have ratified the policy must make the necessary adjustments on their legal, political and civil institutions to reach the expectations of the policy.

Regardless the good intentions of the Convention, countries like the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, UK and Finland faced various issues and barriers to the implementation of the policy. The Netherlands has implemented the policy in 1991 and since then, the Convention had little impact. Despite the fact that the government is reporting ways in which *CEDAW* can and should be implemented, civil servants responsible to implement the policy have limited knowledge about the treaty obligations. Thus, as argued by Van den Brink, policy makers have to understand the legal character of the treaty and use it as a tool for change (2013)[28]. The *CEDAW* seems to have contributed to a gender equality in Canada and Australia, but had different impact, or not at all in the UK and Finland. Lucie Lamarche (2013) argued that in Canada, the treaty confirmed the legal and juridical entry points to achieve gender equality by contributing in various ways[29]. The Australian government, according to A. Byrnes, submitted numerous reports to the *CEDAW*

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[27] UN. n.d. "*CEDAW* in Your Daily Life." United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/*CEDAW*/Pages/DailyLife.aspx.

[28] Brink, Marjolein Van den. 2013. "THE *CEDAW* at Er All These Years: Firmly Rooted in Dutch Clay?" In *Women's Human Rights CEDAW in International, Regional and National Law*, 482–510. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139540841.022.

[29] Lamarche, Lucie. 2013. "The Canadian Experience with the *CEDAW*: All Women's Rights Are Human Rights – a Case of Treaties Synergy." In *Women's Human Rights CEDAW in International, Regional and National Law*, 358–84. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139540841.017.

Committee and promoted key politician representatives in the government to ensure sexual equality and achieve *CEDAW*'s goals[30]. The treaty has not been so efficient in the UK, since the government has taken crucial steps towards gender equality without any normative input from the treaty. As S. Fredman is arguing, the *CEDAW* Committee needs to take more perceptive position and address the most problematic issues in the UK to be solved[31]. Finally, in similar position is Finland where steps for gender equality have been made before the creation of the treaty, influenced by the Nordic welfare state model. Thus, according to Nousiainen and Pentikäinen, there is the Finish paradox where gender equality is an already established value and a successful goal so the potentials of the *CEDAW* treaty are still underused[32]. Hence, the *CEDAW*, as a broad policy, leaves unclear instructions to what civil servants should do to implement it correctly, and can benefit states to some extent or not at all.

## Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The *Beijing Declaration Platform for Action* acts as a commitment, made as a broad universal women's rights declaration that emphasizes the reaffirmation of commitment to human rights, such as *CEDAW*, and is of great importance. It was the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women that took place on the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations' founding[33].

According to Lépinard and Rubio-Marín (2018), the *Beijing Declaration* epitomize the efforts for women's inclusion in decision-making process and empowerment, as a fundamental democratic requirement. The authors believe that the Declaration is supporting affirmative action as a tool to reach substantial equality, in order to connect women's access to decision-making processes with justice and democracy. Drude Dahlerup (2008)[34] argues that the UN Women's Conference with the creation of the *Beijing Declaration*, has legitimized gender quotas as a mediator to eliminate women's underrepresentation. Dahlerup, draw attention to the controversy of gender quotas by

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[30] Byrnes, Andrew. 2013. "The Implementation of the *CEDAW* in Australia: Success, Trials, Tribulations and Continuing Struggle." In *Women's Human Rights CEDAW in International, Regional and National Law*, 323–57. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139540841.016.

[31] Fredman, Sandra. 2013. "The CEDAW in the UK." In *Women's Human Rights CEDAW in International, Regional and National Law*, 511–30. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139540841.023.

[32] Nousiainen, Kevät and Pentikäinen, Merja. 2013. "Rise and Fall of the CEDAW in Finland: Time to Reclaim Its Impetus." In *Women's Human Rights CEDAW in International, Regional and National Law*, 557–87. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139540841.025.

[33] *See* 'Fourth World Conference on Women *Beijing Declaration*' on https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/declar.htm

[34] Dahlerup, Drude. 2008. "Gender Quotas – Controversial But Trendy." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 10 (3): 322–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616740802185643.

bringing to the discussion attitudes towards the strategy from various countries. For example, a survey among Flemish politicians[35] revealed a gender gap, since male politicians do not think quotas are legitimate or fair, which contradicts the perception of female politicians. Indeed, the Declaration acknowledges that this situations can occur, but despite the presence of a global movement towards democratizations, women are not being seen as equal partners with men especially when it comes to politics (Beijing, 1995:21). Like the gender quotas strategy, both policies from the UN, seem controversial. Because of the ambiguity of those policies to fit in every constitution, countries are facing a lot of difficulties on how to handle and apply these treaties to achieve gender equality.

### 4.1.1  UN policies and their implementation from Cyprus

In order to review what the Cypriot government is doing with these policies, I was unable to find scholars and literature that examines this topic. Thus, I am using the information provided by the participants as my main source, to analyze the actions of the Cypriot state to establish gender equality. The UN policy that has been brought up and discussed from mostly all of women politicians I have conducted interview with, was the *Beijing Declaration.* During my research on the policy, I have come across the *CEDAW* and its implementation by the Cypriot government.

As stated by the UN database, the Republic of Cyprus ratified the CEDAW in 1985 and its Optional Protocol in 2002[36]. Since then, according to my interviewees, the Republic of Cyprus has been making the minimum effort to ensure equality. Roulla Mavronicola who is the President of the Socialist Women's Movement and had participated during the discussions of the *Beijing Declaration* strongly stated that

> The implementation of the declarations and legislations are among the big problems we have as a society and it is not only us, it is also in Europe. We have legislations not because the Cypriot government in general wanted to make them, but because EU has forced us to do so. One of the good along with the bad things of EU, is that we were forced to implement legislations for gender equality. And as a state we have done the minimum, just to be enough to get in EU (…) We are also as a state not even half way to complete the Beijing Declaration. When we've

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[35] Politicians who are in Flanders / Vlaanderen (northern part of Belgium)
[36] UN. n.d. "Ratification Status for Cyprus." Accessed May 15, 2020.
https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=45&Lang=EN.

signed declarations and legislations and do not implement them, then *vráse óryza*[37] (!) (…) The state infrastructures are very important, as the existence of legislations. But how we are going to change and implement those legislations when we are following the same pattern which does not bother us? We are supposedly a European country, and supposedly all of the legislations and decisions to be implemented that are coming from EU are reflecting the Cypriot reality. (…) Whatever legislations and orders are given from the EU should be followed, we are as a state obliged to follow them but we are doing the minimum effort to do so.

What Mavronicola is essentially stating, is the fact that there is a gap between the existence of policies and their effective implementation by the Cypriot government, which according to the UN is a result of the lack of commitment by the governments. The UN under the *Beijing Declaration* is addressing the importance and the necessity from the member states to implement the *CEDAW* "In order to protect the human rights of women (…) and to ensure that no reservation is incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention"(Beijing, 1995:135). The fact that extensive discrimination against women still exists is acknowledged, and the UN recalled that

discrimination[38] against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity, is an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries (…) makes more difficult the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity (*CEDAW*, 1979:1).

But the discrimination against women who consist the half of the population in Cyprus is not only violation to human dignity and respect but also violation against the democratic political system of the country. According to my interviewees, the *Beijing Declaration* and *CEDAW* are implemented to the minimum degree by the Republic of Cyprus something that is insufficient. As Efi Xanthou (Deputy Leader of the Green Party oriented in the Centre-left) noted with great frustration

We [as a state] supposedly have a strategy for the promotion of gender equality, which is bullshit.[39] They have set the right goals, but the preparation that has been done to

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[37] Roulla Mavronicola is using the phrase 'vráse óryza' which is translated directly as 'to boil rice' and it is an expression used to show frustration and disappointment for the development of a case and/or a situation

[38] UN defines the term 'discrimination' as the distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex (*CEDAW, 1979*:3).

[39] The quote is necessary for the research. I do not want to sensor her thoughts because in research, you should quote them verbatim. Editing, or censoring, swearing is wrongly representing your research subjects and is thus a form of scientific misconduct.

achieve those goals is not efficient! And I repeat it is bullshit, because neither this government nor the previous one were willing to promote the strategy for gender equality. (…) only to take a look at which governmental body has been assigned to take actions in order to achieve it you will be laughing. Because it is irrational even to whom the government has entrusted these actions. As the Republic of Cyprus we do not think that it is crucial to implement policies and also because we do not understand what a strategy is (!).

The proposition by the *Beijing Declaration* and the *CEDAW,* to implement gender quotas as a measure to increase women's participation receives a lot of conflicted opinions. Through my interviews, the general perception of women politicians can be encapsulated in Alexia Sakadaki's statement pointing out the fact that the president indicated only one woman as a Minister in the Parliament. Specifically, Alexia Sakadaki from the Green Party oriented in the Centre-left wing, stated

> Even the implementation of quota will not help because the goal is not to say that 'there are women on the ballot so there is equality'. In our cabinet there is only one woman as a minister and this for me is automatically unjustifiable. There are capable women, I see them, they are there. (…) the president did not choose any other woman and this shows a specific perception of a state that cannot establish gender balance.

As stated in the Cyprus National Report[40] on the implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action* (1995), the slow progress that have been made can show the women's representation imbalance in the decision-making process. The report states that the percentage of women's participation in municipal councils has gradually increased but women still cover 84 out of 468 positions. The percentage of women in Parliament has been also increased from 5.4% in 1991 to 14.3% in 2006, and decreased to 12.5% in 2014. Despite this gradual rise there is still a significant gap between men and women when it comes to the position in decision-making. This outcome according to the report and the *Beijing Declaration,* is due to the "patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family, in the workplace, in political and public life" (Beijing, 1995:33). There have been efforts to strengthen the governmental bodies by integrating gender perspectives, which are not

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[40] There was a Cyprus national report in 2014 on the implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action* (1995) and the discussions on the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000) that will lead to the adoption of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action* 2015. The aim of this report is to identify and discuss the challenges and the emerging priorities to achieve further advancement in various areas. Among them is the empowerment of women in Cyprus. The report was commissioned by the National Machinery for Women's Rights (NMWR), the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, and compiled by the UNESCO Chair in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment of the University of Cyprus.

sufficient due to the lack of extensive lobbying activities and campaigns to increase awareness and sensitize the public.

Over the establishment of laws and through gender equality speech, the legislative system and the government respectively, appear to be committed in the manifestation of gender equality by ratifying the *CEDAW* and the *Beijing Declaration*. But the problem of gender inequality in the decision making process is still present. The underrepresentation of women in the political sphere and especially in higher positions of the decision-making process, is caused by multiple factors which are acknowledged by the UN with efforts to be resolved through the Convention (*CEDAW*) and the *Beijing Declaration*. Among these factors according to the UN, is the traditional way political parties are functioning which can discourage women from seeking political office. The tendency of negatively stereotyping women in society, in political parties and through media, has been addressed by the *Beijing Declaration* as well as by my interviewees (Beijing, 1995:120). All of these factors and their contribution to the maintenance of politics as a male-dominated sphere will be analyzed closely in the following up chapter.

## 4.2    European Policy of Gender Quotas system

When it comes to the underrepresentation of women, one of the suggestions of the UN Organization is the implementation of appropriate measures

> to substantially increase the number of women with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men, if necessary through positive action, in all governmental and public administration positions (Beijing, 1995:122).

One of those measures UN and EU are proposing is the "gender quota revolution" which was initially suggested in the *CEDAW*. Gender quotas as an ideal measure to establish gender balance has been strengthen and reinforced by the *Beijing Declaration* (Lépinard & Rubio-Marín: 2018:1). Blanca Rodríguez Ruiz and Ruth Rubio-Marín characterized the "Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women's Rights (Beijing 1995) as the crosscutting goals of all initiatives aimed at achieving real equality of the genders" (Ruiz & Rubio-Marin, 2008: 287). The achievement of gender equality and political representation is a primary goal among many countries, and emphasis is being given to the empowerment of women. On the matter of gender equality and the policies that are produced to achieve it, Lépinard and Rubio-Marín show that there are two more declarations, the *European Summit of Women in Power* (Athens, 1992), and the *Declaration on*

*Equality between Men and Women as a Fundamental Criterion of Democracy*[41] which was adopted during the Fourth European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men (Istanbul, 1997). All of those declarations and recommendations that have been ratified by the member states aim for the exact same thing: equality of men and women by not ignoring the competence, skills and creativity of women; which is a necessity to achieve a genuine democracy. The fact that all these various declarations exist and have been produced throughout the years show the constant challenges to achieve gender balance (Lépinard and Rubio-Marín, 2018).

According to Lépinard and Rubio-Marín, the European Union has been promoting gender equality action either through the European Commission or through the European Parliament since the 1990s. The EU has been ever since, producing reports (based on statistics) on women in decision-making process and held conferences on parity democracy. Silia Kyrmitsi (former Social Security Committee Adviser to the Ministry of Labor and Social Security) who was present during the interview I had with Roulla Mavronicola (from EDEK oriented in the Centre), stated that

> EU has showered us its position. Through EU's reports regarding the position of women, we are, as a state, one of the last on the list. And this tend to be a general phenomenon with Cyprus in various topics in every report of EU. It is like Cyprus is wearing a see-through dress in the dark and brags that is the best. Suddenly the light is shed on and that light is the statistics from EU. We have suddenly discovered that we are among the last places of all the European countries. (…) The other issue we have as a country is the absence of statistical information from within the state, but despite this, the statistical reports from EU showed us the situation we are in.

It is a perception with which Roulla Mavronicola agrees on, and explains that those statistical reports show exactly the minimum amount of effort the Republic of Cyprus is making, in order to achieve gender equality. Mavronicola stated that

> If we were following those regulations at least half of the way, we would have been on the average position in the statistical analysis of EU. It is not accidental that the Nordic countries are always first. They might not have the ultimate equality but they are above the average. The most important thing to note here is not if we follow or not the regulations of EU, but the fact that we think we can fool them [EU], but we are fooling ourselves (!)

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[41] 4th European Ministerial Conference. 1997. "Istanbul Declaration on Equality between Men and Women as a Fundamental Criterion of Democracy." *Legislationline*. Istanbul. https://www.legislationline.org/documents/id/7968.

In order to achieve at least the average position on the statistical report of EU when it comes to gender equality, my interviewees, sometimes strongly, disagree with the implementation of gender quotas and the extent to which this system will benefit women. The negative perception towards gender quotas is also noted in the literature. Authors presented in this section have explained extensively and clearly why the quotas system can generate negative reactions and act as an affirmative action damaging the democracy, rather than as a tool towards gender equality.

Mona Lena Krook provided a comprehensive analysis on the matter. Krook's main focus in her article *Electoral Gender Quotas: A Conceptual Analysis (2014)*, is to provide an explicit thinking about the concept of gender quotas in order to give resources to a more structured and methodical comparative work. To do so, she tries to open the discussion towards the question "what quotas 'are' and 'do' in relation to the existing political process" (Krook, 2014:1273). For me, the most important part of this question is 'what quotas 'do' and I will try to provide an answer throughout this chapter having as guidelines the comments and impressions of my interviewees.

Undoubtably, as it can be seen from the various policies and suggestions coming from supranational organizations (UN & EU), the demand of gender parity in elected offices became a central goal for governments. Gender parity came to the center of the discussions since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Multiple documents were signed by the United Nations member states throughout the years with the aim to establish at least 30% women in the decision making process which is going to be achieved only "through greater use of positive action in candidate selection" (Krook & Norris, 2014:1).

Gender quotas must be understood first and foremost when it comes to what they 'are'. To do so, M.L. Krook has as a starting point the various ways on how quotas are "named" and the various ways to categorize them (Krook, 2014:1270). The naming of quotas defines the possibility of the policy to be applied in a government and in what concept. The variety of names given to the policy makes it either attractive or undesirable for governments, as the name implies different things. Krook gives an example of a French campaign which was based on the concept of "parity" as an alternative to quotas, in order to overcome the legal barriers quotas are creating. As she explains, this strategy of differentiated naming appears to some scholars as a strategic framing "for all intents and purposes, parity is the same as a 50% quota" (Krook, 2014:1272). Other examples provided by Krook on the diversity of naming the quotas is the term "equality guarantees" which is used in the UK, the belief of Sweden that "every other one for the ladies"

and the "zebra" term used in Africa. The different terms imply different targets and policy strategies for gender equality.

Krook goes one step further to argue that, quotas do not shape only the pre-selection and election process but also alter the dynamics of the operation. Electoral quotas affect the reserved seats in the parliament, the candidate quotas affect the manner of functionality and selective process of the political party, and the legal quotas push towards the transformation of the existing norms to achieve equality (Krook, 2009). Additionally, there is a struggle of data collection despite the presence of an international website[42] that provide information on quotas around the world because new measures are being proposed constantly while the existing policies are being updated. This causes confusion and uncertainty not only in the scholarly world but also among the governments when it comes to the effectiveness and necessity of quotas.

Regarding the way concepts are featured and named, Choi (2004) and Davis (2005) stress the issue on terminology which should not be too fixed but rather, the 'name' that is going to be given to a concept should provide the ability for the concept to be applied according to time and place. In other words, the concept of quotas, should be characterized and analyzed with respect to time and place. The same lines of implementation of quotas in Nordic countries are not going to, and should not be the same, when the strategy is introduced to the Cypriot framework. With the departure from one place of the world to another, the 'name' which will be given to the concept will be affected and shifted in order to match with the geographical, cultural, social and political framework of the country.  Also, the concept will become a policy if there is willingness from the legislative and party mechanisms to implement quotas. Goertz and Mazur (2008) argue that the way concepts are defined can modify the results of the policy. In the Cypriot framework, the concept of quotas is defined and understood as UN and EU policies and regulations suggests to. No different naming or meaning is being given to the concept in order to be comprehensive, analyzed, and explained according to the socio-political context of Cyprus in order for the governmental bodies to decide if the policy is going to be implemented or not.

Because of these vague and diverse conceptualization and differentiation of naming of the concept of quotas, Collier and Adcock (1999) suggest a more "pragmatic approach" rather than looking for a single "correct" meaning, which is going to "travel" between countries'  frameworks and their governmental systems, to find gender balance. The basic suggestion of the "pragmatic approach" is simply "to propose a new and more comprehensive typology that might better

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[42] See http://www.quotaproject.org.

capture variations across quota policies (…) [quotas] are better theorized as systematized concepts" (Krook and Norris, 2014:1279). So, the concept of quotas should have a different typology and variations which will be aligned with the organization of a governmental system of the country in which the concept will be applied to.

The system of gender quotas seems prominent if it is named and implemented according to the sociocultural framework of a country. It aims for a gender-balanced society, offering solution to the matter of underrepresentation of women in the decision-making process. Through the research of Krook and Norris (2014), as well as in my research, women politicians see the underrepresentation of women in politics as a 'problem' that needs to be solved. Rena Yiavasi from the Citizen's Alliance (Centre-left), comment that

> I think in pretty much every political party the situation is the same or similar. Very few women are in politics and the fewer they are the harder it gets for them to make themselves heard and pass their ideas and perceptions, especially when it comes to gender issues. The ideas of a woman, which in many cases are different from those of a man, are harder to get through in a discussion, because always a woman belongs to a minority in politics and it is difficult to convince the majority. In that sense, is difficult for women to discuss gender issues and I think this does not apply only in the political arena but also in other fields.

But when it comes to resolve the issue of the underrepresentation of women using gender quotas, Yiavasi states that

> Many times, political parties are including women for communication reasons. Parties often are under the impression that 'we should include some women to show that we are a political party that promotes equality'. I find this … that are including women as, I do not want to say the word because it is really unpleasant to me, but they are including women as "flower pots"[43], and when the time comes the party will say 'but we have 3 women in the Parliament'. For me this is not the best.

Her comment comes to an agreement with the claims of Galligan and Clavero when they are noting that "women representatives elected under quotas systems (…) [are] often branded by political opponents as "puppets" (Galligan & Clavero, 2008:165). Additionally, Amanda Clayton

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[43] Flower pot: In Cyprus it is often used as an metaphorical expression mostly for women. It is an derogatory expression for women who stand up showing off their beauty without doing anything more than that

(2015) points out that the beneficiaries of the quota system can be identified as "quota women". By combining these two concepts, the statement of Yiavasi where women are "flower pots" can encapsulate the perception of "quota women" as "puppets". It seems that gender quotas which aims for gender equality, can stigmatize women.

On the matter of stigmatization of women elected through quotas, Skevi Pashia (from the left party AKEL), she recalled an incident that happened in a political party of DISY(right-wing) just a few weeks before our meeting.

> In my opinion, quotas are not the first step that needs to be taken. (…) an example is DISY where there was a male member who turned to a female member of the party and said to her "this is not a catwalk *mana mou*"[44]. The female member entered the ballot with gender quotas and he meant that she entered the ballot as a favor because she is pretty, that was his point basically. And that incident was an inner-party issue. The specific woman is very good at what she does and she is better than many men in her party. But you can see sexist reactions from the right wing. The fact that they have put quotas and a member of the party is behaving with a demining and sexists way towards a female, then is the matter solved with quotas? Women are devalued and are not being seen as equals so, no, the problem is not solved (!).

The comment of the male member of the party shows his dissatisfaction towards the way the female member was included in their political party. The female member is seen as a capable individual from Skevi Pashia (left-wing), but even if a woman is qualified, she can still receive ironic comments and experience lack of respect from colleagues because she entered through quotas. So what quotas actually 'do' if this system which aims for gender parity can generate inner-party conflicts and sexists behaviors?

The majority of women politicians who took part in my research, from around the political spectrum, strongly believe that quotas will not solve any problem. Rather, they will cause more issues and especially issues of stigmatization while undermining equality. Clayton offers a case study of Lesotho (country of Southern Africa), where there are two group of women in politics, those who were elected through quotas and those who did not, providing an opportunity to examine the point of view of female representatives in a different country. Clayton notes that "in Lesotho (quota mandated and non-quota-mandated) provides an important test to differentiate between a "quota effect" and a "female representation effect" (Clayton, 2015:339).

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[44] Mana mou~ Μάνα μου: It has no literary translation which can be expressed. It is an expression frequently used in Cyprus to show an additional reaction to a situation. It can show admiration, sadness, irony. In this case it express irony.

Clayton's results shed light to the manner citizens perceive women who were elected via quotas and those via regular electoral rules. She concluded that there is a negative reaction towards quota-mandated women in comparison with women who were elected with regular electoral rules. She noticed that when the gender quotas are implemented, "quota women" are perceived differently in contradistinction to their female or male colleagues who entered politics via non-gender quotas. Through the words of one of Clayton's interviewees, I have found unexpected similarities with the views of my interviewees. This indicated that there can be a common, negative perception about quotas despite the cultural differences from one country (Cyprus) to another (Lesotho). Clayton quotes a female councilor who stated that "I think in the future we should just have open elections. We don't want a quota. Women should stand on their own feet . . . for our creditability it is important to stand on our own and win." (Clayton, 2015:358). The organizational secretary of the Women's Organization POGO from the left political party AKEL, Skevi Pashia stated that

> With the application of gender quotas, issues of parity and equality will not be resolved. The woman in that way [with quotas] is not being considered as equal with the man. She is seen like she belongs to a social group that is inferior and quotas are needed to push her and put her in higher positions. Why women have to be perceived as the vulnerable social group that needs to be pushed? If there were enough state infrastructures that would give the tools to help women, that would change the mindset and perception firstly through schools, so different perceptions will be created in future adult citizens. So in the future, women would be mostly likely be seen as skilful and competence candidates without gender indicators.

All of my interviewees, while talking about quotas, showed the same disapproval and distrust towards the efforts these intergovernmental bodies (UN & EU) made to achieve gender equality. Meritocracy was the term which has been used almost from all of my interviewees to point out the contradiction between quotas and gender parity. As Skevi Pashia continued

> I believe that the most important thing, is to increase women's representation in the governmental bodies with meritocracy (!). (…) if political parties paid a bit more attention to increase female members in their parties, then help those women to rise inside the party, thus women will gain more confidence that they can progress in this field. And if those women can get high enough to enter the ballots then there is automatically a wide range from which women can be selected. Many times the

perception of 'okay we will vote for one woman too' prevailed. But the point is not to vote for just one woman but more.

Surprisingly, one of my interviewees, Rena Yiavasi (the president of Women's Organization under the Citizen's Alliance party) seemed that she changed her belief regarding the implementation of gender quotas.

> To be honest when the gender quotas system was introduced to my political party, as a woman I told them that is not the best option. Everyone in politics should be getting in with meritocracy either you are a man or a woman. Now I think I have changed my mind because, up until we reach the point when people are going to get in with meritocracy, we should first find a way to include more women and establish equal representation. If in every position, every organization, in the Parliament, in the ministries, the same amount of men and women exists and equality becomes our culture, then we should let go the quotas system. But in order to make equality part of our culture, we should establish it through violence [putting pressure through quotas] if necessary. The issue of quotas it is a bit violent. And if it is necessary to achieve equality through sacrificing men that are worthy by putting more women in politics then so be it. I think now, after I have seen how people are getting into positions I believe that we should have quotas or else we will not consolidate gender equality.

Recalling the moment Yiavasi stated this, I can still remember her disappointment on the manner in which some individuals are entering the political arena. A field which has direct and crucial impact on the functionality and perceptions of the society as a whole. For Yiavasi, the implementation of quotas, can be applied if it is the only solution that will cultivate gender parity. It is not a system that will provide meritocracy, but for her, it will be the first step towards that direction. Something that contradicts Pashia's perception which for her, gender quotas are not and should not be the first step.

### 4.2.1 Quotas as an Affirmative action undermining Parity Democracy

The perception of Rena Yiavasi, who sees gender quotas as a violent act towards gender parity aligns with the argument of Ruiz and Rubio-Marín who argue that, when parity is not ensured spontaneously then measures need to be taken in order to be imposed. The lack of parity in political representation in various European countries has opened the discussion to resolve the issue through quotas (Ruiz & Rubio-Marin, 2008:289-290). From my point of view, I perceive

quotas as de facto affirmative action (either mandatory of voluntary). Ballots based on quotas make room for an underrepresented group of people (women) at the cost of the overrepresented group (men). So the overrepresented group, has to make a sacrifice even though it might not be the best outcome. Subsequently, how can parity be achieved through a policy which is exclusionary and based on affirmative action?

The *Beijing Declaration*, was portraying women's inclusion in the decision-making process as "a democratic requirement, explicitly endorsing affirmative action (…) linking women's access to decision-making to the notion of justice and democracy" (Lépinard & Rubio-Marín, 2018:2). Gender equality and parity is undoubtably a democratic requirement and a fundamental human right according to the UN. But what are the results when a state applies affirmative action and positive discrimination to achieve gender equality? How can a state progress (politically, economically, socially) when individuals are entering politics without meritocracy?

Though Lépinard and Rubio-Marín (2018) argue that gender quotas can be seen as an affirmative action when the concept is not aiming for political representation, I see quotas as an affirmative action also inside the political sphere. Affirmative action can be perceived as an effort to help people obtain positions which are equally accessible for men and women, but it "misses the point, which is justice" (Tahmindjis, 1997:200). As Jordan Peterson argued in an interview he had on female quotas, "to pick your cabinet by genitalia is not an expectable move" and following the quotas system "the most qualified people are not selected because it is statistically impossible"[45].

Although I see quotas strictly as an affirmative action that undermines the democratic value of freedom of choice (from parties and in the ballots), the dilemma of implementation or not of gender quotas cannot have a light hearted response. We should not exclude countries which have been actually helped from the existence of quotas (e.g. Rwanda). Quotas are a relatively new phenomenon in an effort to achieve parity democracy, but it is not the only one or necessarily the best one. I would like to think quota system which has been introduced from UN and EU, as a pilot program to examine the difficulties and the necessary changes each country has to make to accomplish a gendered balanced democracy. Quotas, which is a system that implies affirmative action, is a process with no promises. No gender balance, or parity democracy can be ensured through this system. The various expression and 'naming' to describe quotas, imply that the

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45 Rogan, Joe. "Jordan Peterson Explains the Gender Paradox - Joe Rogan". *YouTube* video, 24:07. November 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVvOv1UwJLA

nature of this concept cannot be fully comprehend by the governments. The variation of names points out clearly that gender quotas is an unstable, fragile, unpredictable and doubtful policy.

Despite the negative reactions towards this policy, women politician's in Cyprus with whom I have conducted interviews, have had a mixed or positive attitude towards European Union as a supranational union. Most of the participants supports the UN and EU policies because they call upon the countries to unite and function more or less in the same manner. However, two interviewees described their doubts about policies coming from above (supranational). Two statements on the matter stood out. Rena Yiavasi (from the Centre-right wing) stated that

> EU does not makes miracles but at least we have somewhere to lean on, a small protective shield which would not have it if we were not in the EU. Especially when we have periodically Turkish challenges. (…) one of the good things of EU is that we, as a country, are taking good practices, examples and policies, that we would have not created by ourselves. And I hope now with the election of Ursula we are going to have more positive changes.

Skevi Pashia (from the left-wing) believes that EU is beneficial when it comes to the union of countries under the same values, but expressed her disappointment on how EU has changed from its original aims.

> I think that in any system or organization that brings individuals and nations under the same values, beliefs and goals it is a win-win situation. *I ischýs en ti énosi[46]*. Today the EU is based on neo-liberal policies, the interests of the few are prevailing while the principles on which EU was built on were those of peace, solidarity and the value of the individual (…) when it comes to the union, we have gained as a country knowledge through other countries' experiences, when it comes to economy, in regard to health, the educational system, or other issues that as a country we should be taking notes in order to become better. When you enter a team, as a member the goal is to take actions to benefit your team. In the EU we are talking about a team in which the greater good for all has to be putted first and take examples from the best in order to erase the 'bad habits'. But because always the economic interests are prevailing nowadays, and capitalism…because we are talking about a capitalistic European Union, there are differences between the member states.

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[46] I ischýs en ti énosi = Η ισχύς εν τη ενώσει = the union is the force

Pashia expressed also her disappointment when it comes to the policies which are being produced by the European Union arguing that

> The EU may conduct researches on what each country needs but it is different… people in the European Committee might see only numbers. The research will show you numbers through statistics but people are not numbers. (…). To make a decision and make a policy, you are not going to rely on the numbers but also to what the policy will do. Policies should not be based solely on numbers but also on the impact they will have on humans, the same thing happens with gender equality. What one should look for is the impact every policy will have.

Policies coming from supranational organizations like EU, which are based on statistical information about gender equality may not be always welcomed from the member states. The gender quotas policy while aiming for gender-balance societies and parity democracy can be controversial. What quotas actually 'do' in an effort to reach gender equality? A policy which is mainly based on statistics and minimum or maximum percentages of women in the decision-making process, is ignoring the aspect of meritocracy, while often stigmatize women who entered politics via quotas. In order to avoid these consequences, governments can apply soft measures which are, from my point of view, the best option. Those measures can be campaigns to raise awareness, training courses for women politicians, and policies aiming at supporting women's work–life balance. But this cannot be achieved effortless because the mobilization of women for greater female representation in politics can be challenged from the absence state infrastructures. In the following chapter, the preferable tools as are expressed by the participants, which can essentially help women to increase their political representation will be examined.

To sum, this chapter has analyzed policies that are coming from supranational organizations and their effects on the political system of Cyprus. Due to the lack of scholarly work on the UN and EU policies and their impact on Cyprus outside the legal perspective, I have used as main sources the interpretations and views of the participants to pinpoint the efforts of the Cypriot government to implement these policies and the problematic aspects of the gender quotas system. The strategy of quotas that aims for equality is a controversial topic, and the scholarly work that has been made on the issue is very fruitful and explanatory on the diversity of the strategy and its results. However, as it will be discussed in the next chapter the presence, ratification and efforts for implementation of policies from the Cypriot government are not enough to ensure or to bring the country closer to gender equality. Women politicians are facing gender stereotypes on social and political level. Additionally, being a working mother, makes it even more difficult to engage fully with the political sphere due to the lack of state infrastructures.

## 5.0   Articulating Women's Underrepresentation: Challenges and Personal Experiences of Cypriot Women Politicians

It is clear from the UN and EU policies presented in the previous chapter that, a great emphasis is been given on the need to increase women's participation in the decision making process. Women have to be included in governmental bodies, political parties and electoral offices through policies and legislative regulations for a country to have a complete parity democracy. The UN *CEDAW* and *Beijing Declaration* are acknowledging and addressing existing barriers such as cultural stereotypes and state infrastructures that are preventing gender equality. This chapter dives into those issues to analyse the impact of these barriers through the experiences and viewpoint of my interviewees. Eight Cypriot women politicians from the whole political spectrum, provided various of arguments that gives the opportunity for a fruitful discussion around the issues of gender stereotypes, gender roles and women's representation on media. A research conducted by Mary Koutselini and Sofia Agathangelou will be examined, since they give a comprehensive understanding of gender representation in the Cypriot television.

Sara Clavero and Yvonne Galligan (2005)[47] are drawing from various literature and arguing that, the expectations from modern democracy are created from the study of women's political representation. The field of women's representation study has been developed on the careful examination of women's political behavior, focusing mainly on gender awareness and how is being created in the parliamentary agenda in order to increase women's representation.

In their research they are engaging once again with women's political representation in the CEE (Central and Eastern Europe) by addressing the issue that emerged since 1989, which was the year that gender quotas were withdrawal from the electoral system, and women's representation decreased dramatically. The major barriers Galligan and Clavero pointed out and apply to women in CEE countries, are identical to the barriers my interviewees indicate. Firstly, women are not willing or wishing to go after politics either because they lack confidence, interest or motivation. There is a need to understand from where the lack of confidence emerges. According to the studies (Galligan & Clavero 2005, 2008) and the statements from the participants of this research, the political world is being perceived as a masculine world (when it comes to the behavior and the used discourse) and thus, feminine values and traits are neglected. This factor

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[47] CLAVERO SARA, and GALLIGAN YVONNE. 2005. "A Job in Politics Is Not for Women': Analysing Barriers to Women's Political Representation in CEE." *Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences* 41 (6): 979–1004. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41132239.

combined with the lack of women as role models in politics (with a focus on the Cypriot society), leads to a domino reaction causing the lack of interest for women. Roulla Mavronicola, from the Centre party EDEK, emphasized the impact of absence of women-role-models and spoke extensively on the matter not only in our discussion but also on a television panel. The lack of motivation might be connected with the previous factors (lack of confidence/interest). The participants of this research acknowledge the fact that, part of the motivation women can have or lack, comes from the amount of support they have from their social and family background. That brings me to the second barrier which was pointed out by Galligan and Clavero, the family responsibilities which do not allow women to spend the amount of time politics need (Galligan & Clavero, 2005:984-987). All of my participants expressed gratitude for the support they receive from their husbands when it comes to sharing the weight of parenthood. Despite the support they are getting from their husbands and other members of their family, my interviewees expressed with great frustration the absence of tools and lack of state infrastructure which can help women get involved with politics and pursue higher positions.

The participants of this research believe that barriers in politics are emerging from deeper structural inequalities. Traditional gender roles in the Cypriot context are obvious and emphasized almost daily from older and younger generations. Tradition and religion are two main fundamental ingredients that consist the Cypriot society. Hence, change ends up to be a slow process.

Irene Zorpa from the Solidarity Movement, oriented at the right-wing believes that

> The society is changing because young people who lived abroad are coming back with new mindsets. (…) the old people have built a certain life, with certain beliefs and what they have learn to do since they were young they will continue to do. And many of them will transmit those old beliefs to their children, and those children will continue to do what their parents were doing and nothing will change. (…) Is our youth from the outside that will bring alteration.

Unless the society changes the stereotypes will endure and this mindset will be passed from generation to generation. As Rena Yiavasi from the Citizens' Alliance which is a Centre-left wing political party added

> A 50 year old person cannot be convinced that there is an equality between men and women. A 50 year old person learned that, there is *adhropos*[48] , who is Anthropos, who is the man and there is the woman. It is difficult for that person to comprehend and accept and make gender equality part of his/her life. On the contrary, a child who is going to be educated about these issues from 3years old, will look at the world with a different eye.

A third barrier comes from the political parties concerning the ideology of the party which can be friendly or hostile. The participants of Galligan and Clavero pointed out the lack of solidarity and support from other women which for them is "another important factor acting as a barrier to women's political representation" (2005:991). Irene Zorpa remembering her first months and experiences entering the party commented that

> I received internal party war, I would say mostly from women. Men welcomed and helped me more when I entered the party. (...) There is competition between women, not only in politics, but especially in politics. It is a place where in order to survive you have to show who you are and to evolve with your strength. Existing women with many weaknesses often try to overshadow or attack newcomer women. This exists strongly in politics.

This chapter focuses on the aspects Galligan and Clavero draw upon in their research, to show that countries which had different political system (socialism) and converted to democracy, while removing the gender quotas system, have the same or at least similar issues with the ones my interviewees brought up. The chapter starts from political parties' impact on women's underrepresentation, because political parties can discourage women to participate or promote them in the political scene, making parties having a dual impact on women's representation. The section continues with the expectations society has from women which can lead to the unwillingness of women to get involved with politics in Cyprus. The first part of this chapter connects the tendency of women to adopt masculine characteristics in politics, as a normality that is needed to be trusted and respected as a politician. A social consciousness is created through institutions like television, formulating a norm regarding the way in which individuals must act according to their gender. A research from Koutselini et al. will be discussed to indicate how mass media production can reinforce traditional gender roles.

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[48] Adhrobos [άδρωπος] in Cypriot means human/man and stands for the Greek word Anthropos (ἄνθρωπος) for human.

Lastly, the second section indicates women politicians' experiences when it comes to motherhood and politics. The necessity of motherhood is still present in the Cypriot society. How motherhood is experienced varies among my participants, the experiences of two of my interviewees are standing out. Roulla Mavronicola, from the Movement for Social Democracy which is positioned in the Center, explained that she had to raise her children first and then enter politics. Skevi Pashia had to take her children in the offices of the Women's Organization POGO of the left-wing party AKEL, because there was an absence of kindergartens with extended working hours. Pashia expressed the difficulties she had to overcome when it comes to the marriage of motherhood and politics, by bringing to her memory various incidents. All of the interviewees, expressed strongly their disappointment towards the lack of state infrastructures and the absence of tools in order to find balance between motherhood and politics.

## 5.1    Political parties' mechanisms, stereotypes and cultural production

Political parties are intertwined and inextricably linked to politics, and are one of the barriers women have to face in the political scene. Galligan and Clavero have pointed out that political parties can affect negatively the political involvement of women through the manner in which parties are electing individuals. They believe that this happens because the

> party selectors may discriminate against women political hopefuls because of prevailing gender-role norms, because of perceptions that women politicians are not as capable of doing the job as men, or because they simply believe that women will lose votes for the party. (Galligan & Clavero, 2005:983)

Now this can be one side of the coin. The other side, as it was indicated from my findings that in some cases political parties can promote and encourage women's participation. Thus, political parties can function as a barrier or as a motivating power for female representation. Indeed, some parties in Cyprus do that, from my observations gathered from the interviews, those parties tend to be positioned in the Centre, Centre-left wing of the political spectrum. Nonetheless, women's underrepresentation still prevails, so political parties are not the only reason women are absent from the field of politics. As it will be indicated in this section, women are underrepresented firstly because of their unwillingness to get involved with politics, as it is believed that politics is men's affair. Secondly, the existence of deeply rooted gender stereotypes in the Cypriot society reinforce

the mindset of what it should be the role of men and women in society and where each one must contribute (public/private sphere). These stereotypes are being produced, re-produced and preserved through mainstream media which are responsible, according to Pierre Bourdieu, for cultural production.

Starting from the analysis of parties' mechanisms, there are mainly two key variables influencing women's participation in political parties, which are the electoral system and the influence of the party, when it comes to its nomination procedures and ideology. The political parties in Cyprus, especially the traditional ones, which are the biggest, have a more strict partisan line. The way those parties work can discourage women from running for a political office or even entering a political party. On that matter, Efi Xanthou, from the Green Political Party, oriented at Centre-left, noted that

> There was a period when women in traditional parties were more present, but most of them have distance themselves because of the party's mechanism. The traditional way in which the political party works is foreign to women's mindset. Women want actions, we [women] want for the system to function and be productive, is not a matter of deception, to deceive the voter to elect me. The matter is to take an action to try and resolve an issue in order for the voter to vote me.

Thus, one aspect of parties' mechanism can be the usage of the technique of deception of the voters, which to the eyes of some women seems unwanted and they tend to avoid entering parties that function like this. Another aspect that can drive women away from the majority of the political parties in Cyprus is the roles and the position women are being given in the party. As Rena Yiavasi from the Citizens' Alliance party (Centre-left) pointed out, parties tend to put women for communicational reasons and they do not see women as fully capable members. Another issue that exists among the political parties, which is declining according to Yiavasi, is the customer relations that the parties have with the citizens. People are voting for particular parties because their family and/or their children have been helped from individuals of a specific party, either by appointing family members as civil servants or by doing favors for citizens. According to Rena Yiavasi, the means to get into the government violates the dignity of the individuals, and the customer relations approach by the parties is not letting the voters fully free to vote open-minded. She indicated that

> we have learned to have a relationship of dependence from the parties and this should not exist. The parties should only produce a quality relationship with the population.

Unfortunately, for the most part they serve interests, and for this reason we are in this situation in Cyprus.

The customer relations which can deprive an individual and violate meritocracy might be an additional, not so obvious reason why women tend to avoid, or be more hesitate to enter a political party. Mainly, it is noticeable from the participants that women's absence is due to the ideology and the mechanisms a party is using, the lack of dynamic women, the deficiency of women-role models, and the undervaluation of women by the society (as suitable politicians) and therefore by the parties. The result of this, is the preservation of male-dominance in the majority of parties. Xenia Constantinou, from DISY (renter-right wing), believes that

In politics, the male figure still dominates as a dominant trend, and to a large extent the structures of political parties are quite macho. (…) There is, I think, a significant issue with the fact that a substantial percentage of men is voting men and a significant percentage of women is voting women.

Constantinou's claim that women are voting for women contradicts the belief of Rena Yiavasi who thinks that

women should learn to vote for women. Women tend to not being supportive towards other women and it is another thing we should, as a society, work on, we should learn to trust our own gender. I can see the new generation to be more open to that idea.

Roulla Mavronicola from EDEK located in the Centre,  also believes that women need to learn to trust and vote for women politicians, but they do not do so because the ballots tend to have small amount of women. She pointed out that

When one goes to vote, even if there are 3-10 women on the ballot, the image one has from the society and the government is: one woman as minister, 10 women out of 56 as members of the parliament, very few women in city councils, few women as mayors and municipal councilors. Therefore, the citizen's first thought will be directed to men. So the voter will vote for male politicians because we [society]  learned since we were children, that politics is a male affair.

On the other hand, Irene Zorpa from the Solidarity Movement (right-wing), believes that by electing women who are incapable and do not have the knowledge to cope with the demands of politics, more damage can be caused to the woman who got elected and to the society. There is already a tendency on behalf of men not to see female politicians as politicians but as women

first. So by electing women who are not fitted for the position, the problem is increased. She indicated that

> in politics everything is on the game and especially if you are a woman and you know that a man cannot see you purely as a politician. He will see you first as a woman, and after as something else so it is difficult to get through a message of "stop seeing me as a woman and start see me as a politician, come to talk about the issue as equals", you cannot pass this message easily.

The fact that men in politics and the rest of the society see female politicians firstly as women, as mothers, as females and then (if so) as politicians was addressed also by Alexia Sakadaki from the Green Party positioned in Centre-left wing. She brought up an example from her own experience on how women politicians can be deprived from their identity. She explained that for a woman it is difficult to overcome the superficial part, the fact that everyone is focused on the appearance. Sakadaki explained that

> when you go to a television panel to talk about an important topic like immigration, the comments you will receive are of the type "the way you've cut your hair is beautiful, the color of your clothes looks good on you, your earrings are very nice" something which I think is ridiculous. I don't think a male politician gets that kind of comments, at least not to the extent women do, and that's not just something I only have experienced, but I know it from other women who have received similar comments.

These type of remarks can take away the value of female politicians' perceptions and views on crucial political and social matters. Alexia Sakadaki and not only -almost the majority of the participants- indicated that this kind of treatment, and the undervaluation of women are shaped from cultural perceptions and gender stereotypes. Sakadaki noted that

> It is cultivated the stereotype that a woman must be beautiful, sweet, must follow many 'musts' in the society. A man does not face these stereotypes (…) A woman to be socially accepted must meet all the criteria, and even more when she is in politics. I have often realized that women in politics, in their attempt to prove that 'you should not see me as a woman, but as a person, as a politician, because I'm here to discuss politics', are in the process of becoming masculine to eliminate the aspect of femininity, sexuality, beauty, sweetness, to present something else, in order to sit at the table of the discussions.

Women are adopting male traits in politics, because those traits are the dominant ones and are those "fostered before them" by the performance of men such as their behavior, the way they speak and their bodily automatisms (Goffman, 1956:10). To that, Efi Xanthou stressed that

> Women in politics who are involved, they adopt some characteristics that are considered purely masculine. But I understand that if I do not pose in a certain way, if I do not differentiate the tone of my voice, if I do not become aggressive when I am attacked; I will be considered an inappropriate and failed politician. If the goal is to convince that I am the right political person to solve the people's problems, I must be successful in managing the political part, both in a televised debate and in an attack that I may receive on social media networking.

Those traits are considered by the society as acceptable, as desirable traits a politician must have. The society, but also politicians (male or female) are policing women who are trying to adopt and adjust in the political arena by adopting the common accepted characteristics which are formulating the normal (norm). A situation or a person is normal and creates a normality when, according to Goffman, is a collective achievement. Media (e.g. newspapers, television) can establish normality and build trust around them or around specific individuals. As a politician one has to be trusted. To gain trust, drawing from Goffman, means that one's personality has to fall within the normality that has been shaped in the particular society in which he/she finds him/herself in.

In Goffman, normality and normal appearances provide a safety which is rooted in the predictability of the environment. That is because normal appearances reassure the society that nothing in the everyday life is out of the ordinary. Through routinizing practices the normality is established and a specific reality is formulated in a society. In the course of establishing a reality, a person is going through a learning process and learns through his/her experiences what is acceptable and what not. Normality is not formulating only the political behavior but also regulates gender roles. Goffman's observations on media indicates that normality is the idea of women having "a spouse and children" while having established an ordinary (normal) life confirmed by "spending Christmas and Thanksgiving with the family" (Goffman, 1963:7). Anybody who deviants from this normality is going to accept social criticism. As Sakadaki and other interviewees argued, there is a fixed social belief of what a woman should do, and what is her role in the society. The priority of women according to the Cypriot society is to have a family, to be a good mother too. And this was something that has been addressed also by Irene Zorpa (Solidarity Movement, right-wing) who noted that

> Even the time I was a candidate for municipal councilor elections, I had people telling me in a very disrespectful way "what are you doing in this field with three kids and you are not going to your home?" and I think many women have to deal with this kind of comments, is not only me. The same thing happened with Irene Charalambidou when she was a candidate for MP and they told her "*mana mou*[49] what are you doing? The only thing you know is to press a button for the show Happy Saturday Night". Yet she was elected! For me there is a big gap that differentiates men and women when it comes to politics, it is not easy to be accepted as a woman in politics.

Efi Xanthou from the Green Party positioned in the Centre-left wing, brought in the discussion two incidents that happened inside the parliament in 2018 and 2015, which shows the degree of undervaluation of women not only inside the parties but also on a parliamentary level.

> when we heard two years ago [2018] a man telling to a woman MP "go to your home and make some laundry", you understand that we are [as a nation] in a very low level when it comes to what it is expected from women by the society. Also, we had a sexist attack where a male MP photographed the underwear of a female MP by placing his phone under her skirt. He claimed that he did not press the button to take a picture but he doesn't realize that the major problem is that he intended to take a picture. (…) The politicians, as well as the citizens underestimate women.

She believed that these incidents happened because

> we are being raised in a culture which continues to make the distinction between social roles, the ways each gender is appreciated, and which role each gender have to play. Unconsciously we [society] have this issue.

Xanthou pointed out examples indicating how women are being stereotyped, and at this point I would like to analyze I bit more the second incident Xanthou talked about to examine the event and the implications for those involved. The matter occurred in 2015, and from the police conclusions, the MP of AKEL (left-wing) Irene Charalambidou took a photo of two other MPs smoking in an undesignated area in the parliament. Then, the ruling MP of DISY Andreas Kyprianou (who was one of the two smokers) was triggered by Irene Charalambidou's move and approached her with the intention to photograph her underwear by placing his phone underneath her skirt. This lead Charalambidou to report the incident to the police filing it as a harassment.

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[49] *Mana mou* translates literary from the Greek phrase my mother (μάνα μου). It is used as an expression in Cypriot with various meanings. It can show irony, doubt, sadness, admiration and more. In this passage, the phrase is used to express irony towards a woman.

After the examination of the incident, the attorney indicated that there were not enough evidences to designate the incident as an assault so the demand for lifting the immunity policy of the DISY MP (Centre-right wing) was ignored. Thus, at that time, the MP of DISY was requested to pay only a fine for smoking in public area. Seven months after the event, a Cypriot newspaper brought back the issue stating that there were five people present during the incident affirming that the MP of DISY was seen moving towards the MP of AKEL holding his phone in a position which was obvious that he wanted take a picture underneath her skirt. The president of the Parliament, sated only that the issue will be discussed in the parliament and nothing since then has been brought up again in public discussion, so it is unknown what happened and what exactly were the consequences[50].

A second incident that happened recently which involved the MP of AKEL Irene Charalambidou, took place in February 2020. The President of the Parliament, Dimitris Syllouris, released to the press the transcription of the meeting of the Parliamentary Audit Committee, during which the AKEL MP Irene Charalambidou claimed that she was attacked by a DISY MP Kostas Constantinou. The events unfolded in front of the Speaker of Parliament, MPs, Finance Commissioner and the Governor of the Central Bank, while discussing the non-performing loans of politically exposed persons. The meeting was interrupted, with the AKEL MP denouncing the DISY MP for a personal attack and the DISY MP raising the issue of ethics for the AKEL MP. Referring to that event, Efi Xanthou, argued in a television panel[51] few days later, that there is an institutional issue which arises from personal attacks and sexist implications. She pointed out that the code of ethics that should have governed the House of Representatives has not yet been formulated, despite the efforts of the Parliamentary Institutions Committee to look into the matter and to decide on a code that it will be implement. Xanthou pointed out the treatment of the event by the President of the Republic of Cyprus who according to Xanthou, annulled the ethical code he created by not supporting Charalambidou firstly as an MP and secondly as a woman.

The president in his message[52], two days before Women's day, according to Roulla Mavronicola and Silia Kyrmitsi from political party EDEK positioned in the Centre, blamed angrily women

[50] Psyllides, George. 2015. "MP Says He Was 'Bullied' over Photo Incident." Cyprus Mail. 2015. https://cyprus-mail.com/2015/08/04/mp-says-he-was-bullied-over-photo-incident/.

[51] Σωκράτους, Ονούφριο. n.d. "Ενημέρωση Τώρα." Cyprus: OMEGA Channel. https://www.facebook.com/cygreens/videos/2312557829036509.

[52] "Δηλώσεις Του Προέδρου Της Δημοκρατίας Για Την Ημέρα Της Γυναίκας." 2020. Γραφείο Τύπου Και Πληροφοριών. 2020. https://www.pio.gov.cy/ανακοινωθέντα-άρθρο.html?id=12507#flat.

who are already in politics for women's underrepresentation and lack of support. The president, in his message noted that

> On this occasion, I would like to reassure women that as equal partners we will continue to ensure that state policies contribute to real, substantial equality between men and women.(…) What I will boldly dare to ask of you is to defend women who hold office when they are subjected to unacceptable attacks either by state officials because it is up to you. As long as your silence and tolerance allow some people to systematically target government officials because they are women, you are not expected to be able to defend yourself against others. We are doing our duty, you have an obligation (…) Who is stopping you [women] from choosing and promoting your vote and strengthening the presence of women in Parliament? It's up to you. And I want to hope that in 2021 you will do your duty as required and as dictated by the equality you claim. (…) It is not enough to expect men to impose rules. What are you doing? I expect writing samples from you. You never fell behind. Neither in struggles for freedom, nor in struggles for social conquests, nor elsewhere.

He added that it was not the electoral system that was responsible, but women themselves. As he argued, women cannot be an exception in a Parliament, a statement with which I agree because, women themselves, as it was indicated in the previous chapter do not want to be the vulnerable group that needs a push with gender quotas. Referring to the priorities of government policy, the president claimed that these are on the one hand the harmonization of family and professional life, and on the other hand the elimination of violence and domestic violence, but also all kinds of inequalities, discrimination and exploitation against women. When it comes to the harmonization of family and professional life, women politicians expressed with great disappointment the absence of state infrastructures, something that will be extensively analyzed in the following up section.

The president's remarks were condemned by politicians, parties (center-left and left-wing), and newspapers in a very short time, which makes clear the indignation of Cyprus' institutional system. He's promises on stable welfare, family support, implementation of policies that have been ratified decades ago (e.g. *CEDAW*), seem like hollow words repeated by different presidents.

Regarding the message of the president, Efi Xanthou from the Green Party positioned in the Centre-left wing, stated in an article[53] of hers that

> There is a reason that two of the four leaders of our movement were women. That we always have at least 35% presence of women in our political committee and 40% at least the representation of women in our Central Committee. We seek it! We are concerned and we insist on the promotion of women! If the other political parties in the country applied a quota of at least 30%, the President would be justified in demanding that women should vote for women. However, I do not accept any suggestion from a man who for 30 years now could change the data of his own political space and have promoted women in politics with the most important electoral percentage that the Democratic Rally [DISY] has been receiving for decades in electoral contests of all levels of power. A little restraint and self-criticism would not hurt …"

The president also stated that women are over the 51% of the population and if women wanted, politics and power could be dominated by women. To that, Roulla Mavronicola during our conversation indicated that

> Does it matter? The important thing that needs to be emphasized is that we have been taught by children that women have no place in politics. (…) What we are looking for besides infrastructure, is governments that trust and believe in women. To create a mentality that women are also part of the society is by appointing and electing them.

Discussing about the lack of trust towards women as capable politicians, Alexia Sakadaki (Green Party, Centre-left wing) blamed the political parties as they do not advance and promote women in the political arena. She argued that there are many trustworthy and remarkable women in every political party, with a lot of knowledge, energetic, who could represent their parties on an equal footing as men. Those women are not promoted because there is no such will from the parties, no efforts are made to combine family time with working time. The lack of effort to encourage women has as a result their minimal participation in the ballots. Sakadaki noted that

> When the elections arrive and we are looking for women, they do not exist, because for so many years no effort and work has been done to promote them, so you cannot ask women at the last minute to enter the ballot. Also, there are no policies to unload and

[53] Xanthou, Efi. 2020. "Απαράδεκτη η Στάση Του Προέδρου Αναστασιάδη Για Τη Μη Συμμετοχή Των Γυναικών Στην Πολιτική." 2020. https://cyprusgreens.org/index.php/component/k2/item/4691-aparadekti-i-stasi-tou-proedrou-anastasiadi-gia-ti-mi-symmetoxi-ton-gynaikon-stin-politiki-diloseis-anaplirotrias-proedrou-kinimatos-oikologon-k-efis-ksanthou.

offer the right tools to provide assistance for the roles they [women] take on in society as working mothers and caregivers.

Moreover, Roulla Mavronicola argued that, the election campaigns and partisian life are fitted to men. She also referred to the inappropriate and unfriendly hours of party's meetings and gatherings for women, as they can take place late at night. As she mentioned, the main committees of the parties are held during weekends when the men are free and do not work. She stressed also the fact that the cost for a woman to participate in a pre-election campaign is greater than those of the men.

In order to be able to campaign, one must be financially motivated, which very few women are. They have to leave their children, and young women have to make a lot of sacrifices. I reached 46 years old to be interested and involved in politics. Young women need to be motivated to enter the job market early, to enter social events early. And we have many smart women. But unfortunately, coming in Cyprus after their studies abroad, they are getting lost in the system! Because the should build their family, they should become mothers, they should raise their children and after (!) … that after is the key that never comes.

With that Mavronicola wants to emphasize that women, who either they remain in Cyprus or return from abroad, still receive the same pressure from their families (parents) and from the rest of the society. Because it is still rooted in the minds of Cypriot people that women must serve firstly as mothers, and after they can focus on building on their careers. And until that *after* comes, women are losing opportunities to excel on the profession or the study field they have chosen. They lose from economic and social growth since they devote themselves fully to the raising of their children, while they are forced to stay in part-times jobs because of family responsibilities.

Roulla Mavronicola from the Centre party EDEK, believes that politics is a tough filed, and it is even tougher for women. Skevi Pashia from the left-wing party AKEL, thinks that politics is an un-friendly environment for women. Both of them strongly believe that the reason lies on the lack of tools given to women to enter and stay in politics. Thus, there are not a lot women present till now that can act as role-models. Mavronicola noted that

the role-models that exist are few, and we, who should actually be the role models, have had a hard time and there is no light at the end of the tunnel right now.

The views of Mavronicola are complimented by the beliefs of Pashia who stated that

the few who manage to get elected, you will see them much more sparsely in television panels because there are very few. And they [tv stations] will usually invite only women to talk to each other many times, even women MPs. Lately this image started to change, and we see a woman and four men for example in a panel discussion, but again is not the ideal setting.

The role of television on how and when women are present to discuss a crucial socio-political issue is extremely important. Television is present in every house, as a major entertainment and information transmitter since the 1980s. Efi Xanthou addressed the fact that

The role of television in the family has drastically, dramatically and completely changed the role of women. Because women observed [in 1980s] how other women live abroad. TV for a while was in the cafes and homes of the rich, then everyone had a TV, regardless of whether there was only one channel until 1990-91. The important thing is that this one channel was also broadcasting series from abroad, it conveyed a different image of women (…). Television has been a catalyst since the 1990s.

Television provided to the population not only entertainment, but also knowledge about other societies and had a positive impact according to Xanthou, in changing the role of women in the Cypriot society during the 1980s. The role of mass media and the impact they can have on the society is not always positive and far more complex. Pierre Bourdieu's theory on media production offers a great base for a fruitful discussion. Bourdieu analysed the theory of cultural production guided by his theoretical terminology of habitus, capital and field. The economic and the political field for Bourdieu, constitute "the field of power". Television, journalism and art belong to the field of cultural production. These two fields can be intertwined when the cultural production becomes a large-scale production (mass production), thus, it can be a subject to outside rule (state/ruling class) but not to the fullest. Mass production is oriented to produce 'commercial' cultural goods, and as Bourdieu explained in *The Rules of Art* (1992), through cultural consumption the social practices that are formed tend to serve the interests of the dominant class.

There are some limitation in his theory on large-scale production that does not allow us to understand contemporary media production. Nonetheless, Bourdieu's way of thinking offers a good complement to Antonio Gramsci's theory on the cultural hegemony and the role of the state that impacts the media production. Media production can directly affect the cultural reality. While entertainment is offered through mass media, a social consciousness is being formulated. In our case, this social consciousness refers to the perception of the society around gender roles and stereotypes. Combining Bourdieu and Gramsci here, will allow us to understand why and

how mainstream television is re-producing and preserving gender stereotypes, as the research of Koutselini et al. showed. Even though, Gramsci is not providing a specific and fixed definition of cultural hegemony, it is as he stated

> the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production."[54]

In other words, cultural hegemony can be created when the society as a whole recognizes and gives its consent to a dominant group, for example to the state, for cultural production. Gramsci's contribution and way of thinking can function as a great start point to analyze cultural hegemony. The notion of cultural hegemony can serve as a point of departure in an effort to understand how ideologies and mainstream media function, and contribute in sustaining or shifting gender roles in societies. An interesting thought, is that the state could passively influence the media and in turn the media can influence the society from the way messages are being conveyed. So, the decision to vote for a certain politician or a certain political party can be influenced passively by the state.

Gramsci argues that,

> The State, which is usually thought of as political society -i.e., a dictatorship or some other coercive apparatus used to control the masses in conformity with a given type of production and economy-[is] a balance between political society and civil society, by which I mean the hegemony of one social group over the entire nation, exercised through so-called private organizations like the Church, trade unions, or schools. (Gramsci, 1973: 204)

Gramsci believed that the public discourse that can be formulated through hegemonic culture, tends to express a reality and make it directly available (mediate it) while it suppress or even ignore other experiences. T. J. Jackson Lears, drawing upon Gramsci believes that in order for a cultural hegemony to be achieved, the leaders must create a world view that appeals to the majority of the society, and those exact leaders must persuade the society that they can serve its interests (Lears, 1985:571). In Cyprus, the ruling class, or even better to put is as the ruling political wing, was and still is right. Since the independence, the first president was Archbishop Makarios III, the second president was from a short lived moderated right-wing party. In general,

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[54] Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York, 1971), 12

four out of eight presidents were coming from a clear cut right-wing parties, with two out of eight presidents as independent, and one out of eight from the left-wing. So, Cyprus, has been a country with a tradition on voting for right-wing parties which have more traditional views on the society. Given also the fact that the first president was the head of the church, indicates the strong connection that state-church had and continue to have up until this day. This, can be proved by the fact that the church is still regulating and defining the educational books in schools something which has been verified from Rena Yiavasi who characterized the situation as "tragic". Thus, the dominant culture, the ideas and values which governs society are coming from a strong religious, traditional political system.

Bourdieu and Gramsci's perceptions on cultural production and cultural hegemony allow us to understand the influence of the state and the political system as a ruling class on the mass media production. The way mainstream television is re-producing and preserving gender stereotypes, was portraited through the research of Koutselini, Papaioannou and Agathangelou which concerned firstly, the gender profiles and how they are presented on Cyprus television. Secondly, they examined the impact that gender representations on television have on the perceptions of youth when it comes to gender roles. It was a very methodical and detailed research where 588 elementary school students (firth grade) and 1158 high school students (secondary grade) were called to answer the questionnaires to examine their perceptions of the role of the Cypriot man and woman in the society. The researchers examined also, 8 series from 3 television channels and randomly selected 158 episodes to analyze them. They analyzed bodily, verbal and non-verbal behaviors in each scene, as well as stereotypes and characterizations that persons attributes to themselves.

Through their research, they have found that when it comes to matter of money and finances men are gaining money to provide financial support while women are asking for money. When it comes to professional and working life, the series presented women as being unreliable and incapable. Koutselini et al. noted that

> the word 'professional' is used to characterize men only, while the word 'unemployed' is used with a negative tinge for men, but not for women. (…) The profile is dominated by the picture of an unemployed and /or cultivated housewife with a limited range of interests (Koutselini et al., 2013:7).

Women are also presented as having the preservation and presentation of their beauty as their major concern. When it comes to women's participation and knowledge for political

developments and events, television series presented men to be more active (70 cases) by reading newspapers, listening to the news or having a discussion about politics, while women were significantly less active (6 cases) engaging with political developments and/or discussions. The authors pointed out that there is a high correlation between the stereotypical gender representations showed on television, and the perceptions about gender roles students have. The high correlation according to the authors is due to the fact that television "becomes a powerful socializing agent for the new generation" (2013:12).

In general, what it had been observed through the series, is that women are excluded from the economical, professional and political sector, while "men's profile is constructed around the principle of freedom of will and independence due to financial independence" (Koutselini et al., 2013:12). Students consider that is more likely for men to work and have higher income than women. As for the political participation, students did not seem to distinguish men and women. Koutselini et al. stated that stakeholders like the Parliamentary Committee of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men, the representatives of the National Machinery for Women Rights of the Ministry of Justice and Public order in Cyprus and the Cyprus Radio-Television Authority ; stressed the crucial role that mass media play in the construction or reconstruction of gender stereotypes. The authors addressed the fact that "the TV, as one of the institutions that produce and reproduce gender knowledge, functions as an agents of maintaining the status quo for the oppression of women." (Koutselini et al., 2013:11).

Though their research, Koutselini et al. showed that

> the Cypriot woman appears to dedicate most of her daily time in her private life (…) appears to be isolated by the wider social environments (…) absolutely depended on the 'companion of her life'. She never asks for a divorce, regardless of what happens in her marital life (…) women restricted in the limited space of their house, in no case they do participate in decision making processes (Koutselini & Agathangelou, 2010:8).

While on the other hand, men are presented as independent and free social subjects. Another example on how society is generating stereotypes consciously or subconsciously has been brought up by Rena Yiavasi from the Citizen's Alliance positioned in the Centre-left, through an incident she had with one of her sons. She remembered that

> one day we had balloons in our house, and one of my sons told me "the blue are mine, and the pink are yours", and I asked why, and he replied "I am a boy and you are a girl". I immediately released that they started to separate and distinguish what things

are for boys and what are for girls. We are still making this distinction between male and female objects and colors because they are accepted by the society and is being preserved. These are the things we see, the things we know and the things we reproduce. And I see it as a mother of two boys who are carrying with them stereotypes which I cannot get rid of. Children absorb everything, from school, from their grandparents, from the society in general. They see things and no matter what you say and do as a parent in the house, this cannot be changed.

It is undoubtedly true that children absorb everything, as Koutselini et al. indicated too. Additionally, through their research it can be seen that the Cypriot cultural reality and consciousness is constructed by the preservation of the traditional gender roles through institutions that are promoting and regenerate stereotypes. Television series which are preserving the status quo of gender roles, aim as Bourdieu defined it, to marketization. Such entertainment responds to *"a pre-existing demand, and in pre-established forms"* (Bourdieu, 1992:142, italics in the original) that means, the goals of entertainment media production is to sell what is 'demanded' from the market, what the society has used to and accepted as a reality and a norm. The result of this pattern is the maintenance of gender stereotypes. Thus, society (men and women) continues to see the female sex as inferior, as weak, and unable to cope with the challenges of politics and any other leading role.

On the matter of the impact of culture and the undervaluation of women, Rena Yiavasi pointed out that

In general, the voice of a woman does not have the same gravity [weight] of that of a man so women often are not being taken seriously. It is maybe embedded in our culture, or maybe it is because we got used to see and listen to men in politics and not a woman. Maybe it is also because politics is considered as a job for men and not for women. It is a male affair and not *genetzisimi* [female affair] as we say in Cypriot. There is a difference between female and *genetzisimi* because the second one has a derogatory tone. They [men] may consider women to be appropriate only for women's organizations, like when I took over the women's organization in my party there was a prejudice and we are always a minority so is also difficult to make our voices heard.

But Yiavasi was not the only one who pointed towards culture as one of the major reasons that affects women's progress. Efi Xanthou from the Green Party located in the Centre-left wing, noted

the culture of the society holds individuals back. The woman is holding herself back, because she thinks that her role is first and foremost to take care of her husband and be a good mother and wife, she does not invest. She is wasting her time to build a family and then invests on her career. So a woman if she decides to go after her professional development is going to do it in an older age. Many times women are deprived of education and a lifelong learning because there is no time! Women are taking over traditional duties, they are working and returning home for an additional 8 hours of work, while men have the chance to go after a lifelong learning so they can improve their vocational training.

So far, this section has showed that the reasons on why women are underrepresented in politics vary. As it was showed, political parties have a dual function. They can either discourage women or promote them to get involved in politics. The electoral process of the parties, as well as their ideologies, are the two key variables affetcing women's representation. Nonetheless, this section has showed that the mechanisms and/or the ideologies of the political parties are not the only, and possibly not the major reasons for the phenomenon of women's underrepresentation. Beliefs and expectations imposed on women by the Cypriot tradition and culture, indicate women's primary goal should be motherhood and family. These kind of beliefs are maintained and established through the conscious or subconscious reality that is created by mass media. Institutions like the television can create a social consciousness and formulate a normality on how individuals must or should act according to their gender roles. The state and the ruling parties that are formulating the government passively, create a cultural hegemony and shape the habitus and mindset of the society through media production. The ruling political system, which has been deeply traditional, along with the power of religion has on the Cypriot society, creates an additional reason for women's underrepresentation. Stereotypes, gender roles, political mechanisms and cultural production through media, are additional causes for the absence of women in politics. Nevertheless, despite the barriers some of the participants like Rena Yiavasi from the Citizens' Alliance (Centre-left wing) and Irene Zorpa from the Solidarity Movement (right wing) remain optimistic. They have confidence that society's beliefs and norms can change from the new generation, the ones who go abroad to live and/or to study, and with their return are bringing new habits and knowledge. Yiavasi stressed also the necessity to change the pre-existing educational system and the knowledge that is being passed to new generations. I could not agree more with her point, since school is a miniature of the society which should provide the best tools and shape the minds of the future citizens to think critically and apply equality in all aspects of life.

## 5.2    Balancing between family and politics: the lack of state infrastructures in Cyprus

As it was indicated briefly in the previous section, women are strongly influenced by the expectations imposed on them from the Cypriot society. Stereotypes can be regenerated and preserved from the family environment, since they are expected to become first and foremost mothers and wives, leaving women to think and invest on their career at a later stage in their lives. In this section, the way in which women's lives who chose to combine political career and motherhood will be examined. Through the experiences of my interviewees, it will be revealed the manner in which the identities of these women, mothers and politicians are intertwined and function in the Cypriot society. I want to start by providing the example of Rina Katselli, the first Greek-Cypriot woman who entered the parliament, and her experience as female politician during the 1980s.

Rina Katselli was the first woman MP in Cyprus. She entered the political party DIKO (Democratic Party that is variously described as centrist) in 1978, and after her first election in 1981 she got re-elected in 1986 and remained in the position of MP representing the people from Kyrenia (occupied city of Cyprus) up until 1996. In an interview she had with A. Kouroupaki[55] (2016) she spoke about her experience in politics and the way men confronted her. Katselli pointed out that

> The people, not only from the Democratic Party, but also from other political circles, accepted me, showing me trust and I tried to look worthy, serving in difficult times with all my strength. My family has been very positive. My then-husband also served as deputy minister for refugees and later as minister in various ministries. My mother helped me a lot at home and raising my children so that I could be uninterrupted in my duties.

> I have never had any problems in my life with men, not even when I was in EOKA, where the majority of fighters were men, neither later nor of course in Parliament, although in the first decade I was the only woman among 55 men. I treated them and they treated me as their equal colleague. But I made sure to be honest and dedicated to the function I was practicing, either in the Cypriot Parliament or in the international forums I was a member of, such as the Council of Europe. All I cared about then was being a little more conservative in my dress.

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[55] Apostolos Kouroupakis is a journalist for the newspaper Kathimerini ( "K" ). Kouroupakis kindly provided me the article of the interview from his archive. The interview was conducted at the 22nd of May in 2016.

Katselli, being the first woman in politics, experienced first handed the difficulties a woman has to face in the political sphere of Cyprus. Specifically, in the interview she had with Kouroupaki she stated that

> It helps a bit that today there are more female university graduates, who do not seek to be just professors and make a career in the profession they studied on equal terms with men. But parties are still largely male-dominated and there are no opportunities or facilities to involve more women in politics. In other countries, the state itself provides skilled staff to look after the young children of women MPs. We in Cyprus are far from that. I think the reason for this phenomenon is that our society is conservative in the old sense and we are not, in general, men and women, cultivated in the broad sense of the term.

Katselli shed light in key points I want to address in this chapter on the experiences of women politicians. Firstly, she pointed out the help and support she received from her family environment, which was something my interviewees referred to. Secondly, Katselli mentioned briefly the way male politicians have treated her, something that has been discussed in detailed with my interviewees. Finally, her statements highlight the difficulties arising from the lack of state infrastructures for further support and promotion of women in the political arena, a point that the participants of this research have touched upon.

The lack of state infrastructures is the core of this section, as well as the family support the interviewees received, and their efforts to balance family and politics. I want to start this analysis with Efi Xanthou, the Deputy Leader of the Green Party (Centre-left wing) who was the only one to provide extensive details on the amount of work she puts in her efforts to balance family and work life, something that is not easy as it can be observed from her sayings.

> It is hard to keep balance and if I did not had the husband I have who understands the reason why I am away from home, it would have been much harder. He took over the traditional role of the mother as it is understood in the Cypriot society. This is the only reason that allows me to do the things I do. And also the fact that I have a mother in law who was taking care of my baby boy after my maternity leave had finished and she took over almost completely my child's care, up until he was 3.5 years old and he got in the kindergarten. The infrastructures in Cyprus do not exist. A woman who does not have the social network to help her become a mother, she will choose not to have a child or she will have huge financial problems because she will be unable to work, at least full time.

The amount of work is increased through the years as her child is getting older and his needs are growing. But she believes that the amount of work between her and her husband is equally split stating that

> Without exaggeration I am working between 15-18 hours a day. Until the time I will close my eyes I am playing a role. Especially during the last 4 years the situation has been deteriorated, because my child has grown up and he now needs support with his school homework. The last 2 years is even more difficult because he also goes for tutoring lessons. Since my husband supports our child with his homework and is responsible for taking our child to the tutoring lessons every afternoon and then they both continue with the school homework, that means that everything that has to do with the house is on me. It is a simple matter of time management, it cannot be done differently. (…) So the role that my husband took over, to take care of our son's school support, has increased my volume of work which is something I am accepting because I feel that I am sharing equally the libra of the family life with my husband. I am understanding the situation. And to be honest I am not sure how I could change this because of our financial situation. The solution to reduce the amount of work when it comes to household is to employ a person to do this job. We are not in a financial position to do this, if in the future we will have the chance we will do it.

Irene Zorpa from the Solidarity Movement party (right-wing) has a different point of view on the matter of family-work balance. She claims that

> It is not hard to mix family and politics but you have to find the balance. If a woman decides that her goal is to become MP from President of local government for example, that means that she has to give up everything and spent endless hours in cafes [*kafeneia*], at events, to become known to the people, in order to get voted. It is something that I personally do not want to do now, nor something that I have even though of doing. What I am doing now wasn't my goal it just happened. I am giving a lot of time and attention to my kids, to my husband and my family. First comes the family and then politics. Many times I have cancelled important meetings that had to do with local governmental problems because I do not want to feel guilty that I have left my kids, I haven't been to a play in their elementary school or when one of my kids had a fever and I left, or I send someone else to pick them up from school. I wouldn't forgive myself because from the moment I chose to become a mother, politics come second. I am not

rushing things to become someone in the field, if an opportunity it will, I am not chasing anything.

For her motherhood and family come first and politics comes second. It all depends from the goals a woman has in her life, if she wants to invest in her career and progress rapidly or if she wants to combine both and make slow progress.

> To keep the balance between family and politics you have to take slow steps each time. If the decision of a woman is the political life, and she wants to succeed and not be the pawn of anyone, she has to take slow steps, to listen carefully every individual and not only one, to learn, to think and then to proceed.

It seems that Zorpa had a clear picture on how to balance family and politics since family comes first. Women though, can still face a big dilemma between becoming a mother and staying or entering politics. Efi Xanthou from the Green Party (Centre-left) and Mariella Aristidou from DISY (Centre-right) expressed that they had faced such a dilemma when they became mothers. Both of them overcome that situation with the help and support of their families.

Xanthou stated that

> I had the dilemma to choose between family and career many times. But I had the support and understanding from my family something that helped me to choose the political life which is very difficult for an average woman. An average woman wouldn't be capable to take over, and many times I am feeling guilty because I do not think that I am the ideal. I am quite good, I have confidence, but I have seen women who I believe they would have done a better job than me. But those women were unable to embark on this adventure because they do not have the supportive network that will help them. And this is a pity for women in general.

And similarly, Aristidou noted that

> When I ran for parliament I was pregnant and yet I didn't give up, I was stubborn and chose to move on. But I moved on because I knew I had my family and my husband by my side so I could handle the obligations I had before me. But that doesn't mean that every woman has the ability to participate in decision-making centres, or to claim her participation.

The majority of the interviewees (5 out of 8) pointed out the support they received from their husbands without whom they would not have been able to get involved and evolved in the

political scene. Rena Yiavasi, from the Citizens' Alliance which is a Centre-left wing political party, claimed that

> My husband is very supportive and helpful. But the society is structured in a way that even if he wants to provide the best and be there for his children, he cannot. And I am engaging with politics because I have the luck to have a husband who understands and many times he will take over responsibilities and obligations regarding our children. For example, he might change his appointments to be with the kids while I am unable to do it. But again, is difficult also for him because our society is structured in a certain way. If a man does not understand what he has to do and take it seriously, it is very difficult for a woman to enter and stay in politics.

And Irene Zorpa from the Solidarity Movement (right-wing), described the initial conversation she had with her husband when she received the proposal from her political party to enter politics. It is clear from their discussion the support she had from her husband. Remembering the incident she noted that

> When I had the chance to enter Solidarity Movement, I discussed it with my husband and I told him "my working hours will be difficult, I will be working during weekends and I would have to go to many places around Cyprus. If you agree, we will take the opportunity, if not I will refuse. I will not lose my home and my family because I want to do something else". He accepted it and he told me "I will stand by you, if you do not succeed we will move on, if you succeed great".

Zorpa commented also that her husband is among the rare cases because not all men are willing to accept their wife to resign from the civil sector with a secure job and stable salary to become a politician. Her husband accepted it because the nature of the job in the party would make her happier (than her previous job in the civil sector). Zorpa managed to include her family as a whole in political activities such as events, pointing out that

> we are going to events from municipalities around Cyprus as a family and my husband sees that I am loved, appreciated and he likes it, he stands by me for me to progress.

Zorpa was not the only one who indicated that the support she received from her husband is a rare case since not all men are willing to do that. Not all men are going to take over motherhood roles and take care of the children by sacrificing hours from their work. In fact, women are stepping back and are more willing to sacrifice their careers for a certain amount of time, and they are reinforcing the absence of the father and his responsibilities as a parent. Rena Yiavasi pinpoint

When a couple has a baby and one of the two parents has to stay home, the initial though is to stay home the one who does not earn a lot. What I want to say is that, it is more luckily that a woman will stay home and sacrifice her job at least for a certain period of time than the man who is earning more. We had gone through that phase as a family, and the majority of the society has to go through that. Women are often forced to step back and stay home for a period of time because they are earning less. (…) Families want to do what is best because the economic needs are being increased and there is a need for a family financial budget.

Efi Xanthou, from the Green Party positioned in the Centre-left, also believes that mostly economic reasons can push couples to choose one of the two to stay home and take care of the child/children. Besides that, Xanthou brings something else to the discussion. She recalled a case of a couple she knows, where the man becomes as a stay-home-dad and his approach to the issue makes more clear how Cypriot men can react when the social gender roles are reversed.

In 2013, when we had the debt restructuring, we saw that the priority in who from the family would find a job was again the man, automatically even though the woman may have more qualifications. And the men who were forced to stay home because they had lost their jobs, while their wives continued to work, huge problems were created because for a man to think and accept that "I will stay home to raise our baby" is something very strange for our culture, which that doesn't make sense!

 I have a couple in mind that I can't forget, they have a small child, is a couple that doesn't have the financial means to send the child  to kindergarten. The husband is unemployed so he is home with the baby. And it is hard for him to bear that he is house-bound, that he is at home. If he went to find a job , then half of his salary would be for the nursery school because the baby would stay until 5 in the afternoon, which is a serious expense. They don't see the profit of being one of the 2 parents at home for another 1-2 years until the baby is old enough to go to a regular child station with different schedule and lower expenses. (…) It is not this logic that comes first, it is clearly her role as a woman and a mother. the priority is for the woman to stay home automatically. The other problem for women as a society is divorce and single-parent families. Society demands from the woman to stay with her children and I think it is natural for most women to want to stay with their children due to the process of childbirth (...) beyond the social perception that a man cannot raise his children properly and the mother raises them better, something that remains a perception.  This

is not true at all, but this is the surrounding atmosphere, and the courts give this role to women.

The fact that women are seen as more suitable than men to raise a child in the Cypriot society (and not only), brings me to the policies around parental leave. Policies that have been ratified by the Republic of Cyprus and are coming from supranational organizations like United Nations and the European Union, are aiming to push the states to overcome the traditional parenthood roles that want women as the child caretakers and men as the breadwinner. Policies and regulations from UN and EU can function as benchmarks to help the Cypriot government and the system in general to come closer to gender equality.

Among the aspects examined in the previous chapter, the *CEDAW* addressed the social significance of maternity and the important role of both parents in the upbringing of the child, in an effort to bring awareness to the fact that

> the role of women in procreation should not be a basis for discrimination but that the upbringing of children requires a sharing of responsibility between men and women and society as a whole (1979:3).

So the UN policy, as the EU commentaries, draw attention to the need of modification of the social and cultural patterns of behavior of men and women. The aim is to eliminate the prejudices, customaries and all other practices that are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes, or on stereotyped roles for men and women. The 2002 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, signalized the need for "genuine partnership in the shaping of responsibilities between women and men in both the private and public sphere"[56].

While family policies aim to balance work-family and share the paid and unpaid labor when it comes to raising children in order to bring equality between the genders, Mandel and Semyonov (2006)[57] noted that, no matter how generous family policies are, and how flexible conditions women have in their working environment (the authors focused on the public sector), women still have to face the traditional division of work between men. The authors arguments, combined with the observations of Finch (2006)[58] that countries where gender equality is accepted but the

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[56] 2002 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe – Resolution on Parental Leave - Resolution 1274 (2002) on Parental leave (§§ 1–3)

[57] Mandel, Hadas, and Moshe Semyonov. "A Welfare State Paradox: State Interventions and Women's Employment Opportunities in 22 Countries." *American Journal of Sociology* 111, no. 6 (2006): 1910-949. Accessed June 12, 2020. doi:10.1086/499912.

[58] Finch, N. 2006. "Gender Equity and Time Use: How Do Mothers and Fathers Spend Their Time?" In *Social Policy, Employment and Family Change in Comparative Perspective*, 255–82. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

traditional division of work between men and women insists; can give us an image of how deeply rooted traditional gender roles are and how difficult can be to change.

Cyprus is far from the ideal welfare state and efforts are not being made to blend work and childcare while ensuring gender equality. The regulations on the parental leave are the minimum a state can give. According to the EU report on maternity and paternity leave (2019)[59], Cyprus is among the lowest levels on the number of weeks offered for maternity and paternity leave. The state offers only nine weeks of maternity leave with 72% payment. Out of the nine weeks, two of them are mandatory and the rest are voluntary. The fathers receive only two voluntary weeks of paternity leave with the equal amount of payment (72%). The current EU legislation gives minimum 14 weeks for maternity leave of which two are mandatory. According to the report and Silia Kyrmitsi from the political party EDEK located in the Centre, Cyprus does not have a paid parental leave which means parents do not have the ability to take extra leave and split it among themselves in order for the family to be benefited. The fact that there is parental leave in the statute of the state but it is unpaid, for Kyrmitsi makes no sense, because no one will take advantage of it since it is unpaid. So families are entering a vicious circle trying to cope with parenthood and working life by themselves, facing economic constrains and receiving help from other family members instead of the state.

Rena Yiavasi from the Citizen's Alliance positioned in the Centre-left, argued that

> The maternity leave is almost 3 months, and the paternity leave is two weeks. Which de facto is nothing, because if a couple does not have the necessary family help from the grandparents, makes it really difficult to have a child. The couple has to take the newborn to nurseries which is considered anti-educational for newborns. They are changing environments too soon, and they are in a different space from a really young age, from 1.5-3 months old, with other kids that might be sick all the time. (…) There are many fathers who want to spend time with the new member of the family and they cannot. A father has to take unpaid extra leave to spend more time with the infant, and it is not sure if his employer is going to accept it.

Additionally, Alexia Sakadaki from the Green Party in Centre-left wing, stated with a note of frustration that

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[59] European Parliament. 2019. "Maternity and Paternity Leave in the EU."
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2019/635586/EPRS_ATA(2019)635586_EN.pdf.

A pregnant woman is required to work until the last month of her pregnancy. She is entitled to maternity leave which is unpaid and receives only 72% of her salary which she gets after three months. There is physical fatigue, the woman goes through a difficult transition physically and psychologically, but she is obliged to go to work normally and then she has almost 3-4 months of maternity leave. She returns to work normally after physical changes, in the obligations and needs of the profession. (…) most of the people who legislate are men and they don't care, they don't know what a woman is experiencing during pregnancy, childbirth, and the first months with her child. I'm not saying they have to know, but there should be a balance so that there is no disproportionate treatment of women, and the truth is that we [women] are burdened with many roles.

In regard to the low and late payment women receive during the maternity leave, Yiavasi argued that the government should give the amount a woman is getting paid before the leave. She indicated that the state is providing less, in a period of time that the expenses of the family are growing rapidly, and the state during this urgent phase decides to cut the family's income, something that for her and the rest of the interviewees does not make sense. "You do not go to work because you cannot (!), you gave birth, the body is still changing, you cannot go to your work." And she continued by explaining that

having a baby is not only beneficial for the mother, for the partner, but also for the society. Cyprus suffers from birth deficit, our population is growing old, and it is the first time in Cyprus that we have this situation to a great degree. We did not suffer like this even during wars. And in this situation when the state has to motivate the population to have children, and support families, the salary of the mothers is being cut and the state makes it even more difficult for them to decide to have children.

To make her point clear, Yiavasi brought up the examples of Nordic countries and their welfare system. But unlike any Scandinavian country, in Cyprus, mothers (nuclear family and single-parent) and pregnant women do not have the constitutional protection they deserve when it comes to work. The protection of working mothers and pregnant women does not fall only to the state alone, but to the community as a whole. Legislations on parenthood leave are a key component for gender-equality policies and exists throughout Europe (e.g. Sweden, Portugal, Finland, Slovenia, Spain, Lithuania). Even if there is a paradox in the welfare state of Scandinavian countries (Mandel and Semyonov 2006) in which inequalities are still present, it has been implied by Mavronicola (Centre wing), Yiavasi (Centre-left wing) and Pashia (left wing)

that by following the steps of those countries can be beneficial on many levels (social, economic, political) for the Cypriot society.

In the literature is still controversial that a welfare state can promote gender equality. According to Christina Bergqvist, Sweden has implemented policies that are income-related parental leave which benefit the public childcare services. The parental leave in Sweden exceeds in duration of one year and it can be shared by both parents, giving to each one at least two months parental leave. This has led to the disestablishment of the traditional family gendered roles where women were the caregivers and men were the breadwinners. Bergqvist, draws from Ahlberg, Roman and Duncan (2008) to argue that, even though Sweden may seem as a country that has reached a great level of gender equality, there is still much work needed to be done (Bergqvist, 2016:56). As she states women continue to do the major part of unpaid care work, they tend to take up the most parental leave and they are still falling behind of progress in the labor market. Thus, by the implementation of policies concerning parental leaves, the participation of both parents in the upbringing of the child will not be guaranteed as equal. It is debatable if a Nordic welfare state model can be implemented and benefit the Cypriot society, since women already tend to sacrifice their career opportunities disproportionately.

On the other hand, with Roulla Mavronicola's suggestion and persistence on the implementation of Gender Budgeting[60], the state of Cyprus can open an economic market of labor through day-care, helping unemployed individuals who graduated from the educational sector to find a job, while parents are benefited by gaining the support they need to obtain full-time jobs rather than part-time because of the family obligations. But, as it seems, the government of Cyprus is not willing to follow policies and reform regulations and state infrastructures. According to Efi Xanthou (Green Party, Centre-left), the governmental child care support which was provided by the Ministry of Labor has dramatically decreased. If the childcare policies were implemented, economically reinforced by the Gender Budgeting strategy and were under the provision of the labor market authorities, then parents' employment would have been more interconnected, coordinated and accommodated by the economic and family policies, leading the state to a more parenthood-friendly welfare state.

Skevi Pashia, the organizational secretary of the Women's organization POGO from the left political party AKEL, drawing from her experiences as a mother politician brings into the

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[60] Gender Budgeting is a European Union's strategy that aims for greater gender equality by focusing on the way public resources are collected and spent. Source: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/methods-tools/gender-budgeting

discussion a different perspective, which can function as an example of what a woman has to go through when she is unable to receive help from her family environment. I believe that the example of Pashia can show clearly the implications of lack of state infrastructure and how the absence of a welfare state affect motherhood and childcare.

Pashia described the combination of working, of being a part of the political scene with motherhood as extremely difficult. She characterized herself as "the typical example of a woman who had absolutely no help" from either the family or the state. She stated that in the Cypriot society, there is a tendency to think that the family is a substitute for the state. Her family (parents from both sides) was living in a different city, so there was no support regarding childcare. She brought to her memory the time when

> I was just married, young, with a man who worked late, most of the times until midnight. So days when we were both working late it was a huge problem about where we will leave our children. Both of our parents lived in another city. The kids were going to the kindergarten until 17:00 but the problem was after the kindergarten. And even the weekends, it could be mandatory for me to attend events, I was forced to take the children with me to the office and to the events. Fortunately, I was able to do it because we had a secretariat outside of my office who liked to take care of them. She helped them with their schoolwork and kept them occupied and entertained something that was a big relief.

Thus, for Pashia, the biggest obstacle she had to face was about the child provision and the absence of support from the state. When asked to explain what does she mean by lack of infrastructures, she pointed out three indicators that existed when she entered politics (1980s) and still exist now, to explain her point of view. Firstly, there was (and still is) an absence of low-cost state kindergartens which will relieve young women in the labor market from great expenses. Secondly, there were no kindergartens working 24 hours, and many times she had to take her child from the home of the kindergartner teacher after the school has finished. Thirdly, Pashia realized that if she wanted to obtain a post-graduate degree she would not have been able to do that because the state does not provide the support and the childcare women need to invest in themselves and therefore in the society. For her, if she wanted to follow a post-graduate program she would have had to sacrifice her children or her education "something I didn't want. I had

the right for the state to provide me with what we are entitled to so that I can move forward".

Pashia remembered her first years as a working mother in the political scene and referred to an incident that still bothers her

> A typical incident that happened and I strongly felt the lack of infrastructure and support from the state, was when there was a party conference, I was my party's representative and the conferences as usual take place on weekends. I had nowhere to leave my daughter then, the kindergarten was closed, and I decided to take my daughter with me to the conference. It didn't seem strange to me, I had no choice after all. But they didn't let me enter the meeting room with my child because, as they explained to me, children were not allowed. I told them I had nowhere to leave her, and they forced me to leave my daughter in the foyer, alone, so I could enter the room. At that time I felt very bad, and I decided to talk to the conference about this incident, about the injustice done to women. They deprive a parent of the right to attend the conference simply because he/she has a child with him/her, and justifiably because he/she does not have the opportunity to leave the child somewhere.

In regard the absence of social welfare and child care support, Efi Xanthou commented on the way governmental institutions are handling the situation. Specifically, she noted with great disappointment that

> the few infrastructures that existed from the Ministry of Labour, for example nurseries for small children to help the families, little by little those nurseries are closing. So there is no help for an employee, he/she is forced to work only part-time and these are decisions of the neoliberal government that we have for the last 6 years. Out of the 38 stations that the Ministry of Labour had for child care, 6 remained throughout Cyprus! With the policy to be clear that the Ministry of Labour is responsible for the equality of gender and they do not realize that it is a key part of equality!

The lack of social welfare and support for the parents creates a chain reaction of negative results. One parent has to stay home for 2-3 years until the child reaches the age of kindergarten. In the case of single-parents the situation is far more worse, because the parent has to leave the new born child in private nurseries, which usually are more expensive than the parent can afford. But the state gives no choice, and the parent has also to work a part-time low paid job in order to collect

the child from the nursery on time. Automatically the market loses a certain amount of workers for three years and thus the state does not take advantage of the full working and productive potential of the population. So, the bottom line is that with the absence of sufficient infrastructure there is an absence of wealth and growth for the state and the general population. If the possibility for a parent to take his/her child at work, like Skevi Pashia did, is not the ideal for a toddler. As Pashia stated

> Being able to take your child to work does not mean that is the ideal and the more suitable situation. There must be infrastructures that occupy children in a healthy way so that parents can be reassured when they work, that their children are in a safe environment. That children will have a good time and benefit from school assistance if needed. And when parents finish their work, even late in the evening and pick their children from the kindergartener, they will not be burdened with extra hours of labor at home.

There is a mindset and a tendency according to Silia Kyrmitsi from the centred party EDEK, that public nurseries and kindergartners with extended working hours are not in operation because politicians do not leave their children in child care institutions. She commended that this is extremely wrong because

> In order to enter politics, one needs prior service in events and organizations related to the public. There must be a preparation and a start from a link, an organization, a non-governmental organization in order to be able to reach the top and enter politics. In order for all this to happen, however, you must have the time, the opportunity, the capability and the help you need also from the state.

The particular situation of absence of welfare is not something new, or something the current government created. Roulla Mavronicola, from the political party EDEK, stated that the situation is an ongoing process since she can remember. In 1980s when she entered politics the situation has changed slightly or even not at all. There were no support from the state when it comes to childcare, and for a woman who was working full time it was extremely difficult.

this section has shown one more complex factor for women's absence from politics. many problems can arise from the lack of state infrastructure, ending the family environment to replace the state. Parents like Pashia did not even had this kind of support something that had a great impact on the balance between working life and parenthood.

Even with policies like *CEDAW*, which require from the states that have ratified them to take measures to erase stereotypes and create the welfare support system families need to be productive and harmonize family and working life; the government of Cyprus does not take gender equality seriously. In my belief, and from what has been examined throughout this chapter, the Cypriot society will be on the right path for gender equality with equal family responsibilities, when the state will implement policies correctly. Then, there will be a guideline and a base for a functioning social system to be build.

# Concluding remarks

The aim of this thesis was to fill the gap in the literature about Cypriot women's experiences in the political scene and contribute to a global scholarly discussion about policies and international organizations concerning gender equality in politics. Through interviews with eight female politicians I was able to cross-examine how these women assess the lack of women in politics, what their interpretations about gender equality policies that are created by the UN and EU are, as well as to present their experiences in the political sphere and the barriers they had to overcome.

Starting from the first chapter, an introduction was given about the participants, indicating the diversity of the interviewees and the way each one entered politics. From the very beginning the interviewees pointed out the main factors of women's underrepresentation in politics, which corresponds with the culture and stereotypes, the patriarchal structures of the Cypriot society, and the lack of several state infrastructures. All these factors were analyzed throughout this research, some of them in individual chapters. The second chapter examined the type of culture of Cyprus and how gender roles were shaped since the 20th century. The chapter showed that the roots of a patriarchal social structure were pre-existing and are still maintained to some extent.

Following up, the third chapter was based on the previous one to pinpoint the change of women's social roles through major conflicts and strikes. Throughout the chapter, I have made a comparison among political scientists drawing from a historiographic discussion of authors who have written about women's activism and the political activism of women in Cyprus from the middle of the 20th century. The chapter briefly showed the role of the Ottoman Empire on the establishment of the Christian Orthodox religion which installed strict, traditional stereotypes and gender roles. The mindset of the Cypriot society changed along with the religion which were fundamental reasons that perpetuates traditional gender roles setting men in the public and women in the private domain. By examining Cypriot women's activism through history since the liberation struggle during 1955-59, up until the latest strike in 2020, the chapter showed that women shifted their approach of engaging with the public domain and national struggles. Drawing from the indications and analysis that has been made by Vassiliou (2019) regarding the traditional gender roles, women engaged with the liberation struggle having mainly the identity of the mother and wife. After the Turkish invasion (1974), Cypriot women decided to take a different approach by entering the public domain, building international networks with other women's organizations which lead them to create a peace-building march and human chain (1988, 1993) in an effort to take part in the negotiations. Since then, no more mobilizations have

been made apart from the latest which was characterized by the interviewees as a milestone, since it was the first time female politicians from the whole political spectrum organized a strike to demand women's rights while putting aside political ideologies. Thus, the chapter follows a different approach by clarifying the alternations of women's roles in Cyprus by examining their political activism and the means they used to engage with conflicts. Through their political activism, Cypriot women have shifted their roles and how they perceive themselves. From acting as mother/wives they have turned to peacebuilders and strikers.

The fourth chapter was focused on the interpretations of the participants regarding gender equality policies from supranational organizations such as the UN and EU. Specifically, the chapter showed the efforts that are being made from the Republic of Cyprus regarding the implementations of two main policies the *CEDAW* and the *Beijing Declaration*. Throughout the section, the interviewees expressed their frustration and disappointment towards the approach the Cypriot government uses to implement the policies. They have also given a lot of attention to the suggestions from the UN and EU for gender quotas to be implemented. Among my interviewees it was clear that it is debatable if and how gender quotas will succeed since this strategy can stigmatize women who enter via this policy, and women are portrayed as the vulnerable group in need of assistance. Although the majority of the participants were adamant that quotas will not help, but rather will preserve the discrimination and sexism that already exists in politics, Rena Yiavasi from the Citizen's Alliance party (centre-left wing) seemed to change her opinion thinking that if quotas were established for a short period of time, the political and social culture could change to a more female-friendly culture and after this would be achieved, then quotas could be erased from the discussion. So as in the scholarly world, also in the political world, the gender quotas system is debatable and controversial.

The fifth and final chapter was the one that brought everything together proving that women's underrepresentation in the political sphere of Cyprus is a vicious circle. Starting from the broad question of what the experiences and barriers the participants had to face in politics are, the chapter unravelled the main factors which were presented briefly in the first chapter regarding the causes of women's underrepresentation. The section showed the existence of multiple factors that can discourage women from going after a political career. Primarily, women can be unwilling to get involved with politics either because it is time consuming, or they believe that politics is a male affair, or due to the dual functionality of parties' mechanisms which can either encourage or discourage women. Hence, they are stepping back and do not claim higher positions or even a seat in a political party.

Secondly, the existence gender stereotypes in the Cypriot society, which have their roots since the establishment of the Orthodox religion, reinforce the division between the roles of men and women in the Cypriot society and where each one must contribute (public/private sphere). These stereotypes are being produced, re-produced and preserved through mainstream media which are responsible for cultural production, presenting women in the eyes of the society solely as mothers/wives, superficial and incompetent. Women are only expected to fulfil their duties and their roles, but they are also discouraged and lead to believe that they are incapable of leading and/or running for office.

Thirdly, women who are already in the political world are having a hard time to harmonize family and political life responsibilities. Due to the lack of state infrastructures in Cyprus that can provide childcare support, women are discouraged to get involved with politics and to pursue higher positions which is an indirect discrimination. The absence of the tools and support cause them to avoid politics. The social and cultural barriers are the most powerful and hardest to eliminate.

This thesis encapsulated the reasons why in Cyprus there is an absence of women in politics and how supranational policies are being implemented to achieve gender equality. I already knew that stereotypes and traditional culture that is preserved in a highly religious society plays an important role. Now, at the end of this research, I have found that these are not the only reasons holding back women from entering politics. It is not only the general perception of 'women do not belong in politics' which can create a mindset that blocks women from entering that area. There is evidence from examples coming from the discussions with the interviewees, that women and the Cypriot society and bureaucracy are not taking advantage of women's abilities in politics. Additionally, policies are being and will continue to be created by supranational organizations aiming for gender equality. The question is how these organizations can ensure and push more for gender-equal system in a society which is highly traditional like the Cypriot society. If member states of international organizations are not fully committed to make fundamental changes and be guided by the policies, then how will gender equality be created? This research showed the complexity of achieving gender equality. Policies cannot work unless stereotypes are eliminated, gender-equal culture is cultivated and unless individuals and political parties are educated on the benefits of taking advantage of the assets of both genders in order for societies to progress.

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# Appendix

Structured questionnaire with the 10 common questions for all interviewees:

1. Where are you coming from, what did you study and what led you to choose politics (how did it occur)?

2. How easy or difficult was your development in the political arena? What are the difficulties/obstacles?
   a. If there are obstacles why do you think this is happening? Are there more difficulties whe you are a woman? If yes, why do you think this is happening?

3. Have you ever had the dilemma of choosing between family or politics? How difficult is it to have a balance between family and politics for a woman and how difficult is it for a man (both in the same position)?

4. Do you think that is generally difficult for women to pursue a political career because of the obstacles or is it not their choice (as a career path)?

5. Do you believe that the political system in Cyprus is structured in a way that favors or does not favour women politicians? What are the obstacles, if any, that are set by the Cypriot political system?

6. Is there under-representation of women in government (quotas)? If so, what do you think is the cause?

7. Do you feel that women in politics have the same or less power (respect for their views in debates and decision-making centres) in the political party and/or on parliamentary level than that of men?

8. Do you know how the idea of the strike 'It is Time' came about, and why it was organized during this period (this year)?

9. Are you aware of any European policies that need to be followed by the government to ensure gender equality? The Republic of Cyprus follow these policies? If not, why do you think this is

happening?

10. Do you believe that the European Union has a positive or a negative effect:
    a. In our political system in general?
    b. In terms of eliminating gender inequalities and discrimination?