



Women's History in Greece through *The Ladies' Journal* of Kallirhoe Siganou-Parren: Class, National Identity, and Reformist Activism in the Formation of Women's Associations (1887–1917)

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This paper investigates how *The Ladies' Journal* (*Efimeris ton Kyrion*), edited by Kallirhoe Siganou-Parren between 1887 and 1917, constructed a gendered historical consciousness and mobilized national history as a vehicle for women's civic inclusion in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Greece. Through a qualitative content and discourse analysis of selected articles from the journal's complete digitized archive, the study examines how Parren strategically invoked historical female figures, from classical Antiquity to the Greek War of Independence and the Byzantine era, to legitimize women's public roles within a framework of patriotic maternalism and bourgeois respectability. These representations restored women to history and actively recast historical memory as a tool for moral instruction, civic pedagogy, and reformist activism. While rooted in nationalist ideology, the journal's narratives also reflected transnational influences through Parren's engagement with international feminist networks and suffrage congresses. The article argues that this hybrid mode of popular historiography simultaneously enabled middle-class women's symbolic integration into the nation and reinforced prevailing class and gender hierarchies. Ultimately, it situates *The Ladies' Journal* as a formative site for the articulation of women's associative practices and reformist discourse, while also critically assessing its role in shaping the terms and limits of female civic identity.

Keywords: women's history in Greece, Kallirhoe Parren, *Ephimeris ton Kyrion*, feminist historiography, Greek women's associations, maternalism, Greek feminist movement

Introduction

In the late nineteenth century, the rise of the middle class and Greece's irredentist ambitions led to a redefinition of womanhood. Emphasis was placed on women's domestic and maternal responsibilities as key to nurturing virtuous citizens, while this shift, driven by the nationalistic "Great Idea" (*Megáli Idéa*) extended women's roles into the public sphere, where they became instrumental in supporting the state's mission through activities such as fundraising and

collaborating with international women's organizations.¹ Among them, Kallirhoe Siganou-Parren (1861–1940) played a catalytic role in shaping the discursive and organizational foundations of women's reformist activism.² Through *The Ladies' Journal* (*Ephimeris ton Kyrion*), the first Greek periodical edited by and for women, Parren advanced a vision of civic motherhood and gendered patriotism that sought to reconcile female emancipation with dominant national ideologies. While scholars such as Angelika Psarra and Eleni Varika have examined Parren's nationalist maternalism and her reformist approach to women's roles,³ this article extends the discussion by analyzing how women's historical narratives functioned as ideological instruments within her editorial strategy.

Rather than reasserting Parren's ideological framework as such, this study offers a systematic content and discourse analysis of *The Ladies' Journal*, with a focus on how its historical representations constructed a usable past that legitimated women's participation in public life. Drawing on the complete digitized archive of the journal (1887–1917), I examine the selection, rhetoric, and thematic organization of articles published by Parren and her collaborators on historical female figures, national heroines, intellectuals, and empresses. These representations served not only to restore women to the national narrative but also to define a specific, class-bound model of female citizenship that reinforced gender hierarchies even as it proposed incremental reforms.

By contextualizing these representations within the broader social and political transformations of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Greece, this article analyzes how *The Ladies' Journal* operated as a platform of reformist activism rooted in women's networks, educational philanthropy, and international feminist exchange. Particular attention is given to the interplay between history-writing and associational culture: how the journal's narratives about women's pasts shaped the founding ethos of institutions such as the Union for Women's Emancipation (Ένωσις υπέρ της Χειραφετήσεως των Γυναικών) (1893), the Union of Greek Women (Ένωσις των Ελληνίδων) (1896), and the Lyceum of Greek Women (Λύκειο Ελληνίδων) (1911). The goal is to reassess Parren's contribution

1 Avdela and Psarra, "Engendering 'Greekness,'" 69–79.

2 While the terms feminism and activism are used throughout this article, they are understood in their historically specific context. During the period under discussion, these concepts were not fully developed or uniformly applied. Parren herself rarely used the term feminist before the twentieth century, and her reformist vision was often framed in terms of civic motherhood, philanthropy, and moral uplift rather than explicit political rights. Therefore, the use of these terms in this article denotes emerging discourses of women's public engagement, rather than fully formed political ideologies.

3 See e.g. Varika, "La révolte des dames"; Psarra, "Few Women Have History."

to Greek women's history and illuminate the ways in which historiographical practices themselves were mobilized as instruments of activism. In this regard, the article also contributes to the broader historiography of women's movements in Europe by situating the Greek case within the transnational networks of the period. It argues that Parren's engagement with international congresses and suffrage alliances helped shape a model of activism that was both embedded in national narratives and transnationally informed. Yet, this model remained restricted by class, education, and cultural capital, raising critical questions about the inclusivity of early women's organizations and the boundaries of what we define as activism.

Historical and Ideological Background

In Greece at the turn of the twentieth century, the terms "feminism" and "emancipation" carried specific meanings. "Feminism" had not yet been firmly associated with women's rights and was often used in male philogynic discourse, while "emancipation" referred to women's demands for economic independence through work and, to a lesser extent, political rights.⁴ Parren articulated a distinctly Greek version of emancipation, focusing not on women's political enfranchisement but on their empowerment through access to education and paid employment.⁵

The development of gender consciousness and the literary endeavors of women in nineteenth-century Greece constituted essential channels for the expression of aspirations concerning women's emancipation and challenges to patriarchal structures, especially among educated women in the educational sector, where their writings confronted the intricacies of social relations and offered a means to assert an independent female identity.⁶ Educated middle-class women began to articulate a shared gender identity and common interests, leading to the emergence of feminist consciousness.⁷ Nationalist discourse linked gender and nation, positioning women as essential to the civilizing mission of Hellenism, and women's education became critical in forming future citizens

4 See Giannati, "Εφημερίδες των Κυριών (1887–1917): Αναπαραστάσεις και Επαναπροσδιορισμοί," 35, citing Psarra, "Το μυθιστόρημα της χειραφέτησης ή η 'συνετή' ουτοπία της Καλλιγρόης Παρρέν," and eadem, "Μητέρα ή πολίτις."

5 Ibid.

6 Varika, "Μια δημοσιογραφία στην υπηρεσία της γυναικείας φυλής," 6–7.

7 Varika, "La révolte des dames."

and teaching Hellenic virtues to “unredeemed” territories.⁸ To understand this linkage, it is essential to recognize a concurrent shift in the dominant educational and scientific discourses: women were no longer viewed solely through the lens of theological inferiority but rather as naturally distinct but equal to men, endowed with allegedly differentiated capabilities suited to specific social functions.

This emerging ideology, described by Varika and others as “equality in difference,” became a cornerstone of nationalist thinking.⁹ The doctrine of “equality in difference” framed women as biologically and emotionally distinct from men, confining them to the private sphere while assigning them a crucial yet subordinate role in nurturing male citizens to serve the nationalist aims of the Greek irredentist vision.¹⁰ Parren’s advocacy for women’s rights through *The Ladies’ Journal* remained embedded in this essentialist discourse, emphasizing education, work, and moral upliftment within strictly defined maternal and patriotic boundaries. Her vision did not challenge prevailing gender hierarchies but sought rather to reconfigure women’s roles to align more closely with the perceived needs of the nation.

In the late nineteenth century, although it seemed unimaginable that women’s history would become a serious scholarly pursuit in academic circles, first-wave feminists like Jenny P. d’Héricourt, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton asserted women’s claims to rights by writing historical accounts about women. Their work inspired Parren, who regularly attended international women’s congresses. Influenced by these pioneers, she ambitiously sought to write the “History of Woman from the Beginning of the World to Today” in 1889, a project that aimed to span various global civilizations and reflect on women’s historical roles.¹¹ Parren endeavored to integrate Greek women into the national historical narrative. To establish a feminist discourse in Greece, Parren and her collaborators engaged in a critical reexamination of history, particularly the portrayal of women in Greek myths and historical narratives.¹² They challenged the male-dominated construction of these stories, emphasizing the historical presence of strong female figures as both a source of pride for women and a vital tool for legitimizing Greek feminism within the national context.¹³

8 Avdela and Psarra, “Engendering ‘Greekness,’” 70.

9 Varika, “La révolte des dames.”

10 Papadogiannis, “Gender in modern Greek historiography,” 81.

11 Des Jardins, “Women’s and Gender History,” 138.

12 Poulos, *Arms and the Woman*, 19–48.

13 Ibid.

First-wave Greek feminists, while emphasizing their “Greekness” as a way of asserting their belonging within a distinct national community and positioning themselves as part of Greek history, maintained connections with Western feminism.¹⁴ Their involvement in national crises, especially during the 1897 Greek-Turkish war, was framed within an essentialist discourse linking women's political participation to their alleged bio-social roles, particularly motherhood, which was redefined as a patriotic duty that justified the gradual easing of their social exclusion.¹⁵ Psarra argues that Parren's work represented a pioneering attempt to construct a coherent women's history in Greece, utilizing the legitimizing discourse of history to empower the modern women's movement by framing Greek women as distinct historical agents capable of claiming their own collective identity and rights.¹⁶

By emphasizing women's roles and contributions, the journal sought to advance a discourse on women's rights¹⁷ and also to reframe dominant conceptions of national identity to include female experiences and perspectives. This intervention challenged prevailing historical narratives, which had long marginalized women's contributions. Parren strategically employed historical narratives to legitimize women's demands for social inclusion, presenting them as an integral part of the nation's civilizational and patriotic struggles. More specifically, she used history to legitimize the women's movement by positioning women as distinct historical agents who made their own contributions to civilization and national struggles, allowing them to demand inclusion in the national narrative and challenge traditional views of women's immobility, thereby empowering them to fight for their rights from a stronger position.¹⁸

However, as Psarra noted, this discourse primarily addressed women of Parren's own bourgeois class, or in other words educated, urban women whose social standing and educational capital enabled them to participate in the limited public sphere envisioned by the nationalist and reformist discourses of the era.¹⁹ Her historical representations thus did not seek to dismantle class or gender hierarchies but rather to insert a select group of women into the

14 Psarra, “A Gift from the New World,” 151–52.

15 Ibid.

16 Psarra, “Few Women Have History.”

17 For more on feminist discourse and national identity in Greece during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see Lalagianni, “Conscience Féministe et Identité Nationale”; Lalagianni, “Les Origines du Discours Féministe en Grèce”; Anastasopoulou, “Feminist Discourse and Literary Representation.”

18 Psarra, “A Gift from the New World,” 151.

19 Psarra, “Μητέρα ή πολίτις;”

national narrative by appealing to maternalist and patriotic ideals.²⁰ In this way, women were “empowered” to act from within existing structures rather than radically to transform them. Even in her later interventions, such as during the First National Women’s Conference of 1921, Parren’s appeals to women’s civic roles remained couched in essentialist and conservative terms. Moreover, her alignment with institutions such as the Lyceum of Greek Women in the interwar period further reinforced a maternalist vision of women’s contributions to the nation, one rooted in idealized motherhood and middle-class domestic virtues rather than political or social radicalism. Her approach, though pioneering in form, ultimately reinscribed gender and class hierarchies under the guise of patriotic uplift. This ideological moderation should be understood in relation to broader political shifts in Greece. The Balkan Wars (1912–1913), the National Schism (1915–1917), and the Asia Minor Catastrophe (1922) fundamentally transformed the national imaginary and created new tensions around the role of women in the civic sphere. While Parren’s 1880s–1890s activism emphasized reformist engagement rooted in education and philanthropy, by the 1920s, her alignment with the monarchy and her efforts to distance herself and her ideas from liberal and socialist feminist voices signaled a retreat into more conservative positions that prioritized cultural nationalism over political rights. Women’s rights advocates at the turn of the century, viewing political equality as a premature demand, argued that the granting of political rights should follow the securing of civil and social rights and thus refrained from explicitly articulating a claim for full political emancipation.²¹

To better situate Parren’s historical interventions within the broader trajectory of gender historiography in Greece, it is instructive briefly to consider the development of the field itself. In Greece, the study of “Women’s History” initially emerged in close connection with the post-1974 movement for women’s rights, which sought to reconstruct the collective memory of women’s struggles by tracing historical continuities of dissent and exploring the changing forms of gendered oppression within bourgeois society, particularly in the realms of family, education, labor, and politics.²² While early scholarship often emphasized these themes through the lens of ideological discourse and lived social realities,²³ subsequent decades witnessed a significant expansion of the field. The

20 Ibid.

21 Samiou, “Τα πολιτικά δικαιώματα των Ελληνίδων,” 167.

22 Avdela, “Η ιστορία των γυναικών στην Ελλάδα,” 171–73.

23 Ibid.

establishment of undergraduate and postgraduate programs focused on gender history in Greek universities has facilitated the diffusion of new methodological and theoretical approaches.²⁴ A key milestone in this evolution was the founding in 2007 of the *Historians for Research in the History of Women and Gender*, the Greek Committee of the International Federation for Research in Women's History (IFRWH).²⁵ This evolving scholarly context has reshaped the ways in which figures like Parren are interpreted, not only as national reformers but also as early agents in the construction of gendered historical consciousness.

Kallirhoe Siganou Parren and 'The Ladies' Journal

Born in Crete in 1861 and later acquiring a strong educational background, Parren served as the Director of girls' schools in Adrianople and Odessa before returning to Athens, where she married Ioannis Parren, a journalist and the founder of the Athens News Agency. This marriage immersed her in the social, political, and literary dynamics of her era, profoundly shaping her active involvement in journalism.²⁶

The inaugural issue of this magazine was released in Athens on March 8, 1887, priced at ten cents of the drachma and with an annual subscription fee of five drachmas for domestic readers. Over time, the journal cultivated a consistent group of approximately 18 female contributors, predominantly educators, and achieved a significant readership. Parren managed to establish a successful network of international collaboration and recognition among women, compensating for the lack of domestic acknowledgment of Greek feminists. With contributions by various intellectuals, feminists, and Greek women from the Diaspora, particularly from the United States and France, the paper gained prestige and fostered an important transnational exchange within the feminist movement.²⁷

The journal enjoyed extensive geographical distribution, drawing female subscribers from across the independent Greek state as well as from areas within the Ottoman Empire, the Balkans, and the Aegean islands.²⁸ According to Varika,

24 Livaditi, "Initiatives on Gender History in Greece."

25 Ibid.

26 Giannati, "Εφημερίς των Κυριών (1887–1917): Αναπαράστασεις και Επαναπροσδιορισμοί," 30–31; Varika, "Μια δημοσιογραφία στην υπηρεσία της γυναικείας φυλής," 8.

27 Poulos, *Arms and the Woman*, 19–48.

28 Giannati, "Εφημερίς των Κυριών (1887–1917): Αναπαράστασεις και Επαναπροσδιορισμοί," 32.

statistics from the Ministry of Interior reveal that within the first six months of 1892, *The Ladies' Journal* ranked second in circulation among weekly publications, with 5,000 copies.²⁹ The journal included several unsigned articles authored by Parren.³⁰ For its first two decades, it was issued weekly, transitioning to a biweekly format after 1908, and ultimately going out of circulation in November 1917, after a total of 1,106 issues had gone to press.

As noted by Varika, *The Ladies' Journal* played a pivotal role in shaping Greek feminist consciousness and advancing the cause of women's emancipation.³¹ It fostered collective awareness of gender equality issues and disseminated ideas in support of women's rights, laying the foundations for the feminist movement in Greece. However, it carefully avoided demands for political rights, advocating a “moderate” form of emancipation that respected biological and social differences and emphasized women's roles in the national and familial spheres, with Parren calling for reforms in women's societal contributions based on a notion of patriotic motherhood.³²

Parren's contributions to the formation and expansion of women's associations in Greece were pioneering and reflect the multifaceted approach she adopted in advancing women's rights. In 1889, she established the first “Sunday School” (Σχολή της Κυριακής, απόρων γυναικών και κορασίδων) to address illiteracy among impoverished girls, followed by the founding of the Asylum of Saint Catherine (Άσυλο της Αγίας Αικατερίνης) in 1892, which provided shelter for young women migrating to Athens for work, and the Asylum for the Incurable in 1896.³³ After attending international feminist congresses in Chicago (1893) and Paris (1896), she founded the Union for Women's Emancipation (Ένωση υπέρ της Χειραφετήσεως των Γυναικών) and later the Union of Greek Women (Ένωση των Ελληνίδων), which played a critical role during the Greco-Turkish War.³⁴ In 1911, she established the Lyceum of Greek Women (Λύκειο Ελληνίδων).³⁵

Over the years, however, her engagement with the women's question became more aligned with conservative and nationalist frameworks, reflecting a gradual

29 Varika, *Η εξέγερση των Κοριών*, 279–88.

30 For more on Kallirhoe Parren's life and work see Psarra and Fournaraki “Callirhoe Parren”; Anastasopoulou, *Η συνετή απόστολος της γυναικείας χειραφεσίας*.

31 Ibid.

32 Avdela, “Between Duties and Rights,” 122–23.

33 Giannati, “Εφημερίς των Κυριών (1887–1917): Αναπαραστάσεις και Επαναπροσδιορισμοί,” 39–42.

34 Ibid.

35 Avdela, *Το Λύκειο των Ελληνίδων: 100 χρόνια*.

moderation of her earlier positions.³⁶ During World War I, Parren's anti-war stance, fueled by the unprecedented violence and her royalist sympathies, led her to align with Queen Sophia's pacifist efforts and reject the liberal Venizelist party.³⁷ Parren's support for the monarchy during the National Schism and her criticism of the war effort led to her exile in 1917.³⁸ This development, however, stemmed more from her political allegiances than from the impact of her activities, and it should not be conflated with her broader social influence or with the reception of her ideas among different segments of Greek society. Nevertheless, her prolonged absence from public life had a notable impact on the continuity of *The Ladies' Journal*, which was closely tied to her efforts as editor and her personal networks. The journal eventually ceased publication.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative methodological framework to analyze the ways in which *The Ladies' Journal* constructed and deployed narratives of women's history as tools for ideological and reformist activism. The research centers on articles authored or curated by Kallirhoe Siganou-Parren between 1887 and 1917, focusing specifically on narrative depictions of historical women, national heroines, empresses, and intellectuals. The study does not treat these depictions as objective historical reconstructions but rather as discursive interventions shaped by the ideological imperatives of gender, class, and nationalism in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Greece. The analysis is grounded in three interrelated methods: qualitative content analysis, thematic analysis, and discourse analysis. Content analysis enables a systematic examination of recurring subjects and figures within the corpus of *The Ladies' Journal*, identifying the frequency, selection, and narrative positioning of historical female protagonists. Thematic analysis is used to trace broader ideological patterns, such as civic maternalism, moral exemplarity, and patriotic motherhood that structure the journal's historical narratives. Articles were also coded for historical period (ancient, Byzantine, modern), figure type (war heroine, intellectual, empress, philanthropist), and narrative function (commemoration, exhortation, comparison with contemporary women). Discourse analysis complements these approaches by focusing on the rhetorical strategies and linguistic framing through

36 Psarra, "Μητέρα ή πολιτίς."

37 Poulos, *Arms and the Woman*, 19–48.

38 Ibid.

which Parren and her contributors shaped meaning, legitimacy, and audience reception. This combination of methods facilitates an interpretive reading of the journal's historiographical project as both a reflection of contemporary reformist thought and an instrument of cultural politics. The empirical base of the study is the complete digitized archive of *The Ladies' Journal*, which is held in Lekythos, the Institutional Repository of the University of Cyprus. The journal is housed within the digital collection "Greek Press and Diaries of the 19th and 20th Century," compiled and digitized by the Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive. This corpus provides a continuous and comprehensive source of primary material over the journal's 30-year run, allowing for a longitudinal analysis of shifts in tone, content, and emphasis. The study also engages with Parren's wider activist work in women's associations as a means of contextualizing her editorial strategy. In this regard, the analysis traces how historical narratives in the journal were directly connected to the legitimization and mobilization of associative practices. The approach taken here is thus not only historical and textual but also socio-political, attentive to the intersections between editorial production, activist discourse, and national ideology. While Parren did not write as a professional historian, her work can be read as a form of popular historiography, characterized by a moralizing tone, selective biographies, and national romanticism. Rather than dismissing this work as non-scholarly, the article situates it as a gendered and classed mode of historical production, one that sought to insert women, particularly middle-class, educated women, into the symbolic fabric of the nation.

Women's Historical Representations and the Construction of Female Civic Identity

From its inception in 1887, *The Ladies' Journal* consistently featured articles, biographical sketches, and essays on prominent female figures drawn from Greek Antiquity, the Byzantine period, and the modern era. These portrayals were not only commemorative but also served a broader ideological function: to establish a civic genealogy of exemplary women whose lives could inspire contemporary readers and validate women's participation in public life. Drawing on both official historical sources and oral traditions, Parren articulated a historical continuum in which women were presented as agents of national service, moral fortitude, and intellectual capacity. Through this lens, the journal contributed to the construction of female civic identity by framing women's

historical contributions as foundational to the moral and cultural development of the Greek nation.

Parren sought to integrate Greek women into the narrative of the nation's history by highlighting the stories of significant historical female figures in the journal, employing the legitimizing discourse of history to foreground modern women's claims and rights.³⁹ Her portrayals emphasized traits such as patriotism, self-sacrifice, and moral leadership, aligning with contemporary ideals of "patriotic motherhood." This didactic use of history, shaped by the conventions of popular historical writing, provided a sense of historical continuity for women's claims to civic recognition. Importantly, her approach did not seek to dismantle existing gender norms but to reframe them. Parren asserted that traditional maternal and educational roles had intrinsic civic value and were indispensable for national regeneration. This position allowed her to advocate for women's inclusion in civic and political life while maintaining alignment with dominant nationalist narratives.

A recurrent theme in her historical writing was the valorization of female figures from the Greek War of Independence,⁴⁰ particularly the Souliot women.⁴¹ These women, who had defended their homeland against Ottoman forces in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, became a focal point in *The Ladies' Journal*. In an article from March 27, 1888, Parren commemorated their courage and sacrifice, portraying them as moral exemplars for modern Greek mothers.⁴² By invoking the image of women such as Moscho Tzavella⁴³ and Despo Botsi,⁴⁴ who were said to have resisted Ottoman forces heroically and even to have embraced martyrdom to avoid dishonor, Parren constructed a national-historical archetype rooted in maternal virtue and patriotic sacrifice. These figures were not framed as exceptional anomalies but as proof that women had long fulfilled vital roles in moments of national crisis. Haido, another such figure, was praised not only for her bravery and skill in arms but also for the tenderness and care she showed for wounded fighters, reinforcing the dual image of the woman as both warrior and nurturer.⁴⁵

39 Psarra, "Ο χορός του Ζαλόγγου"; Psarra, "Few Women Have History."

40 Parren, "Άγνωστοι Ηρωίδες του 21: Σταυριάνα, Μοδένα και Μεσολογγίτιδες"; Parren, "Λασκαρίνα Μπουμπουλίνα"; Parren, "Μαργιώρα Ν. Μαυρογένους Α'"; Parren, "Μαργιώρα Ν. Μαυρογένους Β'."

41 Parren, "Αι Σουλιώτιδες εις το Κιούγι."

42 Parren, "Η Εικοστή Πέμπτη Μαρτίου – Αι Σουλιώτιδες γυναίκες."

43 Parren, "Μόσχω Τζαβέλλα."; Parren, "Η Εικοστή Πέμπτη Μαρτίου – Αι Σουλιώτιδες γυναίκες."

44 Parren, "Δέσπω Μπότση."

45 Parren, "Η Χάιδω."

As Giannati has noted, Parren's representation of such figures constructed a soteriological vision of the female hero. The heroic woman was depicted not merely a combatant but also as a "rear guard of the army" safeguarding moral continuity and collective identity.⁴⁶ Parren's disappointment at the omission of female fighters from official historiography was explicit. "Those who wrote the history of the new Greece," she noted, "mention scattered and carelessly some of the names of the heroines of the Greek War of Independence."⁴⁷ Through her articles, she worked to correct this omission.

The didactic purpose of these representations was further underscored by Parren's frequent critiques of contemporary Greek women for failing to live up to these historical ideals. In the wake of the 1897 Greco-Turkish War, she lamented the perceived apathy of modern women, contrasting their disengagement with the fortitude of their predecessors.⁴⁸ This rhetorical strategy functioned as both a call to action and a form of moral instruction. It encouraged readers to reclaim their civic responsibilities by emulating the patriotic virtues of historical heroines.

Beyond revolutionary heroines, *The Ladies' Journal* also showcased female intellectuals and philanthropists. A notable example was the publication of the *Album of Distinguished Greek Women* (Λεύκωμα Εξόχων Ελληνίδων) in Athens in 1893 in Greek. This was launched by a transnational network of Greek women from the diaspora, primarily from Romania and Russia, who financed the project collectively.⁴⁹ Although the exact editorial board remains unclear, the album was widely circulated. It commemorated and promoted the contributions of prominent Greek women in the fields of education, charity, and national service. It marked a shift toward more sustained biographical engagement. Parren endorsed the album enthusiastically, integrating it into the journal's content and encouraging contributions from readers. She described it as a significant "trophy of honor" and a unifying gesture among Greek women across borders.⁵⁰ Thus, the biographical project became a participatory venture that sought to democratize access to historical memory and expand the pantheon of national heroines.

46 Giannati, "Εφημερίς των Κυριών (1887–1917): Όψεις και Διαπραγματεύσεις της Γυναικείας Ταυτότητας," 151–52.

47 Parren, "Η Εικοστή Πέμπτη Μαρτίου – Αι Σουλιώτιδες γυναίκες."

48 Parren, "Αι Ηρωίδες Μητέρες."

49 Parren, "Λεύκωμα Εξόχων Ελληνίδων."

50 Ibid.

The more systematic publication of women's biographies in *The Ladies' Journal* commenced in the same period, driven in large part by contributors such as Sotiria Alimperi, a Greek educator who began her career in the Ottoman Empire.⁵¹ These biographies prominently featured women who emerged from families of fighters in the Greek War of Independence or from distinguished intellectual and political lineages. They highlighted their significant contributions to social and charitable efforts, which were central to the progress of Greek society. Each portrayal highlighted these women's moral integrity and intellectual clarity and also their unwavering patriotic spirit, a recurring theme that aligned with the broader ideology of patriotic motherhood, which sought to legitimize women's civic participation by framing their contributions in terms of national service.⁵² For example, the biographies of Kyriakoula Kriezi and Maria Petrettini, published in *The Ladies' Journal* by Sotiria Alimperi, emphasized their noble lineage, charitable work, and educational efforts, casting them as maternal figures whose public engagement strengthened the moral fabric of the Greek nation.⁵³ Kyriakoula Kriezi (abt. 1805–1876), the granddaughter of Admiral Antonios Kriezis (a hero of the Greek War of Independence and later Prime Minister), was portrayed as a woman who had inherited the patriotic virtues of her family, dedicating herself to philanthropic initiatives and the moral education of young girls. Similarly, Maria Petrettini (abt. 1774–1851), a Greek-Venetian aristocrat, was known for her involvement in women's education and benevolent institutions in Athens, where she advocated for the intellectual development of women within a framework of Christian and national values. Both figures were presented not only as exemplars of female virtue but as embodiments of the ideal of patriotic motherhood, serving the nation through moral leadership and socially sanctioned public roles.

The emphasis on biographical recovery extended to female figures from Antiquity and Byzantium, often through a romantic-nationalist lens. Sappho

51 For more on Sotiria Alimperi, see Kanner, *Έμφυλες κοινωνικές διεκδικήσεις από την Οθωμανική Αυτοκρατορία στην Ελλάδα και στην Τουρκία*.

52 Giannati, “Εφημερίδες των Κυριών (1887–1917): Όψεις και Διαπραγματεύσεις της Γυναικείας Ταυτότητας,” 153. E.g. see Alimperi, “Φωτεινή Μαυρομιχάλη Α’”; Αλιμπέρτη, “Φωτεινή Μαυρομιχάλη Β’”; Alimperi, “Κυριακούλα Α. Κριεζή Α’”; Alimperi, “Κυριακούλα Α. Κριεζή Β’”; Alimperi, “Μαργαρίτα Αλβάνα Μηριάτη”; Alimperi, “Μαρία Πετρετίνη”; Alexandridou, “Μαρία Γ. Υψηλάντου Α’”; Alexandridou, “Μαρία Γ. Υψηλάντου Β’”; Parren, “Ελένη Βάσσου”; Parren, “Φωτεινή Γενναίου Κολοκοτρώνη”; Parren, “Καλλιόπη Παπαλεξοπούλου.”

53 Alimperi, “Κυριακούλα Α. Κριεζή Α’”; Alimperi, “Μαρία Πετρετίνη”; Alimperi, “Κυριακούλα Α. Κριεζή Β’.”

was portrayed not only as “the greatest lyrical poetess” but also as a symbol of creative and emotional intelligence.⁵⁴ Parren emphasized Sappho’s originality and poetic genius as a means of strengthening her argument that women had historically contributed to intellectual life. Through her emphasis on Sappho’s “simplicity and grace,” alongside the “strong expression of passion,” Parren constructed a narrative that acknowledged women’s emotional and intellectual contributions, reinforcing the idea that women have always played pivotal roles in the cultural and social fabric of society.⁵⁵ The article ends with the following conclusion: “The woman is equal to the man. She has no need to imitate him, because she has the same gift of originality, invention, discovery. Entering the public sphere, she will not always follow the man, but she will precede him. She will even discover new ways of salvation, which he does not even suspect.”⁵⁶ This passage reflects Parren’s vision of women not merely as participants in public life but as agents of moral and intellectual renewal, a notion closely tied to the idea of women as a “civilizing force,” a theme extensively discussed by Psarra in her analysis of gendered national discourse and maternalist feminism in modern Greece.⁵⁷

Aspasia, likewise, was reframed as a political and intellectual force, “the first minister of the world,” whose influence on Pericles and Athens demonstrated the capacity of women for civic leadership.⁵⁸ In another passage, Parren refuted the charge against Aspasia of being a *hetaira*, attributing it to political hostility and misogyny, and celebrated her as a visionary who helped raise Athens to cultural preeminence.⁵⁹

Parren further explored the contributions of women from the Byzantine world, with particular attention to Empresses Irene, Theodora, Athinais, and Poulcheria.⁶⁰ She presented these women as moral and political leaders who shaped religious life, governed justly, and exemplified the compatibility of

54 Parren, “Σαπρώ η Λεσβία”; Parren, “Και πάλιν η Σαπρώ”; Mavrogordatou, “Σαπρώ.”

55 Parren, “Και πάλιν η Σαπφώ.”

56 Ibid.

57 Psarra, “Μητέρα ή πολίτις.”

58 Parren, "Η Ασπασία"; Ilioroulou, "Ασπασία."

59 Parren, “Η Ασπασία.”

60 Parren, “Αι αυτοκρατεῖραι του Βυζαντίου: Η Ειρῆνη”; Parren, “Αι αυτοκρατεῖραι του Βυζαντίου: Η Θεοδώρα: Α”; Parren, “Αι αυτοκρατεῖραι του Βυζαντίου: Η Θεοδώρα: Β”; Parren, “Αι αυτοκρατεῖραι του Βυζαντίου: Η Θεοδώρα: Γ”; Parren, “Αι αυτοκρατεῖραι του Βυζαντίου: Γ”; Parren, “Αι αυτοκρατεῖραι του Βυζαντίου: Αθηναῖς και Πουλχερία”; Parren, “Αι αυτοκρατεῖραι του Βυζαντίου: Α”; Parren, “Αι αρχόντισσαι του Βυζαντίου.”

female virtue and authority. Through her writings, Parren emphasized their administrative acumen and moral strength, using them to counter the dominant perception of women's historical passivity. These portrayals extended the journal's civic pedagogy by asserting a *longue durée* of female leadership in the Greek historical imagination.

Eleni Georgiadou, another contributor, also examined the emancipatory roles of women in religious life, particularly abbesses and nuns who wielded significant authority within their communities.⁶¹ Georgiadou's articles contrasted the relative freedom of women in monastic contexts with the restrictions imposed on married women, offering an implicit critique of contemporary gender norms.

At times, Parren's portrayals adopted a mythologizing tone, particularly in her treatment of the Souliot women and the legend of the Dance of Zalongo. While she was aware of the limitations of historical documentation, she deliberately used folk memory and national myth as tools for civic instruction. Her invocation of women as "Amazons" or "guardians of the homeland" focused less on historical precision and more on symbolic resonance. In crafting these narratives, she created a form of "usable past" that linked the moral and emotional capacities of women to the health and progress of the nation.

Throughout these narrative depictions, Parren advanced a gendered civic pedagogy rooted in patriotic maternalism. Rather than advocating for abstract political equality, she argued for women's public inclusion on the basis of their historical and moral contributions. Her historical writings functioned as a means of cultivating civic identity, transmitting national values, and legitimizing women's social action. These efforts were not framed in opposition to national ideology but in strategic alignment with it, allowing for a gradual expansion of women's public roles within a culturally acceptable framework.

This section thus demonstrates how Parren's historical narratives in *The Ladies' Journal* functioned not only as acts of memory restoration but also as ideological interventions. By constructing a coherent lineage of female virtue, sacrifice, and public engagement, she positioned women as rightful participants in the moral and civic life of the nation. These representations laid the groundwork for broader reformist efforts and helped shape the collective identity of Greek women as agents of social and national renewal.

61 Georgiadou, "Η χειραφέτησις των γυναικῶν κατὰ τον μεσσίωνα."

History as Instrument: Sources, Narratives, and Ideological Uses in Parren's Writings

Kallirhoe Parren's representations of historical female figures in *The Ladies' Journal*, notably beginning with the fourth issue (March 29, 1887), which featured a biographical tribute to Laskarina Bouboulina,⁶² played a formative role in shaping early women's emancipation discourse in Greece by using national history as a means of legitimizing women's social participation. These articles commemorated individual women but also actively sought to reinscribe them into the collective memory of the Greek nation. Parren's editorial emphasis on patriotic sacrifice, moral virtue, and civic engagement, as seen in her later portrayals of Greek heroines, established a framework of historical continuity that connected modern women's demands to a national legacy of female courage and contribution. As Psarra and Varika have noted, Parren's strategic use of biographical recovery was foundational to the articulation of a Greek women's history that challenged the invisibility of women within dominant historiography while remaining aligned with nationalist ideals.⁶³

While the primary aim of *The Ladies' Journal* was to improve women's social position by advocating for their right to education and work, especially for unmarried women or those without male protection, and by affirming their importance as mothers of the nation, Parren also used the platform to promote a broader cultural agenda. In an 1892 article, she described the journal's ambition to engage with historical narratives by "searching through entire libraries" to uncover evidence of women's contributions to national history, which had often been neglected in favor of male achievements.⁶⁴ This editorial mission was not confined to passive recovery but constituted an active intervention in historiographical production, designed to reframe history itself as a space accessible to women's voices. Through this strategy, she encouraged contemporary Greek women to recognize distinguished female figures of the past as role models, thereby reinforcing their civic identity and moral legitimacy within the nation's evolving public sphere.

However, Parren's historical methodology deserves a closer examination if we seek to determine the extent to which her portrayals were based on rigorous scholarship and grounded in primary sources or leaned more toward anecdotal

62 Parren, "Λασκαρίνα Μπουμπουλίνα."

63 Psarra, "Few Women Have History"; Varika, *Η Εξέγερση των Κοριτών*.

64 Parren, "Εχτον Έτος."

retellings shaped by popular narratives. Her editorial strategy combined the authority of historical writing with the accessibility of journalistic storytelling, thus constructing a hybrid mode of popular historiography. Parren's treatment of history in her writings exemplifies the intersection of the national and woman questions, using maternalist rhetoric to highlight women's role in the nation.⁶⁵ She presents women as central to the preservation of historical continuity, emphasizing their duty as wives, mothers, and daughters to transmit Greek language, values, and traditions to future generations. This formulation links the civilizing mission of women with the nation's progress, all framed within a patriotic, nationalist discourse.

Parren advocated for women's inclusion in politics. She emphasized that the nation mirrors the family, thereby encouraged women to move from the private to the public sphere. She also urged women to engage with history, suggesting that every household should have historical books on its shelves to nurture in the women of the house a sense of civic responsibility and engagement in public life.⁶⁶ In this framework, the historical education of women was not just beneficial, but necessary for the wellbeing of the national polity. Parren viewed history as the most suitable reading material for women, considering it an essential tool for educating and empowering the female gender.⁶⁷ She emphasized that history, particularly the history of women, was a gift for women of all ages, accessible to women of any financial means, and essential if women sought to develop intellectual and moral strength.⁶⁸

Parren used both traditional historical sources, such as official histories and archival biographies, and popular narratives, including folk songs, oral traditions, and mythologized accounts, to construct a lineage of exemplary female figures whose lives could inspire and legitimize public participation among women of her time. For instance, in her portrayals of Souliot heroines, she combined historical facts with elements drawn from popular memory and patriotic lore to emphasize their bravery, maternal sacrifice, and civic virtue. Similarly, her reimagining of Aspasia and Sappho drew on both classical references and cultural myth to present them as paragons of intellectual and moral excellence, whose legacies affirmed the capacity of women to contribute meaningfully to national culture and civic life. Through these composite narratives, Parren reframed women's

65 Coavoux, "Women authors and the writing of history in nineteenth-century Greece," 226–27.

66 Ibid.

67 Parren. "Τὶ ἀναγιγνώσκουμεν αἱ Ἑλληνίδες."

68 Ibid.

historical roles not as marginal or incidental, but as central to the ethical and cultural development of the Greek nation.

Parren was well aware of the importance of grounding her narrative depictions of historical women in credible sources to lend legitimacy to her feminist arguments. She often referenced established historical works and archives to provide factual details about the women she praised. When writing about figures from the Greek War of Independence, Parren based her narratives on widely recognized historical records but also critically noted the gaps and omissions that left women's contributions underrepresented. She drew on traditional historical texts, such as biographies and revolutionary archives, and she supplemented them with oral traditions, folk poetry, and collective memory. In doing so, she exposed the limitations of male-dominated historiography and asserted alternative forms of historical evidence. For instance, her articles on the Souliot heroines, such as Moscho Tzavella and Despo Botsi, were based on a combination of archival and oral material, songs, ballads, and local legends, highlighting the bravery and patriotism of these women even in the absence of institutional documentation.⁶⁹

Parren also romanticized certain aspects of these women's lives, casting them as symbols of patriotism and self-sacrifice. This romanticization can be seen, for example, in her vivid account of Moscho urging women to fight alongside men. Parren uses the account to attribute military leadership and tactical initiative to female figures.⁷⁰ These portrayals framed historical women as idealized figures of courage, often linked to notions of maternal sacrifice and national duty. This rhetorical strategy, while powerful in mobilizing public sentiment, risked flattening historical complexity in favor of archetypal heroism.

Parren's articles on Despo Botsi are especially illustrative of this approach.⁷¹ Marked by dramatic language and moral exemplarity, Despo is portrayed setting fire to a tower to avoid surrender, choosing death for herself and her daughters over dishonor. While this event is grounded in collective memory, Parren's account elevated it to a parable of moral superiority. Her narrative strategy thus reflected a dual aim: to restore women to history and to construct history as a civic lesson for contemporary readers. This tendency must be understood within the broader context of nineteenth-century Greek historiography, which

69 Parren, "Μόσχω Τζαβέλλα"; Parren, "Δέσπω Μπότση."

70 Ibid. Parren, "Η Χάιδω"; Parren, "Αι Ηρωίδες Μητέρες"; Parren, "Αι Σουλιώτιδες εις το Κιούργι"; Parren, "Η Εικοστή Πέμπτη Μαρτίου – Αι Σουλιώτιδες γυναίκες."

71 Parren, "Δέσπω Μπότση."

was closely tied to the ideological imperatives of nation-building and historical continuity.⁷²

One of the most distinctive features of Parren's historical methodology was her use of mythologized accounts to support her feminist narrative. Her portrayal of the Souliot women, for example, often elevated them to near-mythical status, comparing them to the Amazons. In several articles, Parren referred to the Souliot women as Amazons, emphasizing their martial valor and willingness to die for freedom.⁷³ These classical references served not only to ennoble the acts of these women but also to legitimize women's civic aspirations by grounding them in timeless archetypes.

In her 1888 commemorative article on the Souliot women, Parren explicitly criticized male historians for marginalizing women's role in the national narrative: "Those who wrote the history of modern Greece mention the heroines of 1821 only in passing, as if in a footnote, while entire volumes could be filled with the deeds of those immortal women's patriotism and bravery."⁷⁴ Parren contrasted this omission with her own aim of documenting women's active agency, portraying them not as passive victims but as conscious patriots. Her historical women were depicted as both nurturing and militant, guardians of the homeland and moral educators of the next generation.

She further celebrated scenes of female heroism, such as Moscho distributing cartridges "like an experienced general"⁷⁵ or Despo choosing martyrdom over enslavement.⁷⁶ These portrayals culminated in moral appeals to her readers: "Let modern Greek mothers remember, at least on this sacred day, how dearly those heroines paid for the freedom we later-born make such use of." By constructing such vivid portraits, Parren redefined patriotism in gendered terms, linking women's civic identity to their capacity for sacrifice.

Parren's use of cultural memory is also evident in her treatment of the Dance of Zalongo. Although the historical accuracy of the Zalongo episode is no longer debated and the story is now widely recognized as a nationalist myth, Parren portrays the Dance of Zalongo as the ultimate expression of maternal

72 Plantzos, "Time and the Antique"; Gazi, "*Scientific*" *National History*.

73 Parren, "Η Εικοστή Πέμπτη Μαρτίου – Αι Σουλιώτιδες γυναίκες."

74 Parren, "Η Εικοστή Πέμπτη Μαρτίου – Αι Σουλιώτιδες γυναίκες."

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

self-sacrifice.⁷⁷ Her invocation of Zalongo exemplifies how memory, myth, and ideology converged in her writing to shape historical consciousness.

In 1893, following the publication of the aforementioned *Album of Distinguished Greek Women*, Parren announced a new initiative to gather biographies from her readers.⁷⁸ This participatory method reflected her belief that history was a communal undertaking, not the monopoly of elite scholars. By inviting women across Greece and the diaspora to contribute, Parren constructed a decentralized archive of memory that drew on plural voices and perspectives. This collective project challenged the exclusivity of professional historiography and positioned women not only as subjects of history but also as its authors and curators.

In conclusion, Parren's historical writings in *The Ladies' Journal* employed a multifaceted strategy that combined documented history with cultural myth, scholarly research with popular tradition, and editorial authority with participatory authorship. Her approach constituted a parallel mode of historical production, one that restored women to the national narrative while reimagining the role of history itself as a vehicle for civic pedagogy and moral uplift. Her ideological use of the past did not aim at academic neutrality but at strategic alignment with broader goals of national renewal and gendered civic engagement. This instrumental vision of history, deeply rooted in didacticism, remains a defining characteristic of her contribution to Greek public memory and cultural heritage.

Networks, Associations, and International Engagement: Women's Social Action and National Reform

Women's associations in nineteenth-century Greece played a crucial role in shaping national identity and promoting women's civic inclusion. These organizations emerged alongside the establishment of girls' schools and women's journals, promoting education and professional opportunities for women.⁷⁹ In the nineteenth century, Greek women, especially from the middle and upper classes, sought to improve their social standing through education. Yet despite the 1834 royal decree mandating primary education for both genders, female education advanced slowly, with only a small percentage of girls and women enrolled in educational institutions, as societal views valued education as a means of upward

77 Psarra, "Ο χορός του Ζαλόγγου."

78 Parren, "Λεύκωμα Εξόχων Ελληνίδων."

79 Foukas, "Women teachers' education."

mobility for men but confined to social consumption for women. However, women began to use education to challenge their prescribed roles, assert their societal worth, and elevate their position.⁸⁰ In the 1860s, female education began to function as an increasingly important foundation for collective social reform and philanthropy in Greece, for instance through the work of influential figures like Calliopi Kehaya and Sotiria Aliberti, whose efforts transformed philanthropic activities from an elite pursuit into a collective movement among middle-class women.⁸¹ Parren built on these educational and philanthropic networks to gather collaborators for her initiatives fostering women's associations across the country, which enabled women to engage in social and cultural issues while cultivating a shared identity of collective female action against patriarchal constraints.⁸²

The nineteenth century also saw the emergence of transnational networks of women's reform, with which Parren sought to align. These feminist networks were international in scope, with women across Europe and North America forming a shared ideology and communities. This facilitated the exchange of ideas and support.⁸³ The movement's international dimension is evident in organizations like the International Council of Women and the International Woman Suffrage Alliance.⁸⁴ Although the Greek case developed within a distinct national context, Parren's strategic participation in these forums highlights the interplay between international feminist mobilization and national reformist agendas.

The ability of certain activists to afford regular travel was crucial, since travel facilitated direct engagement with international feminist networks, allowing activists to exchange ideas, strategies, and best practices. This interaction was essential for fostering solidarity among women from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, helping to unify the movement and amplify their collective voice. Activists like Parren, who could attend international women's congresses, were able to bring valuable insights and inspiration back to their local contexts, enriching the discourse around women's rights in Greece. By participating in these global gatherings, she engaged with leading feminists from across Europe and the United States. Through her speeches and interactions, Parren sought to challenge prevailing stereotypes, highlighting both the historical

80 Varika, "Subjectivité et identité de genre," 32–35.

81 Ibid., 49–50.

82 Ibid.

83 McFadden, *Golden Cables of Sympathy*.

84 Sneider, "The New Suffrage History."

and contemporary roles of Greek women and positioning them as dynamic contributors to both national and international feminist movements.

Through these engagements, Parren used international legitimacy to strengthen the credibility of her domestic campaigns, presenting the advancement of Greek women as aligned with European civilizational standards. Parren's attendance at the 1889 International Congress of the Rights of Women in Paris allowed her to engage with global feminist discourse, countering Western perceptions of Greek women as oppressed "Orientales"⁸⁵ and providing a platform to assert the modernity and civic potential of Greek women.⁸⁶ In her speech, she highlighted the significant historical contributions of Greek women, from the ancient era to the War of Independence, celebrating their role in preserving Greek identity and patriotism.⁸⁷ She emphasized the active participation of women in the War of Independence, portraying figures like Moscho and the Souliot women as embodiments of strength and sacrifice.⁸⁸ Parren concluded by contrasting the bravery of these historical figures with the more conventional image of Greek women, asserting their ongoing potential for progress and education.⁸⁹

At the time, public education for girls in Greece was limited to the primary level, while secondary education remained the domain of private institutions, thereby excluding most girls from lower-income families. In response to these structural inequalities, Parren used the platform of the First Congress of Women's Works and Institutions in Paris in 1889 to announce her intention to submit a proposal to the Greek Parliament.⁹⁰ Her demands included equal educational opportunities for Greek women, the establishment of girls' schools equivalent to boys' high schools, and the founding of a Home Economics and Vocational School in Athens to support the professional training of girls, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.⁹¹

In 1921, Parren organized the first Panhellenic Congress of Greek Women.⁹² Inspired by her participation in international conferences where pressing issues such as, civil and political rights, and fair labor practices were discussed, Parren

85 Parren, "Τι ιδέαν είχαν οι ξένοι περί των Ελληνίδων."

86 Poulos, *Arms and the Woman*, 19–48.

87 Parren, "Η ελληνίς γυνή του 19ου αιώνος."

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 Parren, "Η ελληνίς γυνή του 19ου αιώνος,"; Ignatiadou, "Ο Φεμινισμός της Καλλιρρόης Parren," 23.

91 Ibid.

92 Anastasopoulou, *Η συνετή απόστολος της γυναικείας χειραφέτησης*, 260–62.

was motivated to address similar societal challenges in Greece.⁹³ The innovative philanthropic institutions she encountered during her visit to France, particularly the agricultural schools for girls, inspired her to establish similar programs in Greece, ultimately resulting in the creation of institutions like the aforementioned “Sunday School”⁹⁴ and “Asylum of Saint Catherine,” which aimed to empower Greek women through education and social welfare.⁹⁵

In the journal, Parren wrote on the contrast between French and Greek women of the upper class in the nineteenth century. While both groups enjoyed the privileges afforded by their social standing, Parren argued that the French women exhibited a far deeper commitment to philanthropy and social reform.⁹⁶ She highlighted the extensive network of charitable organizations established and supported by French aristocrats, who actively engaged with the needs of the less fortunate. In contrast, Parren contended that Greek women of the same class lacked a similar sense of social responsibility. She criticized their superficial engagement with philanthropy, their indifference towards their national heritage, and their preference for foreign cultures. By critiquing the Hellenic elite's detachment, Parren called for a reinvigoration of national duty among women of privilege, emphasizing their moral obligation to serve society.

In May of 1893, Parren attended the World's Congress of Representative Women, where she was hailed as the “Aspasia of modern Greece” and the “leading figure in the Greek women's movement.”⁹⁷ In her speeches, Parren celebrated the accomplishments of Greek women throughout history and called for global support for women's empowerment. Through her articles in *The Ladies' Journal*, she shared her admiration for American society and advocated for Greece to adopt similar progressive reforms, particularly in terms of women's education and social roles. In another speech as a delegate to the Congress, she emphasized the role of women's associations in Greece in addressing social issues and promoting education, for instance through initiatives like the “Sunday School” and the “Asylum of Saint Catherine.”⁹⁸ Following the Congress, Parren was hosted by Lydia Avery Coonley for twelve days, allowing her to observe firsthand the social organization of the United States, characterized by progressive

93 Ignatiadou, “Ο Φεμινισμός της Καλλιρρόης Parren,” 24.

94 Parren, “Η σχολή της Κυριακής.”

95 Ibid.

96 Parren, “Αι Παρισιναί αριστοκράτιδες.”

97 Parren, “Εκ Σινάγου.”

98 Parren, “Τὰ ἐν Ἑλλάδι σωματεία.”

education for children, respect for human rights, and a strong work ethic.⁹⁹ From May 30, 1893 to November 27, 1894, Parren published a travelogue titled “From Athens to Chicago: Diary of a Greek Traveler” in *The Ladies’ Journal*. In this, she chronicled her experiences at the Congress, where through her interactions with prominent American feminists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, Parren gained valuable insights into women’s rights movements and developed a vision for a more equitable society for Greek women.¹⁰⁰

After returning to Greece, Parren attempted to establish a national women’s association affiliated with the International Council of Women. However, she faced significant challenges. Greek society at the time was highly conservative, including its political, intellectual, and professional elites, and the broader social climate was unreceptive to organized feminist activism. Moreover, there were few women with whom Parren could collaborate or who might have supported affiliation with the more radical international feminist movement.¹⁰¹ It was only during the interwar period that distinct ideological currents, organizational pluralism, and sustained public discourse on women’s rights began to take shape in Greece.

Therefore, in 1896, Parren established the Union of Greek Women, which played a central role in mobilizing women during the 1897 Greco-Turkish War, with approximately 300 women actively participating in various wartime efforts, such as fundraising, caring for refugees, sewing uniforms, training nurses, and collaborating with foreign organizations.¹⁰² These efforts enabled women to broaden their social networks, develop new skills, and apply their existing knowledge in public service, while also fulfilling their patriotic duties within a national context.¹⁰³

Parren utilized the 1897 Greco-Turkish War to promote women’s integration into the nation, formulating a discourse that legitimized women as active citizens.¹⁰⁴ The Union also cooperated with international women’s organizations during the 1897 war, particularly engaging with English nurses who arrived in Greece.¹⁰⁵ This collaboration exemplified the Union’s commitment to philhellenism, as

99 Anastasopoulou, *Η συνετή απόστολος της γυναικείας χειραφέτιας*, 180–83; Ignatiadou, “Ο Φεμινισμός της Καλλιρρόης Parren,” 25.

100 Ignatiadou, “Ο Φεμινισμός της Καλλιρρόης Parren,” 25.

101 Ibid., 26.

102 Avdela and Psarra, “Engendering ‘Greekness,’” 71.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.

they worked together to support wartime efforts, including the establishment of mobile hospitals and medical units. This cross-border cooperation demonstrated the global solidarity of women in support of Greece's national cause. By linking women's public activism to national emergencies, Parren strategically highlighted women's indispensability to the civic body. The establishment of the Union of Greek Women not only benefited the nation but also laid the foundations for later organizations focused on charity, vocational training for working-class women, and the mobilization of middle and upper-class women in national uprisings, with the Union's organizational structure, nationalistic language, and emphasis on the reformation of the Greek family and nation establishing it as the archetype of women's collectivity in Greece, a model that remained influential over time.¹⁰⁶

The activities of the Union were often framed in terms of national duty, echoing Parren's portrayal of historical women as patriots. This rhetorical strategy enabled the association to appeal to a broad spectrum of Greek society by aligning women's public roles with dominant nationalist ideals. While the association did not explicitly identify as feminist, its efforts to expand women's education and professional opportunities reflect a broader agenda of women's advancement within a national framework. The focus on education and social welfare, in particular, reflected Parren's belief that women's advancement was essential to the nation's progress, first and foremost because women were viewed as the primary educators of future citizens. The argument was often advanced that mothers needed education to raise their children properly, especially their boys, who would grow up to become the nation's soldiers and civic actors. This maternalist logic allowed for the redefinition of civic engagement in gendered terms, legitimizing women's participation without challenging patriarchal hierarchies.

The Union's activities influenced later women's organizations, such as the Lyceum of Greek Women, which focused on preserving Greek cultural traditions.¹⁰⁷ The Lyceum of Greek Women organized exhibitions and festivals that showcased women's handicrafts and traditional dances, activities which contributed to the cultural construction of Greek national identity.¹⁰⁸ However, in the interwar period, the Lyceum evolved into a highly conservative women's association, promoting a vision of womanhood rooted in tradition and national

106 Ibid, 72.

107 Avdela, *To Λόγειο των Ελληνίδων: 100 χρόνια*.

108 Ibid; Bounia, "Exhibiting Women's Handicrafts."

folklore. This stance contrasted with the broader interwar feminist movement, which was notably diverse and dynamic, encompassing multiple organizations, journals, and ideological viewpoints that extended beyond cultural nationalism.

The historical narratives promoted by Parren in *The Ladies' Journal* often paralleled her broader activism, including her efforts to establish women's associations that advocated for improved access to education, employment, and political participation. While a direct causal link is difficult to establish, these narratives reflected and reinforced the ideological foundations of her reformist agenda. By constructing a historical lineage of female leadership and activism, Parren provided her readers and fellow activists with a sense of legitimacy and purpose. Her narrative depictions were not only about restoring memory but also about motivating contemporary women to act. By aligning modern women's engagement with national history and public life, Parren framed their participation as both legitimate and necessary.

However, this strategy must be understood within a broader socio-political context that shifted significantly in the early twentieth century. The Asia Minor Catastrophe in 1922, followed by political upheaval and social transformation, contributed to the weakening of traditional nationalist narratives and allowed for the emergence of more pluralistic feminist currents. In the interwar years, the Greek women's movement diversified, with the rise of multiple organizations and journals representing a range of ideological perspectives, from liberal reformism to more socially radical positions, thus complicating any singular alignment between nationalism and women's rights advocacy.

Conclusions

The Ladies' Journal, under the editorial vision of Kallirhoe Siganou-Parren, functioned as more than a vehicle for women's literary expression or social commentary. It became an instrument for the construction of a "usable past" as part of efforts to assert women's rights and women's value in the civic sphere.¹⁰⁹ Through carefully curated narratives of historical episodes and figures, the journal sought to reinscribe women into the national narrative by commemorating select female figures, heroines, intellectuals, empresses, and philanthropists as paragons of patriotic virtue, moral leadership, and maternal

109 Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past."

sacrifice. These portrayals legitimized women's claims to civic participation and anchored their public visibility within essentialist and nationalist frameworks.

This selective historicization was not ideologically neutral. It validated certain forms of female agency, namely, those aligned with domestic virtue, philanthropy, cultural refinement, and national service, while excluding others, particularly women from working-class, rural, or marginalized backgrounds whose experiences did not conform to the moral and social expectations of the urban bourgeoisie. In this sense, *The Ladies' Journal* articulated a vision of gendered citizenship that was simultaneously empowering and constraining. Women were invited to see themselves as heirs to a noble lineage of civic motherhood and patriotic self-sacrifice but only insofar as their aspirations aligned with the class-bound and ideologically acceptable norms of respectable femininity.

Parren's historical project thus reveals the ambivalence of early feminist interventions in public memory. On the one hand, it offered an important corrective to the symbolic omission of women from the official historiography, affirming that women had always contributed to national life. On the other, it deployed history as a tool of cultural regulation, shaping the terms according to which women could be remembered and by extension, could act. Discourse analysis reveals that historical women were often described through dichotomies, for instance courageous yet tender, strong yet modest, influential yet invisible, reflecting an effort to reconcile agency with notions of proper femininity. These rhetorical choices legitimized women's civic engagement while preserving normative ideals of womanhood rooted in morality, domesticity, and patriotic service. The "usable past" constructed in *The Ladies' Journal* was thus not only inspirational but disciplinary, encoding gendered expectations even as it advocated reform.

Parren's historiography was activist in the sense that it challenged gendered omissions and erasures, inserted women into the symbolic fabric of the nation, and mobilized the past to inspire civic engagement. Yet it also reinscribed boundaries, excluded subaltern voices, and reinforced class hierarchies. This duality complicates the legacy of *The Ladies' Journal* and calls for a more layered understanding of what constitutes feminist cultural activism in contexts marked by nationalism, respectability politics, and ideological constraint.

Crucially, Parren's historiographical strategy blurred the boundaries between journalism, biography, myth, and civic pedagogy. It embraced a hybrid mode of popular historiography that democratized historical knowledge while maintaining a gatekeeping function over who and what could be commemorated. This

approach prefigured later debates in feminist historiography over the politics of recovery and the risks of idealization. By foregrounding moral exemplarity and national service as the criteria for historical inclusion, Parren constructed a narrative that inspired collective identity but limited its transformative potential. Parren's work demonstrates that the past is never only remembered. It is actively shaped, filtered, and instrumentalized in response to the needs of the present. Parren's vision of women's history was a pioneering act of cultural production, but also one shaped by the ideological contours of its time. The challenge for contemporary scholarship lies in recognizing both its contributions and its exclusions and in interrogating how the construction of a "usable past" continues to influence debates over gender, memory, and civic belonging.

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