The Kouza and the Fountana

Gender, Coloniality, and the Afterlives of Water in Cyprus

νερό
αποικιακότητα
υλικότητα
Κύπρος
water
coloniality
critical fabulation
materiality
Cyprus

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Το άρθρο ιχνηλατεί την ζωή των υποδομών νερού στην Κύπρο μέσα από την *κούζα* και τη *φουντάνα*, διαβάζοντάς τες ως λεπτομέρειες όπου η υλικότητα, η καθημερινότητα και η εξουσία διασταυρώνονται. Από τις γυναίκες που ισορροπούν πήλινα δοχεία στο πηγάδι του χωριού έως τις χυτοσκυρόδετες βρύσες των βρετανικών προγραμμάτων ευημερίας, τα αντικείμενα αυτά λειτουργούν ως τεχνουργήματα και κοινωνικοί μεσολαβητές. Ο κόκκινος πηλός, η πορώδης επιφάνεια που «ιδρώνει», τα χειροποίητα σεμεδάκια και οι αποικιακές επιγραφές εμπεριέχουν μεταβαλλόμενα καθεστώτα εργασίας και κοινωνικότητας. Στην αποικιακή φωτογραφία, τα πηγάδια παρουσιάζονται ως χώροι «χυδαίων κουτσομπολιών», ενώ οι κινήσεις των γυναικών αισθητικοποιούνται ως επιπολαιότητα ή «ζωντανά αγάλματα». Στην Κύπρο του 20ού αιώνα, οι βρύσες με τα βασιλικά αρχικά μνημειοποιούν μια λογική «αρκετής προόδου», ενσωματώνοντας την αυτοκρατορία στις καθημερινές πράξεις πόσης και ανάπαυλας.

Το άρθρο προσεγγίζει το σχέδιο όχι ως αρχιτεκτονική λεπτομέρεια, αλλά ως μέθοδο αργής παρατήρησης και μαρτυρίας. Μέσω κριτικής αφήγησης και αρχειακών εικόνων, ιχνηλατόνται οι μικρο-υλικότητες του νερού, του πηλού, του σκυροδέματος και της φροντίδας. Σύντομα αφηγηματικά αποσπάσματα λειτουργούν ως κειμενικά σχέδια, αποδίδοντας χειρονομίες και συναντήσεις που απουσιάζουν από το αρχείο, ενώ οι φωτογραφίες και οι σύγχρονες καλλιτεχνικές πρακτικές λειτουργούν ως καταγραφές βιωμένων υποδομών. Σε αυτό το πλαίσιο, το άρθρο συνομιλεί με το έργο της Κυριακής Κώστα *Το Νερό Της* και με το *KUZA* του PASHIAS, που συμπλέκουν υποδομή, σώμα και μνήμη. Μαζί, οι πρακτικές αυτές επανατοποθετούν την κούζα και τη φουντάνα όχι ως στατικά κατάλοιπα, αλλά ως πορώδεις συμμετέχοντες της καθημερινής ζωής — σπόρους μνήμης, κοινότητας και φροντίδας.

This article traces the life of water infrastructures in Cyprus through the *kouza* and the *fountana*, read as details where materiality, everyday life, and power converge. From women balancing clay jars at the village well to the cast-concrete fountains of British welfare schemes, these objects function as both technical artefacts and social mediators. Their red clay, porosity, sweating surfaces, lace coverings, and concrete inscriptions materialize shifting regimes of labour, gendered sociability, and imperial authority. In colonial photography, wells were framed as sites of "vulgar gossip," women's gestures aestheticized as frivolous chatter or "living statues." In mid-twentieth-century Cyprus, fountains stamped with royal initials monumentalized "just enough" progress, embedding empire in everyday acts of drinking and pausing.

The article approaches drawing not as architectural detailing but as a mode of slow observation and testimony: tracing, through speculative narrative, archival images, and more-than-human perspectives, the micro-materialities of water, clay, concrete, and care. Short vignettes act as textual drawings, responding to archival silences without assuming the voices of unnamed women, while photographs and contemporary artwork function as drawn records of lived infrastructures. In this sense, the work resonates with Kyriaki Costa's *Her/Its Water*, which catalogues fountains as lived archives, and PASHIAS' *KUZA*, which collapses vessel and body in a performance of continuity. Together, these histories and practices reposition the *kouza* and the *fountana* not as static relics but as porous participants in everyday life—seeds of memory, commons, and care.

MATERIAL HISTORY

In the photo albums of the Public Information Office of the Republic of Cyprus there is a treasure trove of information that is otherwise unavailable in the written reports and official surveys of engineers and bureaucrats of the British colonial government of Cyprus. Under the general title "Water Supply and Irrigation 1950s" in the Water Development Department folder, one such photograph instantly shocked and excited me. After years of researching in dusty typewritten documents compiled by British white men—and later Greek Cypriot men—on the history of late colonial water infrastructure construction, I refused to believe that the pervasive image of the Cypriot woman in traditional headdress balancing a terracotta pot on her shoulders is completely absent from the technical histories of water infrastructure. The iconography surrounding water in Cyprus, shaped first through British colonial documentation and later through state-building after independence, circulates across official and unofficial archives, and across the material histories of the everyday objects themselves. This initial encounter with unnamed women and their terracotta vessels reveal how material traces, even when fragmentary, unsettle the official histories that omit them.

Against this backdrop, this article examines the *kouza* and the *fountana* not merely as vernacular artefacts but as micro-sites where gendered labour, imperial technopolitics and the everyday practices of Cypriot life become materially entangled. Drawing from architectural history, postcolonial critique, and more-than-human feminist theory, the aim is not to reconstruct a singular origin story, but to trace how these artefacts operate across archives, photographs, infrastructures and gestures. Their materiality reveals the limits of the colonial record, what Ann Laura Stoler (2009) calls the "epistemic anxieties" of the archive, while also opening the possibility of what Ariella Aïsha Azoulay (2019) terms "potential history," an unlearning of imperial frames in order to imagine relations otherwise.

Within these gaps, the article employs speculative vignettes narrated by objects or environments themselves. Following Saidiya Hartman's (2008) method of "critical fabulation" these vignettes are not speaking for women whose identities remain unknowable, and particularly Turkish Cypriot women whose presence has been doubly obscured by colonial and nationalist historiographies. Instead, these constructed images and narratives activate material, spatial and archival evidence to articulate relational histories that official records cannot name.

The Cypriot woman with the *kouza* itself—the terracotta vessel likely named after the ancient Greek word for head "*κύβη*" which literally denominates its bodily design elements—entered the symbolic repertoire of the Republic of Cyprus shortly after independence. On the Cypriot one-pound (or *lira*), one side depicted the portrait of a woman in traditional attire and the other side depicted the *kouza* alongside other traditional handcrafted artifacts of Cyprus. Examining the lira's material and design history, immediately raises some important questions: who designed these images, and what meaning do they encode? The official website of the Central Bank of Cyprus provides a description of all the depicted figures on all the banknotes but does not name the designer (Central Bank of Cyprus n.d.). İsmet Vehit Güney, the Turkish Cypriot artist who designed the official flag of the Republic of Cyprus after successfully winning a competition in 1960, was asked to designed the new coat of arms and the official banknotes of the Republic. Yet, according to a 2006 newspaper article, he was never compensated and eventually pursued legal action at the European Court of Human Rights (Cyprus Mail 2006).

This episode underscores the broader skewed official historiography of Cyprus, shaped predominantly by Greek Cypriot authors and largely omitting Turkish Cypriot contributions and labour. Scholars have demonstrated how nationalist narratives and the politics of memory structured these exclusions (Papadakis 2009, Papadakis 2008, Hatay and Papadakis 2012, Constantinou 2008, Bryant and Papadakis 2012, Psaltis and others 2011, Bryant 2004). Within this context, the symbolic economy of the banknotes becomes more revealing. High-denomination notes privileged ancient Hellenic heritage: the twenty-pound note depicted the Aphrodite of Soloi, the Kyrenia ship, and *Petra tou Romiou* (in Greek, translated as the "Boulder of Romios") denominating both its "Greekness" and sanctity since the stone was supposedly thrown into the sea by a legendary Greek hero.[1] By contrast, the one-pound note featured the *kouza* made by unnamed potters and carried by unnamed women. This visual hierarchy, even if unintentional on the part of the designer, reflects a tacit ranking of heritage and gendered labour: Hellenism elevated, vernacular material culture feminised and diminished.

This symbolic ordering mirrors the broader processes through which the Cypriot past was selectively monumentalized after independence. And yet, beneath these official narratives, the everyday objects omitted from such hierarchies like vessels, wells, and fountains, hold histories that exceed their assigned cultural value. The following section turns to the *kouza*, an artefact most deeply entangled with these contradictory histories of labour, representation, and colonial capture.

THE KOUZA

Approaching the archival photographs of women carrying *kouzes* requires acknowledging the limits of my own positionality as a Greek-speaking Cypriot scholar. My access to Turkish-language archives, to communal memory within Turkish Cypriot contexts, and to the lived experiences of the women captured in these photographs is certainly constrained. For this reason, the speculative vignette accompanying the first two images does not attempt to imagine the interior life of these women. Following Azoulay's (2009) call to "unlearn imperialism," the narrator is the *kouza* itself for photographs likely depicting Greek Cypriot women, followed by the *well* for those taken in Lefka, a predominantly Turkish Cypriot village. This method does not claim to recover lost voices, but it allows the infrastructural and more-than-human elements in the photograph to articulate what the colonial archive leaves unsaid.

The *kouza* is a particularly eloquent object through which to consider these tensions. Made of terracotta in pottery centres such as Lapithos, Varosha, Foini or Kornos, it was designed for balance: its rounded belly tapering to a narrow neck, light enough to rest on the shoulder or head, heavy enough to stabilise once full. Domestic *kouzes* typically carried a single handle; larger *stamnes* used for transport had two handles and a broader base. Their porosity allowed water to cool by evaporation. Inside the home, *kouzes* stood upright in *stamnostates* or *kotypostates* (handcrafted wooden stands) and were often covered with lace cloth made by women to keep insects away (Fig.1). Today, both Cypriot lace and traditional pottery vessels are listed in the Europeana digital heritage database, marking their continued presence as part of European vernacular material culture (Europeana 2025).

Handcrafted by village potters, the *kouza* embodies both everyday necessity and craftsmanship, linking women's domestic labour to artisanal skill. It is at once a tool of survival, a colonial prop, and later a symbol for state development and of Cypriot cultural heritage. As such, it carries a layered biography: the weight of water, the intimacy of touch, the burden of representation.

John Thomson's *Through Cyprus with the Camera* (1879) is where the *kouza* most explicitly enters the colonial photographic canon. Across many of his plates, women appear with terracotta vessels,

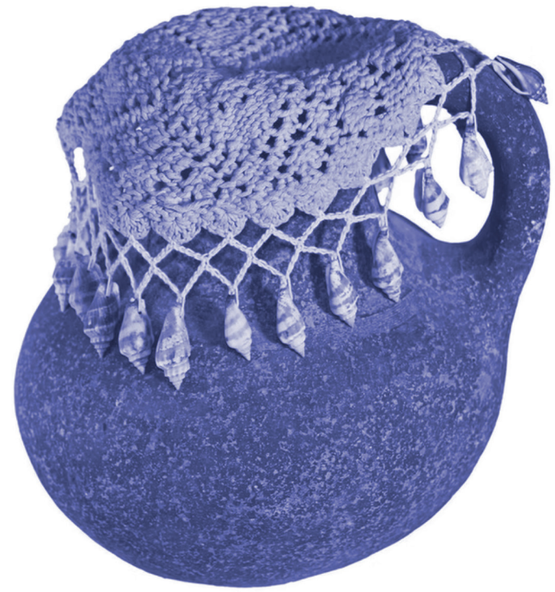

Fig.1 - "Kouza." Kato Drys Bee and Embroidery Museum Collection. Photograph/edit: Charalampos Paraskeva. Copyrights © 2017, Cypriot Food and Nutrition Museum.

posed, arranged, and captioned as types. In *A Water-Carrier* (Fig.2) the sitter braces the *kouza* against her hip; Thomson's caption links the vessel to potteries in Varosha and to ancient funerary jars, situating her within a timeless ethnographic tableau. In *A Woman of the Labouring Class* (Fig.3) the same woman is re-posed against a plain wall, her identity split to satisfy two typological categories: the humble female labourer and the rustic water-bearer. Her headdress and jewelry now arranged more "artfully," serve to authenticate the scene as evidence of Cypriot "tradition" as well as female vanity. Yet her gaze shifts slightly between photographs: in the first image, the *kouza* seems to provide her the courage to look directly toward the lens; in the second, her head tilts away, as if withdrawing from the camera's claim.

The anonymity of these women is not incidental but symptomatic of how the archive operates. State archives catalogue the vessel, the village, the infrastructure—but not the woman. And yet the archival record does not always cooperate with its own omissions. During an informal conversation at the Water Development Department, a clerk showed me one of the most widely reproduced images of a young girl with a *kouza*. In trying to identify her, he discovered that one of their former colleagues was her son, and still, he could not recall either name. The image circulates endlessly as evidence of "tradition," while the subjects themselves recede into anonymity. This moment exposed the tension between visual ubiquity and historical erasure, and clarified why I turned back toward the "safe zone" of state archives during my doctoral research: institutional documents may satisfy evaluative expectations, but they also perpetuate forms of unknowing (Stoler 2009). Hartman's "critical fabulation" offers strategies for narrating lives that appear only in fragments (Hartman 2008). Azoulay

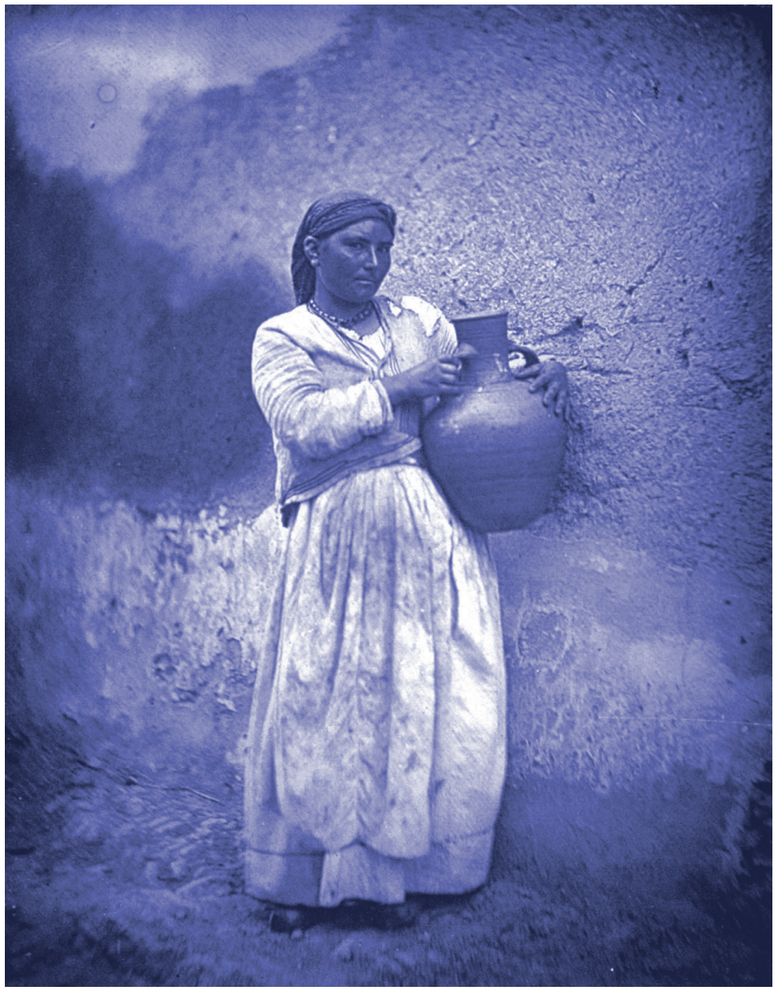

Fig.2 - (Left) "A water carrier." Fig.3 - (Right) "Woman of the labouring class."
From *Through Cyprus with the camera*, in the autumn of 1878 (1878). Courtesy of the University of St Andrews Libraries and Museums. ID: PhotoDS54-T5-18b and ID: PhotoDS54-T5-19a.

I was soil, shaped in Varosha, turned by hands that knew the weight of water and the patience of earth. I rest against her shoulder where the fabric is already worn smooth, following a curve we have learned together. The sun warms my surface; her palm steadies my neck. I do not know her name, yet her stride is familiar: firm, practised, in rhythm with the path. In the photograph they see only a type, but I remember the texture of her skin, the scent and sound of well-water cooling inside my belly, and the quiet knowledge carried between us. She carried me through fields and footpaths long before the photograph, and long after it was taken.

reminds us that photographs are not static objects but ongoing events that bind viewers to responsibilities (Azoulay 2019). Positioned within these frameworks, my speculative vignette aims not to reconstruct biography but to attune our attention to the material and relational textures that the archive allows us to glimpse. They open a space to listen differently, much as contemporary artists such as Kyriaki Costa and PASHIAS return to fountains and vessels not as mute artefacts, but as agents of memory and care. This vignette is followed, in the next section, by the Lefka photographs—*Women at a Well* and *Coming from the Well*—where the narrator shifts from *kouza* to *well*, allowing the infrastructure itself to speak across communal lines in a context where the identities of the women, likely Turkish Cypriot based on period attire described by foreign travelers logs at the time, cannot be ethically narrated.

AT THE WELL: LABOUR, GESTURE, AND THE POLITICS OF LOOKING

Approaching the archival images taken in Lefka requires acknowledging the layered gazes that have shaped their afterlives. The women pictured in these photographs are almost certainly Turkish Cypriot. Their presence is mediated first through Thomson's lens, then through the nationalist selectivity of Greek Cypriot historiography, and finally through the limited access I have as a Greek-speaking researcher to Turkish-language archives, oral histories, and community memory. For this reason, the speculative vignette accompanying the Lefka images is narrated not by the photographed women but by the well: a structure made of earth, mudbrick, and water, positioned at the centre of communal life.

This shift recognizes the ethical limits of imagining women's interiority, while still allowing the photograph to be re-read through the material and environmental presences that grounded it.

Fig.4 - (Left) "Women at a well, Levka." Fig.5 - (Right) "Coming from the well, Levka."
From: John Thomson, *Through Cyprus with the camera, in the autumn of 1878* (1878). Courtesy of the University of St Andrews Libraries and Museums, ID: PhotoDS54-T5-33 and ID: PhotoDS54-T5-34.

I am built of mudbrick mixed with the very water I hold. Each day their footsteps approach: measured, habitual, accompanied by kouzes clacking against stone and voices carried through the linen folds of white. The photographer names none of them, calling one "Aphrodite," but I remember only labour—the leaning in, the lifting, the balance regained before the path home. Whether they arrive in small groups or descend alone toward the village, their gestures repeat across generations. I keep no record of origins or tongues; only the echo of hands drawing water and the traces left as they depart.

Thomson frames these scenes as ethnographic tableaux: women gathered in a courtyard, *kouzes* at their feet, one bending to draw water, others pausing mid-conversation. In *Women at a Well (Lefka)* (Fig.4), the accompanying text acknowledges them as "the recognized drawers of water," only to trivialize their sociability as "vulgar gossip" (Thomson 1879). Labour is named, yet diminished; everyday exchange is observed, yet dismissed. The well becomes a stage set on which the colonial photographer arranges gendered gestures according to a ready-made script of rustic Mediterranean femininity.

In Coming from the Well (Lefka) (Fig.5), the dynamic shifts again. The woman is captured mid-motion, her *kouza* braced at her hip, but Thomson's caption ignores her labour entirely. Instead, he aestheticizes her as "a living model of some Greek statue found in Soloi," drawing her into a pastoral Hellenic imaginary and a sexualized female body of the goddess of love Aphrodite. Here, the *kouza* ceases to be a tool of survival and becomes instead a signifier of timelessness. The complexity of the village, the multireligious and multilingual life of Lefka, and the specificities of women's work vanish behind a classical allegory that served the tastes of a British imperial audience.

These representational manoeuvres must be understood within a broader colonial and nationalist context. As British traveller Esmé Scott-Stevenson (1880) observed around the same period, many Muslim Cypriot women wore long white garments covering their bodies, revealing only one eye. Her description not only exoticized them but also shows how dress, embodiment, and visibility became coded along lines of gender, religion, and class. When viewed alongside Thomson's images, her account illuminates the broader imaginative landscape through which these women were rendered legible—or illegible—to Western observers.

Against these flattenings, the vignette that follows is voiced by the well itself. Built from hand-shaped mudbrick, fed by groundwater, surrounded by *kouzes* resting on stone, the well stands as an infrastructural witness to cross-communal rhythms of fetching, pausing, greeting, and returning home. It acknowledges that the archive cannot recover, names, kinship networks, personal histories, while refusing to substitute them with imagined speech.

The two Lefka photographs expose how the *kouza* was repeatedly mobilized as a device of meaning-making: sometimes evidence of supposed female frivolity, sometimes the accessory that completed a pastoral Hellenic fantasy, hence European, justifying British colonial presence. In both cases, the vessel was instrumentalized to stabilise narratives that were not the women's own. Missing in both cases is the embodied knowledge of balancing, bending, waiting, and walking; the choreography of wrists and backs; the sociability of pausing and exchanging news. What Thomson's captions dismiss as trivial chatter constituted, in fact, the dense sociality of communal life.

This misrecognition continues beyond the nineteenth century. Thomson's *Through Cyprus with the Camera* (1878) is not only an early photographic record but also a canonized one. He is celebrated as a pioneer in the British State Archives, as seen in the UK National Archives' 2020 article that hails him as a "Victorian pioneer of photojournalism" without acknowledging his entanglement with imperial projects (Howells

2020). Similarly, in Cyprus, cultural institutions still exhibit his photographs as nostalgic glimpses of a bygone era. As Philippou has argued, such uncritical reproduction sustains a romanticized vision of Cyprus while overlooking the colonial implications embedded in Thomson's work (Philippou 2013). Recognizing Thomson's canonization means recognizing the institutional apparatus that continues to consecrate colonial vision as heritage.

Yet, against this canonization, the everyday gestures that Thomson trivialized, endure in aspects of tradition and contemporary cultural creativity. The Cypriot traditional dance of the *kouza* still performed at school events and festivals, stylises the act of water-carrying into choreography: jars balanced on shoulders, women circling, pausing to gossip, to flirt, to laugh. What Thomson called "vulgar gossip" becomes, in the dance, collective artistry and cultural memory. The entanglements between vessel, body, and gesture are also taken up in contemporary artistic practice. In *KUZA* (2024), PASHIAS performs with his head replaced by a fragment of amphora, collapsing vessel and body into one (Fig.6). He is inspired by the very origin of the word which literally refers to the human head and illustrates the parallel associations move beyond the visual, equating the body and the amphora with the universality of carrying vessels, safekeeping and

Fig.6 - (Left) promotional photo for KUZA by PASHIAS, 2024. Fig.7 - (Right) photograph by Dimitris Venizelos at the live KUZA performance by PASHIAS at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, 2024. Images courtesy of the artist.

spilling substances, materialities, ideas, experiences and cultural values (Fig.6). His curator Dimitris Venizelos sees the part-human part-clay figure as both proof of the material continuity of collective human presence literally embedded in fingerprints of man-made clay, that remind us of our own corporeal and material existence: from the one hand we strive to satisfy the bodily need for water by containing it and, on the other, we meticulously try to imbue ourselves in handcrafted works of art which defy the passage of time. Where Thomson's camera immobilized the anonymous water-bearer into a "living statue," PASHIAS reanimates the vessel as a precarious extension of the body itself—porous, fragile, resistant to containment.

If Thomson framed women with clay pots as typological props of a fading tradition, *KUZA* insists instead on continuity: the vessel as both burden and potential, a site of identity and becoming. In some of his previous work, PAHIAS refers back to the choreography of the traditional dance and song of the *kouza*, both in *Waiting* (2023) and *Mother, send me to the water* (2023), where the strenuous activity of carrying the vessel on his shoulders is literally illustrated in a video artwork where the female body has been replaced by a male one[2] (Fig.8).

Fig.8 - Excerpt rom "Artwork Timeline Theme: Amphora and Pottery, 2017", by PASHIAS, Images courtesy of the arstist.

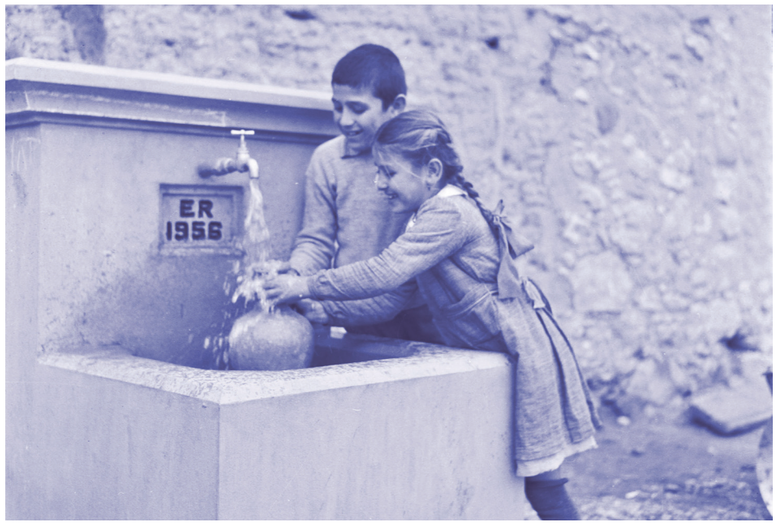

Fig.9 - A photograph of another fountain with the inscription "ER 1956", designating again year of construction and Queen Elizabeth as the benefactor of this Turkish Cypriot village in the Mesaoria plains. Source: PIO photographic archive, under the folder "Water Supply and Irrigation 1950s", 28A-0055-0002, captioned "Mora village water supply."

This gesture does not erase the longstanding history of Cypriot women embedded in the water vessel or its implied feminine character, but it rather subverts the male body's own stereotypical perception of masculine strength, only so that its fragility and fluidity is again encapsulated in an installation depicting the broken vessel and the spilled water.

The negotiated gender identity embodied in water vessels and architecture also resonate with the case of the mid-twentieth-century "gossip squares" designed by Doxiadis Associates in Iraq. As Pyla has shown, the inclusion of such squares signalled an unusual recognition: that informal sociability like chatting, pausing, exchanging news, was indispensable to community life (Pyla 2013). Yet, the very term "gossip square" soon became problematic. Doxiadis himself, a Greek male modernist, later forbade its use, unwilling to let his professional authority be associated with the feminized and Orientalized connotations of "gossip" (Pyla 2013). What began as a fleeting acknowledgement of everyday practices not unlike those around Cypriot fountains, was quickly disavowed in favour of modernist respectability.

The irony is telling. In Thomson's photographs of Cyprus, wells are described as sites of "vulgar gossip," where women's labour and sociability were dismissed as trivial. In Baghdad, decades later, Doxiadis initially elevated gossip into a spatial category, only to erase it from his vocabulary when its gendered and cultural associations threatened to undermine his authority. In both cases—the *kouza* at the well or the fountain, the gossip square in the plan—women's practices of sociability were simultaneously recognized as vital and marginalized as improper.

Across these histories, the well, the square, and the fountain all function as small public stages where sociability and labour blur into one another. By allowing the well to speak in the vignette, this section reframes the Lefka photographs not as inert ethnographic evidence but as encounters shaped by material infrastructures, gendered labour, and contested ways of looking. This reframing also prepares the ground for the next section on the fountain, where similar tensions between visibility, public life, colonial aesthetics, and everyday practice unfold under mid-twentieth-century British welfare and development projects.

THE FOUNTAIN: COLONIAL DETAIL, EVERYDAY LABOUR, AND THE AFTERLIVES OF WELFARE MODERNITY

If the *kouza* brings us close to the individual body, the fountain brings us close to the collective. The mid-twentieth-century public fountain, particularly those built under the British Colonial Development and Welfare (CDW) schemes and the early years of the Republic, is a different kind of micro-infrastructure: cast-concrete, stamped with royal initials, positioned at the threshold between state authority and everyday sociability. These fountains exemplify what this journal's call identifies as "material moments that bring potential interactions into being." Their details, a date, a cypher, a small spout, a shallow basin and doric capital-like addition to its top, tell a story of political intent, bureaucratic pragmatism, and the rhythms of daily life.

Public fountains and their architectural orchestrations have long been part of Cyprus' urban and rural fabric. As Anna Marangou shows in her work on the Pedieos River, the *fountana* or *çeşme* once structured the social life of both city and countryside (Marangou 2018). Fountains were often named after benefactors, landmarks or neighborhoods like "Tzoutzou," "Mavros," "Karydia," "Kamarouthkion," signifying the communal relationships that formed around them. Their religious significance was also marked, particularly in Muslim practice, where fountains provided ritual water and commemorated piety. This perhaps explains why, as Marangou notes, so few fountains survive today in the southern part of Nicosia: they were deliberately erased in the effort to de-Ottomanize the urban landscape (Marangou 2018).

Some infrastructures carried entire neighbourhoods in their

I stop in front of the fountain in Aglantzia. The initials GR are still inscribed, the crown of a monarch pressed into its concrete skin. Once it stood as a monument of progress—cast, dated, inaugurated, photographed. Now it is painted over in fresh grey, its tap dry, nestled between a basil in a plastic pot and a bay laurel seemingly sprouting from the cracks of the well-maintained house in the poorer side of town. No sound of flowing water, no queue of women with kouzes, no gathering in the shade, no chatter. It is part of the narrow street with no pavement, absorbed into the rhythms of the suburb which today hosts a jazz festival. And yet, someone cared enough to paint it. Someone still plants flowers beside it. The fountain no longer distributes water, but it still gathers traces of maintenance, of attachment, of memory. I wonder what's the name of her carer.

Fig.10 - A photograph of a fountain with the inscription "GR 1951" in Aglantzia, designating the year that it was constructed as well as the 'benefactor', in this case King George. Source: The author, 2022.

orbit. At Saman Bahçe in Nicosia, a hexagonal limestone water tank once stood at the centre of a small square. Local tradition held that women would clean it annually, a ritual act of maintenance that reinforced communal bonds (Marangou 2018). The neighbourhood itself, constructed by the Evkaf between 1918–1925 for low-income families, has often been described by some as Cyprus' first social housing project (Doratli and others, 2002). Its grid-like yet intimate urbanism reflected a hybrid of traditional courtyard architecture and modernist planning, and the fountain/tank at its centre, made explicit the association of water, hygiene, and vitality with benevolent governance. Later additions by Photiades and Sons in 1955, in collaboration with the colonial administration, further entangled Ottoman religious foundations, British developmentalism, and modernist aesthetics (Marangou 2018).

Yet, as Sioulas and Pyla have argued for the Omorphita housing estate (1944), these schemes cannot be understood purely as stylistic attempts at a "modern vernacular" (Sioulas and Pyla 2018). They were embedded in the politics of the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts: efforts to pacify rising nationalism, contain unionism, and display the benevolence of the colonial state. The architectural negotiation between "tradition" and "modernity" reflected in a semi-open space like the iliakos here, a fountain for domestic water supply there—mirrored broader negotiations of domesticity, modernity and political control. Water infrastructures, whether central tanks or fountains, were part of this contested terrain. Today, many of these cast-concrete fountains remain scattered across villages and towns in Cyprus. Their royal initials and stamped dates still signal their colonial origins, even when the water no longer flows (see Fig.9 and 10).

By the late 1940s and 1950s, colonial processes of progress and development culminated in the Greater Nicosia Water Supply Scheme, which rolled out cast-concrete fountains across Cypriot villages. These were striking in their austerity: small rectangular blocks stamped with the date of construction and the monogram of the sovereign, GR (Georgius Rex) or ER (Elizabeth Regina). Where Ottoman and Evkaf fountains were made from local limestone, hand carved with ornate inscriptions praising benefactors and invoking divine blessing, the colonial fountains monumentalized "just-enough" progress through imperial cyphers. They were both modest and monumental: utilitarian taps concretized as urban artefacts, anchoring sociability while projecting authority and a mediated modernity for Cypriot colonial subjects.

As in continental modernism where women (and children as also non-masculine presences) were used as props to convince of their usefulness, benevolence and modernity, the photographic representation of infrastructures relied heavily on gendered staging.[3] In one newspaper report of Governor Turnbull's visit to the Greek Cypriot village of Patriki (1951), the headline proclaimed: "This new Scheme will Aid the WOMEN WHO FETCH THE WATER" (capitals in original) (Cyprus Review 1949). A photo showed Turnbull ceremonially opening a tap, declaring, "What pleases me about your water supply is the way it helps you womenfolk." Next to him, his wife received flowers from a schoolgirl—both silent props in a tableau of benevolence. Another newspaper reported the same event under the title: "The Men Talk but the Women Fetch the Water" (The Cypriot 1949). As in Thomson's 1878 photographs, women's presence validated the infrastructure, but their voices were excluded from its narration.

In a more recent article citing the same event and a similar discussion, a counter photograph is unearthed from the archive to confirm the active involvement of Cypriot women in the construction of not just fountains, but large-scale dams (Michael 2024). On the one hand, this indeed rightfully claims space in the collective imaginary to subvert the stereotypical depiction of Cypriot women in traditional attire, carrying a *kouza* and performing domestic duties by establishing them as active members of manual labour. Yet, it still relies on a problematic framework: a perceived "male" occupation such as construction is mobilized as proof of women's modernity and progressiveness. To demonstrate that Cypriot women were "more than what we think today," we continue to fall back on the very narratives we wish to destabilise, reproducing hierarchies between domesticity and labour, "tradition" and "modernity." And by "we," I realize, I am referring to historians, artists, and myself included—those of us who are committed to feminism not only as a theoretical lens but also as a practical methodology.

The challenge, then, is not only to retrieve women's participation in infrastructures but also to rethink the very categories through which participation is measured. Why should labour be legible only when it resembles "male" occupations such as construction? Why should the carrying of water, the tending of fountains, the maintenance of tanks, or the everyday sociabilities that unfolded around them not count as infrastructures of care?

This is where ecofeminist and hydrofeminist perspectives can be particularly generative. They allow us to move beyond the binaries of domestic/technical or female/male labour and to recognize infrastructures of care, maintenance, and sociability as equally vital. Astrida Neimanis has argued that water is not a passive backdrop but a medium that binds bodies in "watery intimacies" (Neimanis 2017). Farhana Sultana shows how water infrastructures encode colonial and gendered relations of power and care, while hydrofeminist scholarship has emphasized how water mediates ecological as well as geopolitical survival (Sultana 2009, Neimanis 2017). Here, care is understood as infrastructural labour in its own right, a notion central to ecofeminist scholarship. From this perspective, the *kouza* and the fountain are not ancillary props but porous participants in social life—sweating, cooling, leaking, commemorating. Thinking with water and clay as more-than-human actors resists the finality of archival silence; even when names are lost, vessels, flows, and materials continue to speak.

Such approaches also resonate with contemporary artistic practices in Cyprus, which treat water infrastructures not as mute relics but as living participants in memory and care. Artist Kyriaki Costa has drawn attention to the afterlives of such infrastructures. In *Her Water*, she catalogued Nicosia's fountains, troughs, wells, and tanks not as nostalgic relics but as lived artefacts that shape memory and sociability (Costa 2016). By photographing them in their present condition whitewashed, dry, overgrown, or still in use, Costa highlights the quiet forms of maintenance and attachment that persist around them (Fig.11). Her later participatory project *Head & Hand – Foun[d]ain* (2021–22) extended this archive into an artistic activism, calling for fountains to be restored as accessible commons. In this sense, her work resonates with the Aglantzia fountain: both insist that infrastructures continue to matter, even in disuse, and that care itself—repainting, planting, gathering—is a form of keeping water infrastructures alive.

A contemporary example from Aglantzia, which I photographed in 2024, attests to this layered material afterlife (Fig.10). The fountain, with its "GR" cypher still visible beneath a fresh coat of grey paint, stands amidst a row of potted plants and encroaching ruderal vegetation. Once a symbol of moderate colonial progress and a node of village sociability, it now sits unceremoniously on the edge of a busy road in a prominent suburb of capital Nicosia, neither preserved as heritage nor fully abandoned. Its material presence reveals how imperial infrastructures persist in altered urban ecologies, absorbed into the rhythms of everyday suburban life. My short note when I took the photograph, is presented here as another speculative vignette, this time acknowledging my own positionality directly, as someone who has an intimate knowledge of water infrastructures as an architectural historian. The afterlives of the fountain remind us that infrastructures do not simply disappear once they cease to function. They persist as social and material artefacts, folded into new urban and suburban landscapes. Their imperial symbolism is eroded, repurposed, or overwritten by everyday acts of care.

May 11, 2015
Subject: Proposal for the maintenance of fountains and their accessibility to the public. Proposal for the placement of drinking fountains for the stray animals of Nicosia.

Dear Mr. Mayor,

Thank you for your reply to my request and for the useful information you provided concerning the bodies and persons responsible for the suggested fountains. I am delighted that you recognize the importance of my venture and are willing to contribute to future actions related to it.

In this light, I would appreciate if you could examine my proposal for the continuation of the actions for the reactivation of the fountains after the completion of 'Waterways. Its water: Taps and sources of Nicosia'. As the material elements in questions have social and cultural significance and constitute evidence of the heritage of our city, their restoration and return to the citizens would be a worthwhile endeavour. As restored monuments of Nicosia, accessible to the public and integrated in our everyday life, the fountains would invigorate the current image of our city and life within it.

This project could be carried out with the help of grants, European programs and a symbolic donation from the municipality. I am personally committed in finding ways and sources of funding in order to make their maintenance and complete restoration possible. My longstanding involvement with this issue. the publication of the list/catalogue to be created and my experience in matters of funding for such actions, can contribute to the success of such an objective.

Additionally. I would also like to request from the municipality to grant the permission for the placement of drinking fountains for stray animals within the city, especially for its numerous cats, giving them direct access to water during the summer months. I have already ordered three drinking fountains from a local manufacturer on my own expense, which will nevertheless need to be connected to the water supply by the municipality.

As a human, an artist and a sensitive citizen of Nicosia, I am inspired by and give great importance to the concept of water as a common valuable good, as a right. as a natural element which connects us with deeper existential and human needs, which can activate several values in modern life (I attach an explanation of the concept of Waterways. Its water: Taps and sources of Nicosia)

Thanking you in advance and always at your disposal for any clarification and cooperation, I remain,

Sincerely,
Kyriaki Costa

Fig.11 - Pages from the exhibition catalogue "Her Water," Kyriaki Costa, 2015, Nicosia: Point Art Centre. Image courtesy of the artist.

MEMORY IN MOTION

From the *kouza* to the fountain, this article has traced how water infrastructures in Cyprus have been framed, erased, and reimagined. Colonial archives preserved vessels and fountains as typologies while leaving the women who used them remained nameless. Their labour was instrumentalized as evidence of domestic tradition or as props for imperial progress, but rarely recognized as history in its own right.

Faced with such silences, speculative narrative becomes a necessary method: a way of listening otherwise, of allowing objects, materials, and water itself to speak. This is not a literary embellishment but a methodological stance, aligned with Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation" and with Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's (2019) call to unlearn the conditions of imperial archives. To let the *kouza*, the well or the *fountana*, themselves speak, is a way to foreground material traces and infrastructural relationships without imposing interiority on subjects whose identities remain unknown or outside one's own cultural and linguistic vantage point. It also acknowledges infrastructures as more-than-human actors, porous participants in histories of labour, empire, and care.

Contemporary artistic practices in Cyprus strengthen this approach. Kyriaki Costa's *Her/Its Water* catalogues fountains and troughs as lived archives, foregrounding maintenance, attachment, and everyday care rather than monumental authority. PASHIAS collapses vessel and body in performance, unsettling the typological stillness of Thomson's "living statues" and reanimating the vessel as a site of embodied continuity rather than ethnographic fixity. Together, their work demonstrates how infrastructures can be reactivated not only through preservation but through performance, participation, and renewed relations of care.

Seen through these lenses, the *kouza* and the *fountana* are not relics of an obsolete past but enduring sites where memory, sociability, and imagination persist. Infrastructures are never simply built or abandoned: they are sustained, neglected, repainted, planted around, and re-narrated. They gather attachments even in disuse, and they continue to mediate relations between communities, ecologies, and histories. To listen to them—and to water—is to attend to histories that the official archive renders silent but which still flow through everyday life.

By pairing material history with speculative vignettes and contemporary artistic practice, this article has proposed a way of reading the archive that neither romanticizes the past nor repeats its violences. Instead, it invites attention to the details that matter: the porous clay of a *kouza*, the chipped concrete of a fountain in Aglantzia, the gestures of carrying, pausing, gossiping, caring. These are the small but persistent movements through which water infrastructures continue to shape, and be shaped by, the lives around them.

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NOTES

1. *Romios* was the colloquial word in mainland Greece for "Greek man" during the Ottoman empire years.

2. "Mother send me to the water" is a reference to the lyrics of the traditional Greek song which usually accompanies the traditional dance featuring women holding terracotta vessels on their shoulders. It is yet another testament to the embodied and lived historical experience of carrying water in amphorae that is so deeply embedded in the everyday lives and culture of the semi-arid East-mediterranean island of Cyprus.

3. Beatriz Colomina for example, considers these popularised depictions in mass media is the real 'space' within which modernist architecture and its problematic perceptions of gender were constructed: Beatriz Colomina. 1996. *Privacy and publicity: modern architecture as mass media*. Boston: MIT Press.