The Cypriot State(s) in Situ: Cross-Ethnic Contact and the Discourse of Recognition

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The Chair

The memoirs of the ex-UN Secretary-General, Kurt Waldheim, recall a recognition incident when the PLO chairman, Yasser Arafat, was invited to address the General Assembly in 1974. Seeking to avoid the thorny issue of Palestinian status becoming a small crisis, Waldheim disagreed with the President of the General Assembly, maintaining that Arafat should not be allowed to sit on the special chair that Heads of State customarily occupy before and after their speeches. Realising his limited options, Arafat agreed to the demand. Standing instead next to the chair—a singular international actor—he casually leaned over it adopting a reclining posture. Let us always remember Yasser Arafat, even after he becomes a fully recognised Head of State, as the chairman. Let us remember him parodying the sign of recognition, handling the artefact of sovereignty, teasing out and playing with the constitution of statehood. Recalling this chairing game is particularly relevant when writing about sitting or standing Cypriots, who for some time now have been Arafat's close political neighbours, in proximity to the recognition predicament. The issue of recognition affects Cypriots deeply and personally. It has been a serious obstacle not only to official intercommunal dialogue but also to the cross-ethnic contact of Cypriots as individuals. On the one hand, intransigent nationalists and confident technocrats commonly employ the recognition argument to disseminate ethico-political rationales that tie reconciliation initiatives to unpatriotic, treacherous, and destructive activity. On the other hand, many Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot citizens have come to endorse the view that these unofficial meetings irrevocably damage the interests of their respective communities. To that extent, individuals or groups of people seeking to meet outside the officially designated channels of communication have been frequently

1. Earlier versions of this article were presented at the meeting of the Bicommunal Group of Cypriot Academics, University of Tel Aviv in July 1999 and at an international seminar on Cyprus organised by the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute in December 1999. We would like to thank Fulbright in Cyprus for sponsoring the former and Thomas Diez for organising the latter. For their comments and suggestions we would like to thank the participants in the two seminars, as well as Vasos Argyrou, Necati Polat, Oliver Richmond, Yannis Stivachtis, Ole Waever and the two anonymous reviewers of this journal.


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charged with offering legitimation to the legal and political claims of the other side. In this respect, and in everyday practice, the recognition discourse has become less reflective of a legal or political dispute and more illuminating of strategies of control and governance.

The history of this paper is yet another anecdote indicative of the Cypriot chair syndrome and its politics of assiduity. We began writing it for a bicomunal workshop of Cypriot academics that was unable to meet freely in Cyprus, and had to be hosted at the University of Tel Aviv in July 1999. It was agreed that academics were to travel there under their personal capacity to avoid problems from their universities, i.e. that they recognised illegal states, governments or institutions. Greek Cypriots travelled with Republic of Cyprus passports. Turkish Cypriots travelled with Turkish passports, the common position being that the Republic of Cyprus does not represent them and with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) not recognised by any other state but Turkey. Ironically, checking in at the hotel we discovered that we were united again through misrecognition. (The printed registration cards bearing our names branded us all “U.S. citizen”! Was this the longed-for US plan on how to settle the Cyprus problem or just a hotel–Fulbright misunderstanding?) Early in the morning, we received a message that the Greek Cypriot ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus in Israel wished to drop in and meet us in his “unofficial capacity”. In response, the group suggested the hotel bar during the evening, leaving it upon individuals to join in or not. During the discussion of different projects that all agreed were worthwhile, members of the group often felt they could not support them openly because these could be officially construed as recognising pseudo- or usurping institutions or states. Distribution of funds from foundations overseas was open to similar problems. In brief, we spent most of the time discussing directly or indirectly matters of recognition, paying close and constant attention to how our actions, individually or collectively, would be officially interpreted. In practice, we accepted and employed the official codes of recognition, though on the whole—like Arafat—we realised their arbitrary and exclusionary character.

In this article, we seek to show that the discourse of recognition as has been officially pursued in Cyprus is highly problematic, contradictory, and dangerous. First, it oversimplifies and popularises the international principles concerning state and government recognition. Second, it continues practices of objectivisation that in the past sought to impose particular cognitions and totalising understandings of the other. The issue of state recognition is conventionally examined at the level of state and government, but we suggest that looking at how this issue works on and affects the individual is highly revealing of how the recognition discourse operates in action, particularly in divided societies. In this respect, we also examine how cross-ethnic contacts in the UN buffer zone, though not always escaping the official frame of recognition, have the capacity of taking the steam out of the rhetorical claims of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot regimes. We do not argue that granting or denying recognition is a light matter, that it has no implications on the settlement of the Cyprus problem, or for the human rights of ethnic groups or of dislocated and dispossessed individuals. We argue, rather, that the Cyprus problem and the rights of groups and individuals are rhetorically enunciated in a way that prompts the danger of recognition and employed as a pretext to determine how (and often, if) Cypriots are to meet and communicate with each other. In conclusion, we suggest that
the predominant discourse of recognition in Cyprus assumes or presents its axioms and maxims as natural, neutral or scientific, thus covering up the constructed and ideological character of the so-called realist readings that follow from it. The dominance of the technical language of recognition is currently attained, we propose, by marginalising the political relevance of other cultures or vocabularies of recognition, such as the face-to-face encounter of the other.

International Standings

The Republic of Cyprus obtained an international legal standing on 16 August 1960, and took its seat at the United Nations on 20 September 1960. The entry of Cyprus as a state actor in international relations has been a reluctant one. It is well known and abundantly registered that this has not been the first choice of the Cypriot people but a compromise result negotiated by the governments of the United Kingdom, Greece, and Turkey. The majority of Greek Cypriots wished for the union of Cyprus with Greece (enosis), whereas the majority of Turkish Cypriots, in lieu of union with Turkey, supported the division of the island between the two “motherlands” (taksim). This served as a pretext for establishing a state whose independence was qualified by important treaty and constitutional restraints. The “guarantor powers”, i.e. the United Kingdom, Greece, and Turkey, were directly given the right to interfere in the domestic affairs of the new state and under certain circumstances to intervene to restore the status quo. Greece and Turkey maintained troops on the island. Great Britain managed to maintain sovereignty and unrestricted military presence over 99 square miles of Cyprus. These novel provisions could be seen as directly contradicting peremptory norms of international law, specifically Article 2(4) and (7) of the UN Charter. In this sense some authors interpreted these provisions as evidence that the Republic of Cyprus came into being with only limited sovereignty, “the only truly ‘international state’”, a strange mixture of a protectorate, condominium, and independent statehood.

A Short History of the Politics of Recognition in Cyprus

The modern envisioning and organisation of world politics as an interstate system raises the issue of the recognition of states and of the governments representing them to a high problematic of international relations. This issue concerns both the construction of legal subjectivity and the bestowal of international legitimacy. From the politics of recognition of the Peoples’ Republic of China, East Germany, Namibia, and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic to the competing government claims of Cambodia, Haiti, Liberia and Somalia, international practice historically has affected the conduct of high politics but also the lives of individuals

4. Both enosis and taksim as well as secession are explicitly prohibited by the Cyprus Constitution, Article 185.
on the ground. In the case of Cyprus, both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaderships currently agree that the recognition or the possibility of recognition of the other side’s regime as sovereign state or legitimate government partly determines what constitutes “the Cyprus problem”. Also, they seem to agree that whether one or two states are recognised will largely determine the future settlement of the Cyprus problem (as a federation or confederation, respectively) with disastrous consequences in either case for “one’s side”.

The issue of both state and government recognition in Cyprus first starkly emerged after the breakdown of the bicomunal structures of the Republic following the eruption of interethnic violence in December 1963. Turkish Cypriots withdrew from the government and were forced to move into self-administered enclaves and set up their own political structures. Initially they set up what became known as a General Committee in 1964, followed by a Provisional Turkish Cypriot Administration in 1967. In short, during this period, the government of the Republic of Cyprus came totally under Greek Cypriot control, in principle representing the Turkish Cypriots but not in practice. By some accounts, the international recognition of the Cyprus government, despite the withdrawal of Turkish Cypriot representatives, was only pragmatically and incidentally provided, given that the consent of a legally constituted government was in essence required for the UN peacekeeping operation to take place in early 1964. After the coup of 1974 against the Makarios regime and the subsequent Turkish military intervention leading to the exchange of populations, the Turkish Federated State of Cyprus was announced in 1975, and in 1983 the TRNC was unilaterally declared. The TRNC has been branded an “invalid” state by the UN Security Council Resolution 541 (1983), and is currently recognised as an independent state only by Turkey. In other words, it is only the Republic of Cyprus that is internationally recognised, and so the Greek Cypriot government has been accepted as the de jure government of the island as a whole, even though de facto since 1974 it only controls the south part of the island. At the same time, though presenting itself internationally as a sovereign and independent state, the TRNC engages in a number of measures undermining its projected sovereignty. For example, rather than a Turkish Cypriot civilian, it is the Turkish commander of the military forces in Cyprus who is the head of the police and the fire brigade. This has recently fuelled a debate among Turkish Cypriot politicians, precisely on how this reflects on the projected independence of the TRNC, leading to a public campaign under the suggestive title: “This Country is Ours”. Moreover, in the last few years, the Turkish Cypriot authorities threaten that any steps that Greek Cypriots make towards accession to the European Union will be countered by more integration with Turkey. This policy is justified by argu-

6. We examine the historicised relationship between the politics of recognition and political practice in the next section, i.e. tracing the issue of recognition back to official historiographies and factional-party politics. Another interesting line of exploration, which we cannot pursue here directly and in detail due to space limitations, is how the politics of recognition relates to the construction of the subject of politics, the construct of sovereignty, and the complex dynamic of practice.


8. See Turkish Daily News (Turkish daily), 5–20 July 2000, on the debate. For an overview of these and other developments related to the campaign see Alithia (Greek Cypriot daily), 6 August 2000, “Ο Xesikomos sta Katehomena”, p. 20.
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ing that EU entry for Cyprus is covert union with Greece in line with past attempts during the 1960s and 1974. This has been nowadays played down in view of Turkey being given candidate status in the EU Helsinki Summit in December 1999.

The issue of recognition in Cyprus is, consequently, not only a historically complex one but also the discourse disseminated is quite contradictory. The most striking example of this contradiction involves the primary symbols of statehood, i.e. the national anthem and the flag. None of the two polities have their own national anthem; each uses the anthem of their respective “motherland”. Also, more often than not, the flags of their “motherland” are displayed alongside the Cypriot state ones.⁹

On the battleground of international recognition, labelling has become extremely important. The Greek Cypriot side always places the TRNC in quotation marks or refers to it as the “Turkish Cypriot pseudo-state”. The Turkish Cypriot side never refers to the Republic of Cyprus as such but to the “Greek Cypriot” or “South Cyprus administration”. It never refers to the “President” but to the “Greek Cypriot leader” while the Greek Cypriot side similarly only to the “Turkish Cypriot leader”, “occupying leader” or “pseudo-president”. These labels have been charged and so highly matter in the reproduction of official narratives. Note, however, that they have become of concern and implicate ordinary Cypriots as well. For example, one of the major political aims of the Greek Cypriot authorities after 1974 has been to obstruct any normalisation of the regime in the north or any possibility of granting recognition to the Turkish Cypriot state after 1983. This has extended to almost any imaginable activity of an international nature, from trade to the landing of civilian company planes in the north, from sports meetings to academic conferences, including meetings or events devoid of any explicit political content. Turkish Cypriots, with equal insistence, have been officially encouraged to participate in such events, often feeling that through them they can also gain some international standing which can then be exploited by the authorities in the north for domestic consumption or to foster recognition. In general, the Turkish Cypriot official aim in international meetings is not so much to block completely the participation of Greek Cypriot individuals or groups (which is not feasible due to the international stance on the issue) but rather to take part alongside the Greek Cypriot organisations. Consequently, if a Greek Cypriot organisation or individuals encounter a Turkish Cypriot group trying to join such events, they frequently protest and try to disqualify its participation and more often than not they are successful; if not, then the Greek Cypriots withdraw. In other words, most Greek and Turkish Cypriots joining international events abroad customarily consider it their patriotic duty to protect or promote their respective state recognitions. Accepting the official logic of recognition, many Cypriots from both sides accept the necessity and actively reproduce the reality of these rationales that turn every single international site into a political arena.

⁹ For the Turkish Cypriot side see, for example, the cover of TRNC Public Relations Department, KKTC 14 Yashinda (n.p., n.d.) This official leaflet commemorates the 14th anniversary of TRNC with the title “Our Republic is the Symbol of Our Sovereignty”. On the front cover it employs in equal sizes a flag of the TRNC and that of Turkey, along with the state logo of the TRNC. This logo is remarkable in itself as it is in fact that of the Republic of Cyprus (a wreath surrounding a pigeon holding an olive branch in a shield) with the addition of a tiny crescent moon, star and the date 1983. For a suggestive discussion of symbols of statehood and independence on the Greek Cypriot side see Fileleftheros (Greek Cypriot daily), 21 November 1996, “I Kratiki mas Ontotita”, p. 7.
The shadow of recognition dominates, furthermore, over intercommunal meetings. It is often an issue raised before or during official negotiations. But it also affects semi-official and unofficial contacts. It is important to note that the UN Security Council has strongly and explicitly advocated bicommunal meetings as part of a general set of confidence-building measures. Resolution 789 (1992) states that: “Each side take active measures to promote people to people contacts between the two communities…”. However, the position of the Turkish Cypriot regime—basically content with ethnic separation after 1974—has been very negative to unofficial contacts, though due to international pressures it shifts from time to time.\(^\text{10}\) Not only does it generally discourage, but often explicitly forbids and intimidates people from taking part. Security Council Resolution 1062 (1996) criticises both sides for obstructing bicommunal events and contacts, singling out “especially the Turkish Cypriot leadership”.\(^\text{11}\) The Turkish Cypriot authorities argue that these meetings are exploited by the Greek Cypriot side in order to promote its government internationally as the sole representative of the Cypriot people.

The issue becomes more complicated as far as the Greek Cypriot side is concerned due to the official policy of epanaprosseggisi (rapprochement) initiated after 1974. The term epanaprosseggisi means “coming together again”. Since the official Greek Cypriot aim is that the unification of Cyprus is the desired outcome, it is felt that measures of goodwill towards Turkish Cypriots are necessary to display the existence of good intentions with regard to the future. This has been the crux of the major but false dilemma that Greek Cypriots face. On the one hand, they try to avoid any possibility of implicit or explicit recognition of the Turkish Cypriot polity. On the other hand, they need to encourage bicommunal meetings between groups of people in the two sides. The official framework adopted by the Greek Cypriot side is that unofficial meetings that do not entail or imply recognition should be encouraged, but anything that does, prohibited or discouraged. For example, if Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots wish to meet as individuals or as part of an organisation which is not linked to official state capacity then such meetings are officially supposed to be welcome from the Greek Cypriot side. Yet, the line separating “acceptable” from “unacceptable” meetings is not always clear in advance, sometimes left deliberately obscure, in practice discouraging people by laying upon them the heavy burden of unintentional recognition. As such the policies of the two sides in Cyprus, though differing in degree or intention, in effect produce the same result: namely, ethnic separation or highly controlled cross-ethnic contact. For it is precisely the official interpretation from both sides over what entails or does not entail recognition that is at stake here, and which implicates a range of other factors as well.

Reconsidering Claims of Recognition

Note, in this regard, that there have already been quite a number of official meetings between the two sides, and officially interpreted as not constituting recogni-
The leaders of the two sides, nowadays Clerides for Greek Cypriots and Denktash for Turkish Cypriots, occasionally meet to negotiate under the titles “The Representative of the Greek Cypriot Community of Cyprus” and “The Representative of the Turkish Cypriot Community of Cyprus”, respectively. (Note, however, that since the EU Luxemburg Summit in December 1997, Denktash announced that he would not be meeting Clerides or negotiating again unless recognised by the Greek Cypriot side or invited by the UN Secretary General as “Head of State”. The November 1999 invitations from Kofi Annan for negotiations in New York required two additional letters of clarification—the last of the three satisfied Denktash by describing both leaders as “excellencies”.) The municipal leaders of the two sides of divided Nicosia also have met under the titles “The Representative of the Greek Cypriot Community of Nicosia” and “The Representative of the Turkish Cypriot Community of Nicosia”. Neither side claims that these official and semi-official contacts have given recognition to the other side, nor for that matter have they changed the positions of the two sides internationally. Still, the official criteria used for unofficial contacts, at least from what we experience from the Greek Cypriot side, continue to be arbitrary in practice. If, for example, a Greek Cypriot contemplating his or her participation at an event with Turkish Cypriots seeks advice from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the advice given may vary according to the latest official pronouncement, or the particular bureaucrat one happens to consult. That is to say, the official discourse on the matter is not always consistent and may shift depending on political and international constellations. It is usually better to take the risk by not asking, but then one may be publicly reprimanded for not consulting the “experts” of recognition and for betraying the Cyprus cause. Similar considerations apply with regard to the reaction of the Greek Cypriot press, in terms of whether a certain meeting will be castigated as implying recognition or not.

The two regimes share more than they care to admit in complicating and exploiting the issue of unofficial contacts. For through their officials and mass
media they have simplistically appropriated and fervently exploited the international law of the recognition of states and governments. This has not been helped by the fact that the law on the matter is politicised anyway. As put by Ian Brownlie: “Unfortunately, when the existence of states and governments is in issue, a proper legal perspective seems to be elusive.”¹⁴ In other words, to put it less euphemistically, recognition has primarily been a governmental political decision justified by reference to certain “objective” legal prerequisites, which are, however, invariably interpreted and sometimes only selectively applied.

In the case of Cyprus, however, the problem goes further. For the proponents of the argument, that unofficial contacts in themselves and increasingly promote the state or government claims of the other side, tend to base their thesis on the law of “implied recognition”. That is to say, the argument is that, despite the express and explicit statement from the authorities of either side rejecting the claims of the other, such unofficial contacts may still provide probative value of opposing claims, and so in effect constitute recognition inadvertently and through the back door.

From the international legal perspective, at least, this argument is fundamentally misplaced for two reasons. First, the law is clear in saying that implication cannot be construed if the other side formally, express, and consistently withdraws recognition. Furthermore, international custom provides a lot of room for the official conduct of parties without necessarily recognising each other:

State practice shows that no recognition is implied from various forms of negotiation, the establishment of unofficial representation, the conclusion of a multilateral treaty to which the unrecognised entity is also a party, admission to an international organisation (in respect to those opposing admission), or presence at an international conference in which the unrecognised entity participates.¹⁵

For example, in the 1999 OSCE conference in Istanbul, the Republic of Cyprus and its Greek Cypriot representatives were accorded full diplomatic protocol and addressed with their full titles, though the state was and remains unrecognised by Turkey.

Second, international law is again clear that neither individuals nor entities other than states as represented by governments have the right to give or withdraw recognition. Individuals and non-state entities have no such express right, let alone the capacity to recognise in an implied manner. In short, the possibility of implied recognition exists only if the official authorities and their designated representatives give unclear and confusing terminology in their statements; to put it bluntly, mess up by not making clear and explicit enough their intention not to recognise. Given the intensity of the debate, there is clearly no such danger between the two sides in Cyprus.

Implied recognition may have some merit as an argument concerning the recognition of governments. Because of a recent change in the recognition policy

¹⁵. Ibid., p. 96. See also Michael Akehurst, A Modern Introduction to International Law (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), p. 66, who qualifies this by saying that recognition may be implied more readily from conduct if a state is not in the habit of making express announcements. For recent developments, see Colin Warbrick, “Recognition of States”, International and Comparative Law Quarterly, No. 41 (1992), pp. 473–482.
of a number of states (mainly Commonwealth countries) current practice for these states has been limited only to the recognition of states—not of governments. To that extent, in lieu of an explicit statement, the recognition of governments is usually implied by state practice, e.g. acceptance of credentials, official visits, communications, etc. Even in the case of such policy, however, if conflicting claims arise then, this can be easily resolved through an explicit statement. Specifically, in the case of Cyprus, the British government that adopted such policy in 1980, stated through the Foreign Secretary in parliament that: “We recognize the Government of the Republic of Cyprus as the Government of the whole of Cyprus.” The contacts of British officials with officials of the Turkish Cypriot regime do not affect or alter in any legal sense the explicit statement of the British government, nor does the Greek Cypriot side claim that they do, though it may sometimes complain about the level of representation. Moreover, in this instance too, unauthorised individuals have no express or implied capacity to give or take recognition of governments.

By contrast, a Greek Cypriot IR academic taking issue with the “rapprochement naiveties” of cross-ethnic contacts has suggested recently that the “international factor tells us [sic]... that it is obliged to legitimise [the TRNC] and to give it the status of a ‘state’” since Greek Cypriot pro-rapprochement activists “daily, through [their] social and political practice, recognise it as legal.” To that extent, in the Cyprus case, an unsupported legal claim has been made casually by those opposed to unofficial contacts between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots. Interestingly, whereas they seem to assume (wrongly) that individual contact can have legal effects concerning state or government recognition they do not extend to those individuals the rights and safeguards afforded by the law of recognition. In other words, if recognition is really the problem an easy way out (though unnecessary and invalid in view of the above) is for individuals to state expressly that their personal contacts should not be construed as recognition of the legal claims of the other side. That this will not do is a sign that the legal side of recognition (which is important and does have implications for the settlement of the Cyprus problem) is, however, when it comes to unofficial contacts, only a cover for local political agendas. Specifically, this is the attempt by the respective regimes of power to control how Cypriots ought to communicate with each other as well as to determine how they ought to think about and define the Cyprus problem.

Re-addressing Ethnic Postures

This brings us to the wider and more politically subtle side of recognition. The debates on state-government recognition could be seen as a historical continuation of attempts in both sides to frame and accredit particular cognitions of each other, both locally and internationally. These attempts to produce essentialist
and totalising visions of the other were attempts that at different historical periods sought to demonise, marginalise, or domesticate the other. Fixing how the other was to be known was in effect a means of delegitimising rights or claims of the other at the same time as legitimising discourses and empowering policies against it. Combined with that, the current discourse of recognition and the critique or support of cross-ethnic contacts has been invariably disseminated through the factional pronouncements and party political debates. The official frames in both sides reflect the above—and occasionally minor shifts occur—but these local debates have not altered the general negative framework within which questions of recognition and cross-ethnic contact are approached.

Knowing the Past

The current issue of recognition has other hidden or neglected dimensions. Primary among these is the acknowledgement or denial of the existence of another as a political entity, ethnic group, or distinct community. Arguments concerning historical origins and continuity become very important in this respect. Most typically employed are the classic nationalist notions of (trans)historical continuity, cultural distinctiveness and purity of the nation. The self is presented as natural and historically given; the other as historically ambiguous and ethnically impure. In this sense, the discussion in Cyprus regarding each other’s historical origins and their links to Cypriot land shows similarities to prevalent views in Greek and Turkish traditional historiography regarding each other’s origins. The formula and moral lesson are strikingly clear as much as they are simplistic: our own continuity and tie to territory has been historically and scientifically proven whereas the others’ is fictitious, mythical, and a product of propaganda.

Specifically, Millas points out how such arguments have been employed in both Turkish and Greek historiography. One common Turkish argument is that the Greeks do not descend from ancient Greeks but are a mixture of races that lived in the area of Greece during various ages. A more extreme form of this point may even posit that at least those living in the islands or in Asia Minor were in reality somehow Turks, a thesis that assumes that contemporary Turks are the direct descendants of the early inhabitants of Asia Minor. The usual Greek counter argument is that the Turks who defeated the Byzantine Empire also proselytised by force many Byzantines (a category treated as equivalent to Greeks). Racially, but also culturally in other versions of the argument, contemporary Turks thus feature as an amorphous mixture and to some degree also Greeks.

These ideas are quite prevalent among Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot writers, though in the case of these two groups more specific arguments are employed. Turkish Cypriot authors, for example, sometimes proudly point out that the first inhabitants of Cyprus came from Asia Minor, which is somehow supposed to make them Turks. This thesis is often geo-logically reinforced by pointing out that Cyprus had been a land prolongation of Turkey that later was

separated and became an island.\textsuperscript{21} Another common argument is that even if Myceneans came to Cyprus in the 14th century BCE, so many other people came later and ruled the island, the present day Greeks of Cyprus are at best a mixture of peoples. As starkly expressed in the standard Turkish Cypriot school text on the history of Cyprus in use since the early 1970s: “Today the Rums found in Cyprus are not Greek.”\textsuperscript{22} It is important here to note that Turkish Cypriots (and Turks) refer to Greek Cypriots in Turkish as \textit{Rum}, not \textit{Yunan}, \textit{which is the term used for Greeks}. \textit{Rum} was the name previously employed for the Christian Orthodox people living in the Ottoman Empire, and it is currently employed for present day Greeks living in Turkey or Greek Cypriots. Not only does this deny the Greekness of Cypriots but it also lends connotations of a “subject people”. Typically, the standard Greek Cypriot argument has been that the present day Turkish Cypriots are in reality “islamised Greeks”, that is, people who were forced to convert during the Ottoman Empire.\textsuperscript{23} If one wishes to push this argument even further: “… and who knows, even those Turks who came from Turkey to Cyprus were in reality islamised Byzantines”.

All these arguments need to be contextualised in order to show how they have emerged historically, an exercise that exposes both the practical significance and aims of such claims. It is important to note that these arguments begin to be stated explicitly and strongly only after the 1960s. It is in the post-independence period that both sides start taking a more pronounced interest in the origins of the other side. Previously there was little interest in knowing-defining the other, and all intellectual effort was expended into proving the historical existence, presence and continuity of one’s own ethnic group. The Greek Cypriot demand for \textit{enosis} was justified through an argument positing the historical presence of Greeks on the island who should thus be given the right to unite with the “motherland”. The subsequent Turkish Cypriot demand for \textit{taksim} was equally premised on the existence in Cyprus of another distinct group, the Turks of Cyprus, who also had a right to self-determination in the form of division and part territorial union.\textsuperscript{24}

It was the Greek Cypriots who first strongly voiced their own anti-colonial demands from the early years of the 20th century and the reply of the British colonial authorities was directed towards this challenge in two ways. First, that Cypriots are a “slave-race” and hence in need of benevolent rule and guidance; second, that Cypriots are not truly Greek but rather an amorphous composite mixture. To address these claims, Greek Cypriots produced historical studies proving their Greekness and continuity as a self-conscious actor who always resisted foreign domination, claiming, in Given’s term “a pedigree of resistance”.\textsuperscript{25}

The British counter argued by also employing historicist arguments, namely that

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{21} Ibid., p. 10.
\bibitem{22} Vehbi Serter, \textit{Kâbris Tarihi} (Nicosia: Kema Offset, 1990), p. 8, our translation. See also Ismail \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 14–15.
\bibitem{24} For a more extended discussion of these issues and for other relevant sources see Yiannis Papadakis, “Perceptions of history and collective identity: a study of contemporary Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot nationalism”, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1993, pp. 25–51.
\end{thebibliography}
the history of Cyprus rather gave Cypriots “a pedigree of subjection”.26 The second interlinked strategy employed by the British was to claim that one could trace as far back as the Iron Age a distinctly Cypriot people and culture (the Eteocypriots, a group which pre-dated Greeks), and from whom contemporary Greek Cypriots descended. The existence of the Eteocypriots was used to undermine Greek Cypriot claims to Greek stock suggesting instead a “melange” culture.27 Such arguments made Greek Cypriots more prone to stress their Greekness in scholarly texts.

If the debate during the colonial period was mostly one between Greeks and the British, things changed at independence. The main subjects in question became Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots and this is when attempts to negate or redefine each other’s ethnic identity began to be articulated more intensely.28 As stated, both ethnic groups were not satisfied with the outcome of independence but more keen on their respective goals of enosis and taksim.29 The two groups employed Greek and Turk as their self-designations, while also denying each other’s claim to Greekness or Turkishness. Whereas before 1960 Greek Cypriot scholars would simply write about Greeks and Turks in Cyprus, after 1960 while they continue speaking about Greeks, they now talk of Turkish or Muslim Cypriots. The main argument proposed was that Turks or Muslims of Cyprus are not really or fully Turks but rather descendants of “Greeks converted to Islam” during the Ottoman period of Cyprus (1571–1878), an argument that posits blood as the determining factor of ethnic identity. Turkish Cypriot writers replied with equal vigour in denying the existence of Greeks in Cyprus, as already mentioned in the case of the school text published in 1971 and with other works up to the present. A Turkish Cypriot academic, for example, published a paper in response to the usual Greek Cypriot claim that “Turkish Cypriots are not Turks” where he actually employed evidence from blood samples in order to argue that they “scientifically” indicate close similarities between Turkish Cypriots and Turks. According to the blood samples, it was the Greek Cypriots, he argued, who should instead worry about their Greekness.30

The above provides a general view of the kind of argumentation about each other’s historicalexistence and identity whose basic premises informed, and sometime still inform, scholarly discussions on the issue of how the other is to be recognised. Such premises also provide the broader socio-cultural background within which more specialised and technical arguments regarding political recognition are articulated. Here we arrive at the crossroads of another issue that has to do with internal political and party positions.

26. Ibid., pp. 6–9.
29. However, it should be noted that the Left on both sides did not always or wholeheartedly agree with the agendas of taksim and enosis advocated by right-wing nationalists.
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Of Right and Left

From which positions then do accusations frequently emerge that meetings of Turkish and Greek Cypriots as part of various kinds of groups, non-governmental ones, lend recognition? In the south, up to the present, those mostly opposed to such meetings tend to come from right-wing political groups, mass media, or political parties. Right-wing groups, in contrast to left-wing ones (as will be explained below), tend to be strongly nationalist and in favour of the development of linkages with Greece as well as proponents of the view that Greek Cypriots are first of all Greek. Thus, more often than not it is right-wing politicians, journalists, academics, or individuals who accuse people of lending recognition to the Turkish Cypriot polity when they attend meetings with Turkish Cypriots. This, however, should not be taken as an absolute statement but rather as an indication of a general—yet clear—trend as people of the Right may sometimes support such initiatives, and of the Left obstruct them. The argument they put forth in order to support their case against meetings of people and groups from the two sides is simple as it is simplistic: any type of organisation—say, a professional association, broadcasting corporation, a university in northern Cyprus—exists as an organisation by virtue of operating in the legal, social and political context of the Turkish Cypriot polity and thus any contact with them by Greek Cypriots lends recognition to the Turkish Cypriot state. In this sense almost any kind of meeting can be viewed as lending recognition and should, according to this view, be prohibited. As graphically put by a leading right-wing journalist, bim communal meetings are “poisonous painkillers which bear extremely serious dangers of direct or indirect recognition of the occupying pseudo-state”.

There are important reasons why this stance is adopted by the Greek Cypriot Right. First, among these groups one finds the strongest nationalist and extreme nationalist factions in Cyprus who tend to regard the Turks as Hellenism’s historic arch-enemy. Second, they argue that the Cyprus problem has only one dimension, the international one, being fundamentally a post-1974 problem and the result of the Turkish invasion of the island. In this respect they belittle the internal dimension (e.g. past interethnic conflict, lack of trust, need for mutual understanding, etc.) as completely irrelevant. Their stance is, however, more revealing of their own attempts at self-justification and self-absolution. During the late 1950s when EOKA entered into fighting with Turkish Cypriots and the TMT, but, more importantly, later during the 1960s when interethnic fighting

31. By right-wing parties we mean primarily the largest right-wing party DISI, and to a lesser extent the smaller centre-right party of DIKO. By left-wing party we mean the large communist party AKEL, and the much smaller EDI. EDEK, though a socialist party, has been generally unsympathetic to unofficial cross-ethnic contacts.

32. For example, within DISI there are some members, even current or ex-MPs mostly belonging to its liberal wings, who are actually in the forefront of bim communal meetings, such as Constantinos Lordos and Kaiti Cleridou. For the views of Kaiti Cleridou and DISI’s recent decision to set up a “Rapprochement Secretariat” that was not without problems and internal debates, see Alithia, 7 November 1999, “I Simfiliostohos tis Gram. Epanaprosigesis tou DISI”, p. 18. For opposing views in DISI see Fileleftheros, 21 May 2000, “Aparadehtes oi Energieis tis Grammateias Epanaprosigesis”, p. 15. For a statement by a DISI MP that cross-ethnic contacts of academics lends recognition see Simerini (Greek Cypriot daily) 5 June 2000 “Pseudopanepistimia kai Anagnorisi”, p. 2.

erupted on a much wider scale, it was mostly people of the Right who participated. The various fighters' associations which currently represent those who fought then are organisations linked to the Greek Cypriot Right. From the perspective of such groups implicated in these events, the current attempts at rapprochement appear not only wrong and unpatriotic, but highly dangerous. For as the political goals of Greek Cypriots changed after 1974 and the rhetoric regarding Turkish Cypriots shifted, they may now be accused of having fought against those who Greek Cypriots now officially, at least, term "compatriots". Even worse, they could even be accused of fratricide, for left-wing political rhetoric goes even further than compatriots talking of Turkish Cypriots as "brothers".

A further related reason why people of the Greek Cypriot Right tend to claim that there is no internal dimension to the Cyprus problem has to do with the 1974 coup which set about the events leading to the Turkish military campaign. This was executed by right-wing extremist groups following instructions from the Greek junta that then ruled Greece, and for this reason they are accused by other Greek Cypriots as sharing a large part of the blame for the tragedy which eventually befell Greek Cypriots. The typical response of these groups is that "Turkey, being an inherently barbaric and expansionist country would have captured Cyprus on another occasion"; in short that all the blame lies with Turkey ab initio and thus the problem is nothing but an international one.\(^{34}\)

These views contrast with the position of the Left, especially AKEL, which is the largest left-wing Greek Cypriot party. Left-wingers of AKEL in the past had the best relations with Turkish Cypriots with whom they co-operated in a large number of forums such as trade unions and workers' associations. Moreover, they did not participate in any of the violence of the 1950s and 1960s. Rather they sometimes found themselves victims of right-wing violence from Greek Cypriot extremists just as the Turkish Cypriots did. In other words, their past record and good connections with Turkish Cypriots placed them after 1974 at the forefront of efforts of rapprochement.\(^{35}\) This exposes another important internal dimension concerning the debate over recognition. Right-wingers who constantly claim that any kind of meeting runs the risk of lending recognition employ this argument in order to castigate and politically marginalise the Left. By contrast, the leader of AKEL recently described the official policy as hypocritical, taking issue with the government decision not to allow a Turkish

\(^{34}\) For a general discussion of the idea of "Turkish expansionism" and the Right's insistence on and employment of this notion see Yiannis Papadakis, "Enosis and Turkish Expansionism: Real Myths or Mythical Realities?", in V. Calotychos (ed.), Cyprus and its People (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 69–84.

\(^{35}\) AKEL alone thus organises a commemorative ritual for the joint killing in 1965 of a Greek Cypriot and a Turkish Cypriot (Mishaoulis and Kavazoglu) by right-wing Turkish Cypriot extremists, which is followed by 10 days of various "Events for Rapprochement" where Turkish Cypriots are also invited. It should also be noted that AKEL as a party or some members occasionally oppose or voice doubts regarding bicomunal meetings which may receive funds or be organised by American institutions such as Fulbright. This is more indicative, however, of their anti-American stance rather than opposition to rapprochement itself. On this last point and AKEL's general role in cross-ethnic contacts see Peter Loizos, "Bicomunal Initiatives and their Contribution to Improved Relations Between Turkish and Greek Cypriots" (forthcoming), in H. Brey (ed.), Cyprus and its Accession to the European Union: Positions and Expectations of the Cypriots and of the International Community (Munich: Sudosteuropa-Gesellschaft, 2000).
Cypriot journalist of BRT to display the logo of his station while in the south for a press conference, as this would have amounted to recognition. Inspired by the gospel of Matthew (23: 24), the communist leader criticised a Pharisaiic recognition policy which goes through the legal motions but overlooks justice and good faith: “The government strains off midges, yet gulps down camels.”

There are, however, important ideological differences and disagreements among Turkish Cypriots as well; that is, in terms of the Left–Right split discussed regarding Greek Cypriots. On the whole, the split follows a similar pattern. Firstly, it should be noted that the government in the north has to a very large extent been monopolised by right-wing Turkish Cypriot parties in the past. Right-wing parties argue that Turkish Cypriots are first of all Turks, while left-wing parties place more emphasis on commonalities with Greek Cypriots and differences with Turks, often supporting the idea of a common Cypriot identity that unites Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. Then, comparatively speaking, the left-wing parties are more in favour of a compromise solution while right-wing ones often claim that the status quo is itself the solution. Finally, as explained, in the past they had significant co-operation with Greek Cypriot left-wing organisations as opposed to right-wing ones generally associated or sympathetic to violent TMT activities, or nowadays linked with extreme nationalist groups like the Grey Wolves. Turkish Cypriot leftist groups often join forums with leftist Greek Cypriot groups, or with other Greek Cypriots in general. For this they are accused by right-wingers as being treacherous, “rumcu” (“Rum lovers”). The starkest example of the Turkish Cypriot Right’s discomfort with bicomunal activities is the recent (starting from December 1997) and past instances of prohibition of any such meetings by the Denktash regime. The Left, especially CTP, resents these as evinced during a recent UN Anniversary Open Day which took place at Ledra Palace (a UN-controlled hotel inside the dividing zone) and was open to both sides. Talat, the leader of CTP, accused the Turkish Cypriot authorities of placing obstacles for Turkish Cypriots to attend precisely because they dislike rapprochement and the development of peace between the two communities.


37. By Turkish Cypriot Right we mean the two larger parties UBP and DP, while by Left we refer to CTP and the smaller TKP. It should be noted, however, that as with the Greek Cypriots these are not absolute distinctions. Individuals within the more liberal (rather than nationalist) wings of the Right may participate and support bicomunal initiatives, while the leader of TKP, Mustafa Akinci, traditionally a very strong supporter of such initiatives adopted a more ambivalent position after entering into a government coalition with UBP. For a general discussion of the similarities and differences in outlook between the Right and Left on the two sides see Yiannis Papadakis, “20 Chronia Meta apo ti? I Pollapl Noimatodotisi tou 1974”, in N. Peristianis and G. Tsaggaras (eds.), Anatomia nias Metamorphosis (Nicosia: Intercollege Press, 1995), pp. 360–365.

38. For an account of political developments and differences in the Turkish Cypriot side see Clement Dodd (ed.), The Political, Social and Economic Development of Northern Cyprus (Huntingdon: Eothen Press, 1993).

39. See CTP’s daily paper Yeni Duzen, 23 October 1999, “Yarin, Dikenli Telleri Aship Bulushuyoruz”, p. 1 for a front page report of an upcoming UN Open Day at Ledra Palace encouraging Turkish Cypriots to attend in order to meet with Greek Cypriots. See also Yeni Duzen, 26 October 1999, “Devlet Ishkencesi Yildimadi”, p. 1 for a report on the obstacles placed by the Turkish Cypriot authorities and Yeni Duzen, 26 October 1999, “Barishtan Korkuyorlar”, p. 1, for Talat’s angry reaction towards the Turkish Cypriot authorities that placed obstructions. See also Fileleftheros, 16 June 1999, “Diakratiki Epanaprosegisi”, p. 12, for a report of a discussion in the Turkish Cypriot parliament on
Paradoxically, when it comes to the ongoing bicomunal meetings of Turkish and Greek Cypriot party leaders, the issue that such contacts can lend recognition is never raised. As if by tacit agreement, all Cypriot politicians across the ethnic and ideological divide evade any discussion of the issue. This reinforces the argument that the discourse of recognition is manipulated in order to control the cross-ethnic contact of individual Cypriots, rendering it possible only under official auspices and party representation.

The Official Frames

In terms of official positions produced from the local debates, the Greek Cypriot side has generally emphasised the international dimension of the Cyprus problem (“a problem of invasion and occupation”), whereas the Turkish Cypriot side has focused attention on the internal dimension (“a problem of ethnic persecution”). In a sense one might expect the Turkish Cypriot regime to welcome bicomunal meetings which strive to create understanding and tolerance precisely as proof of the existence of a significant internal dimension. Still, the demonising rhetoric against the past practices of the Greek Cypriots that it puts forth means it has so far strongly opposed bicomunal encounters of various sorts.

The official Greek Cypriot side fears so much the possibility of the Turkish Cypriot state gaining recognition, and thus legitimising occupation, that reluctant paternalistic acceptance and selective opposition to bicomunal meetings has obsessively expressed this concern. But a more general objection towards such meetings (which for tactical purposes remains officially unofficial) has sprung from an attempt to deny emphasis on the internal dimension of the Cyprus problem. After 1974, there was a major shift in Greek Cypriot historiography towards the documentation of events of past co-existence and co-operation (along with a tendency to downplay conflict and problems), creating a vision of the past as characterised by “peaceful coexistence”. This has received widespread public acceptance as it supports the notion of a future united Cyprus. But sometimes, even according to this logic, trust-building meetings can suffer. The argument goes as follows: in the past we had no problems with Turkish Cypriots and so not only is there no point in bicomunal workshops but rather these workshops imply that there were problems, which is what the Turkish Cypriot propaganda argues. In addition, these workshops can be viewed as an attempt by various other external agencies and states to derail the Cyprus problem from its essence (the international dimension, a problem created by the Turkish invasion) and make it appear as an interethnic one.

If then the official stance of the Greek Cypriot side towards the issue of

Footnote 39 continued

the issue of bicomunal meetings. Talat once again disagreed with the government policy that these should only take place as bi-state meetings, and protested against general efforts to obstruct them. The issue of “bicomunal contacts” was debated fiercely in the Turkish Cypriot parliament during February 2000. In the course of this open debate Talat criticised the Turkish Cypriot Ministers’ Council decision to prohibit such meetings and demanded their allowance. For details of this debate see Kibris (Turkish Cypriot daily), 19 February 2000, “Meclis’te ‘Iki Toplumlu Temas’ Tartışması”, pp. 6–7.

bicommunal events has been marked by considerable ambivalence by virtue of the two aforementioned issues (rapprochement and recognition), the official Turkish Cypriot stance has been much clearer. On one level, the Turkish Cypriot authorities also need to appear to respect UN resolutions calling for bicommunal meetings and contacts, and sometimes allow them. Yet, they clearly dislike such efforts and officially sabotage them to a far greater extent than the Greek Cypriot authorities do. The reason for this is obvious. The official Turkish Cypriot stance is for a future solution which as far as possible ensures division, in opposition to the integrationist Greek Cypriot official stance. If Greek Cypriots officially talk of rapprochement and tend to emphasise past co-operation and co-existence, Turkish Cypriots officially emphasise past animosity and stress the need for the people to remain as far as possible separated in the future. The Turkish Cypriot authorities present the Greek Cypriots as the major past aggressors, past and current enemies. Thus bicommunal meetings are regarded as contact with the enemies against which the “heroic Turkish Cypriot fighters shed their blood” as the stock rhetoric goes. The very idea that people may meet, discuss and try to find common ways forward often sounds to official ears not only dangerous, but positively abhorrent and treacherous. As much as the Greek Cypriot regime worries about the possible recognition of the TRNC, the Turkish Cypriot regime fears that bicommunal meetings lend recognition to the Republic of Cyprus as the only (legitimate) state in Cyprus.

Local Assemblies in the UN Buffer Zone

Above we have outlined the historical and international dimensions of recognition, the problematic official positions of the two implicated ethnic groups and how these are further refracted through the dominant political structures, namely the major political parties. We now turn to have a look at how these discourses have been employed, resisted and subverted by social actors, focusing here on border locations.41

The Ledra Palace Hotel

Borders, whether of a de facto or de jure nature, are places of division but also ones of contact. The UN Buffer Zone in Cyprus is no different. The Ledra Palace hotel inside the Buffer Zone in Nicosia is the primary site where intercommunal meetings have taken place.42 Cross-ethnic contact at Ledra Palace has taken

41. The issue of foreign residents and Cypriot Maronites would, in addition, be very interesting to examine in relation to how their special treatment and movements across the Green Line both teases and challenges the official discourse of recognition. For an interesting article on how a Jewish couple living in a house situated on the Green Line daily negotiates questions of recognition, see Juliette Dickstein, “‘Portrait of a Jew’: Ethnic Identity and National Belonging in Cyprus”, The Cyprus Review, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1999), pp. 83–94. Nowadays, a new medium helping individuals to “cross” the Green Line on a daily basis and greatly assisting cross-ethnic activities is the internet. The Web site www.peace-cyprus.org, featuring the logo of “using technology to build bridges of communication”, co-managed by Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots, provides the most extensive links, lists, and news of bicommunal initiatives.

42. These took place until late in 1997, when most of these meetings were prohibited by the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktash. Later on many of these resumed in the borderline village of Pyla.
many forms. Firstly, meetings of negotiators and political party leaders have taken place focusing on “high” politics. Secondly, meetings of municipal leaders and town planners of Nicosia have occurred dealing with local issues. In fact, the largest, longest running and very successful effort of bicomunal cooperation took place through the jointly set up Masterplan for the development of Nicosia. This was initiated by left-wing Mustafa Akinci (Turkish Cypriot) and pro-rapprochement Lellos Demetriades (Greek Cypriot), as the municipal leaders of the two communities of divided Nicosia.\footnote{43} Thirdly, trade union leaders from both communities have met to discuss labour issues. Fourthly, numerous bicomunal meetings were organised by concerned citizens under various rubrics: e.g. meetings of lawyers, educators, women, youth, artists, and others.\footnote{44} The citizens’ initiative at Ledra Palace created a large interlinked body of various groups from both sides that started to meet regularly. It even organised events outside Cyprus, which involved people from the two sides, along with groups from other places that faced similar problems (e.g. Israelis and Palestinians, Catholic and Protestant Irish). All these initiatives gradually acquired a more organised form at the end of the 1980s and then exploded during the 1990s to encompass hundreds of people meeting in Ledra Palace encouraged and facilitated by the United Nations.\footnote{45} Local organisers also took advantage of the support and resources offered by other institutions, primarily the US educational institution Fulbright, the British Council, PRIO, the German embassy and others. Those participating in the citizens’ initiatives tried hard to avoid the thorny issue of recognition and defended their rights to meet with people of the other community and to allow open discussion and reflection on Cyprus. The issue of recognition was being continually thrust upon them from officials of the two sides, or even sometimes brought up by members of the groups themselves. Yet, with regard to the main issue discussed here, these numerous meetings on various levels encompassing semi- and unofficial events did not in the least affect either side’s gaining of international recognition or of denying it to the other, an outcome fully in line with the argument proposed above.

The primary aims of many citizens’ groups were to meet each other (many meeting someone from the other community for the first time) and create a space for direct interpersonal and interethnic dialogue—an exchange of views and experiences beyond the one-dimensional official discourses of either side. Broadly speaking, by enunciating highly personal narratives, Greek Cypriots tried to make Turkish Cypriots aware of the tragedy of 1974 for themselves, while Turkish Cypriots of the severe problems and violence they were subjected to in the 1960s. These issues have been officially silenced within each concerned side. Concepts such as apology, forgiveness, relational empathy and mutual acknowledgement were employed in such meetings in order to reach understandings beyond those allowed by the dominant political discourses according to

\footnote{43. Demetriades, \textit{op. cit.}} \footnote{44. For a list of such groups and activities see Heinz-Jurgen Axt and Hansjorg Brey (eds.), \textit{Cyprus and the European Union} (Munich: Sudosteuropa-Gesellschaft, 1997), pp. 247–255; Loizos, \textit{op. cit.}} \footnote{45. Such exchanges of multiple narratives made the participants aware of the diversity of experience even within each ethnic group. For a general account of the development of citizens’ cross-ethnic contacts see Maria Hadjipavlou-Trigeorgi, “Little Confidence in Confidence Building? Conflict Resolution in the Context of the United Nations”, in H. Axt and H. Brey (eds.), \textit{Cyprus and the European Union} (Munich: Sudosteuropa-Gesellschaft, 1997), pp. 36–54.}
which a critique of one’s own side is treated as tantamount to treason. Many participants thought that if political dialogue was restricted to official negotiation, it was bound to proceed in a confrontational and antagonistic manner, while such citizens’ meetings provided an alternative ground for grassroots initiatives to supplement or enable the procedures of “high” politics.46

A sociological profile of this movement is unavailable, but the presence of educated professionals was notable. Their impact, especially a direct one on negotiations is difficult to assess. They have certainly created an awareness of the existence of new voices and vocabularies that politicians may heed to. They may prove invaluable in the case of a political solution in having developed a significant substratum of relationships and for having covered much ground for specific readjustments such as the rewriting of history textbooks. Partly due to the problem of recognition, they have broken new ground for discussion on issues pertaining to the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society, and multiculturalism, issues which are significant on their own merit irrespective of whether the Cyprus problem is resolved.47

The Village of Pyla

The mixed village of Pyla, beyond currently being a site of various meetings, is highly revealing in itself of how implicated social actors may meet and also, under certain circumstances, selectively employ the issue of recognition for their own goals. Pyla is a village under UN administration with a population of 800 Greek Cypriots and 400 Turkish Cypriots and is unique of its kind in Cyprus by virtue of being the only mixed village inside the Buffer Zone.48 The discourse of recognition is daily used and abused by the locals. For example, Turkish Cypriots living there have refused to pay electricity, water and garbage duties to the Greek Cypriot authorities that provide these resources and services arguing that they do not wish to recognise the Republic of Cyprus. In doing this, they took advantage of the united network of provisions of such utilities that would have made it impossible to cut off one community in the village. Greek Cypriots of Pyla sometimes exploited the situation by receiving their own electricity via a clandestine electrical cable from a neighbour Turkish Cypriot who did not pay for it. At the same time, many Turkish Cypriots living there are employed on the Greek Cypriot side and thus willingly apply for and take up scores of necessary official Greek Cypriot documents (identity cards, national insurance, all kinds of certificates, etc.) that can allow them to conduct their financial dealings with Greek Cypriots. The Greek Cypriot owners of fish restaurants took


47. On the wider impact of such groups see Loizos, op. cit.; Hadjipavlou-Christegeorgis, “Different Relationships to the Land”, op. cit., pp. 261–270.

advantage of the cheap supply of fish from the north that they abundantly sold in their restaurants, which for a period were frequented by masses of other Greek Cypriots (since the “smuggling” of fish to the south has been branded illegal). Greek Cypriots also flocked in Pyla to buy consumer goods such as cigarettes, whisky, and leather goods sold cheaply in Turkish Cypriot shops. This of course went against the Greek Cypriot authorities’ attempts at imposing a trade embargo on the Turkish Cypriot economy. While internationally they were fairly successful in this, locally many goods passed through Pyla either to Greek Cypriots who lived there, or to the more numerous others who went there in order to eat or buy things.\(^{49}\)

Much as they use the situation to their advantage, the people of Pyla also have been constrained by official policies on both sides revolving around the issue of recognition and as to “who” is in control of the village. To that extent, even the smallest issue (e.g. the raising of a flag, the size of a minaret) can be blown to enormous “national honour” proportions, sometimes by the villagers themselves, but most often by concerned outsiders. During 1998, for example, the paviing of a road by the authorities of one side created enormous friction locally but also wider concerns as it was presented to imply the acceptance of the authority of one side. Another example concerned a 1986 policy of the Greek Cypriot authorities by which it was decided to allocate free plots in Pyla for the housing of locals, especially young families, who might wish to live in the village. This area, where now numerous houses have been built, is known as “New Pyla Village”. Turkish Cypriot inhabitants were also interested and the United Nations took an interest in how these could become available to the Turkish Cypriot villagers too. Nevertheless, despite protracted negotiations and talks during 1993–1994 with the Greek Cypriot Larnaka District authorities that were in charge of the project, this did not become feasible. Despite the attempts of the United Nations to act as a mediator, the issue with regard to Turkish Cypriots being given plots floundered on the issue of recognition. The Larnaka District authorities wanted a straightforward application from Turkish Cypriots while the latter refused to apply in this manner. At times the negotiations went into minute details and possibilities as to whether, for example, it would be possible for a form to be filled in by Turkish Cypriots and then given to the United Nations to be delivered to the Larnaka District authorities, or even if the Turkish Cypriot applicant could accompany the UN official there but it would be the latter who would actually hand over the form. In the end no agreement was reached.\(^{50}\)

A similar issue emerged after the allocation to Turkish Cypriots of a plot in order to build a soccer field. The plot lay inside the Buffer Zone and was designated as “government land (halitiki)” and the United Nations first received the consent and agreement of the Greek Cypriot authorities in order to allow Turkish Cypriots to proceed with their plans to build the soccer pitch. In this case the Greek Cypriot Larnaka District Office did accept the Turkish Cypriot

\(^{49}\) Eventually, however, after 1989, the Greek Cypriot authorities launched a massive police surveillance campaign of intimidation of Greek Cypriots who visited Pyla, leading to hundreds of highly publicised arrests, and to a large extent were successful in scaring people from visiting the village and in stopping the exchange of goods through Pyla.

\(^{50}\) Interview (by Yiannis Papadakis) with UN Spokesperson Waldemar Rokoshewski on 29 May 1995.
application through the United Nations and it was felt that it had all been settled until later a report appeared in a Turkish Cypriot newspaper in 1996 accusing the village Turkish Cypriot authorities of signing a document produced by the Greek Cypriot authorities for the lease of the plot. The Turkish Cypriot village headman (muhtar) along with the president of the soccer club denied this arguing that they had only taken permission to proceed from the UN authorities responsible for administering the Buffer Zone.\textsuperscript{51} Eventually, the stadium was built and is currently in use. Still, it has been a continuous source of friction between the three sides, the United Nations, Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot authorities as to who has jurisdiction and the ultimate decision-making power over the Buffer Zone and how issues like building permits should be resolved.

Interestingly, the peculiar status negotiated in Pyla has led to the avoidance of employing the two Cypriot state flags, i.e. those of the Republic of Cyprus and of the TRNC. All the other national flags of the world can be raised and in fact are being raised occasionally in tourist restaurants and souvenir shops. The only other exception concerns the “motherland” flags of Greece and Turkey that are allowed to fly one each constantly at the two local primary schools, and in the rest of the village for only six days every year, three for each side on commemorations. In other words, Pyla has become a site where the competing claims to statehood of the two Cypriot regimes are by their own consensus sidelined. Paradoxically, while trying to avoid the employment in Pyla of the other side’s symbol of sovereignty, the two Cypriot regimes have accepted to display the symbols of sovereignty of their “motherland” states, thus in effect betraying their own claims to independence.

Life in Pyla goes on with, without, and despite, recognitions. More importantly, the contacts of Turkish and Greek Cypriots in this village since 1974, even since 1983 when the TRNC was declared, have been taking place on a daily basis, frustrating or endorsing rival claims but \textit{without effecting the implied recognition scenario} the two sides officially proclaim. Cross-ethnic contact in this Cypriot microcosm tells a quite different story to the official one.”

\textbf{Unchairing the State, Rethinking Recognition}

The discourse of state-government recognition in Cyprus has been intense. On the one hand, it has been officially perceived from both sides as constituting an inescapable necessity, the \textit{realpolitik} approach in promoting their respective claims and interests internationally. The rules of the international legal system privileging sovereign statehood over non-state actors enhance the possibility that ethnic disputes follow this particular direction and develop the relevant rhetoric for effective political contest. On the other hand, the discourse of recognition has been locally popularised for domestic political gains, especially party politicking. It has been employed by both regimes as a means of prohibiting or strictly regulating cross-ethnic contact that in effect normalises ethnic division both on the ground and as mentality. In doing so, the two sides misappropriate the international law of implied recognition and continue their historical reification of each other. By denying or giving specific “recognitions”

\textsuperscript{51} See \textit{Ortam} (Turkish Cypriot daily), 17 October 1996, “Futbol Sahası”, p. 2; “Biz Rum Yönetimi İle Sozleşme İmzalamadık”, p. 5.
of the other, Cypriot regimes of power thus naturalise what they do or say about each other.

However, what has been less discussed between those articulating arguments concerning recognition is both the character of sovereign statehood in general and Cypriot statehood in particular. In contemporary political science, there have been important developments challenging both the necessity-primacy of the state and the hardcore interpretation of statehood. There are works that have shown the conceptual and practical inadequacy of statehood, especially as globally applied in the post-colonial period, often to delimit the richness of political and economic life as well as provide order or administer justice. Other works show the increasing power of non-state actors, not only in influencing political decisions, but in successfully redefining global issues. The European Union, to which Cyprus aspires to enter, is an organisation where state sovereignty is daily negotiated over a wide range of issues. Still, both regimes in Cyprus seem to conduct their debate within conventional conceptions of the state which define it as a fixed and absolute political phenomenon. Little attention is paid to the historical-colonial contingencies that led to the creation of the Republic of Cyprus as well as to how both sides contradict their sovereign claims by willingly handing over functions of sovereignty to their “mother” states (especially over matters of defence and governmental decision-making). The public debate has now slowly begun to extend to how the post-earthquake Turko-Greek love affair when combined with the European Union can largely redefine the national-state claims the ideologues have so fervently defended. In terms of cross-ethnic contact, the official policy of the two sides may therefore change in the future, especially following the positive climate of the EU Summit in Helsinki, but this still begs the question of why strict cross-ethnic control has been considered of paramount national interest for so long. Moreover, it is most strange that governments have been negotiating or aspire to negotiate membership to the European Union while pursuing policies that directly or indirectly prohibit such contacts from taking place. It is also difficult to understand why the “Europe of the people”—while officially supporting such contacts—has not made them conditional from the very beginning upon states considered for membership to the Union.

This has been happening, on closer inspection, not only because the technical language of recognition has been problematically applied, but also because the politics of assiduity has been one dimensional. Assiduity need not be rejected but can be reinvented by reflecting on how the state as code of recognition of the other is only one among many possibilities. Reflecting as such requires a mental shift into re-cognising the other not as an infinite totality but in its radical alterity, less as an object of knowledge and more as an ethical encounter to

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which we need to respond in ever-changing, ever-inventive ways. Emmanuel Levinas has suggested how this responsibility to the other strikes one as ethical call especially in and as face-to-face contact. 53 What is denied in not allowing cross-ethnic contacts, beyond dialogue and co-operation, is also personal experience or recognition of the other as face. But not of a face that becomes content, of which things have been said, a correlate to being and knowledge. The face Levinas has in mind is a face that obligates one to realise that one is always with-an-other, and so to look beyond the interests of oneself and respond to the call to do justice. The recognition of the other as face then, unlike the assiduous ones tied to international sittings and standings, works to free “the neighbour” from national inscriptions, from the restrictive and simplistic masks of states.

This is not to suggest a new code but rather to point out the existence of different cultures of recognition erased or marginalised in giving state recognition its primacy. In a way this is what some of our hosts (Israelis and Palestinians alike), only belatedly realised as they told us during an earlier presentation of this paper. Indeed, their record until recently on individuals meeting across the ethnic-national divide has been nothing to be proud of. In both camps, with varying intensity, political stigmatisation, imprisonment, and even assassination was the normalised order of the day for decades. Totalisations and demonisations, missed chances and dialogues, criminalisation of ordinary human contact, have been what they now slowly begin to recognise as the unfortunate, biased, and ideological discourse through which they framed knowledge about each other. Ironically—and hypocritically—it was through the face-to-face encounter that they criminalised for reasons of state recognition that the peace initiative for state recognition was brokered in Oslo. Still, past Israeli and Palestinian official practice of demonising the other do not simply disappear but are currently encountered by both sides as a major problem in attempts to shift public opinion that has remained a victim of its own propaganda. In other words, the so-called realist policies presented as necessary for effective political contestation cut both ways and now return to haunt their faithful pursuants.

By this—to reiterate—we are not suggesting that state recognition has no political implications or can be lightly given in the case of Cyprus or elsewhere. We, rather, seek to put state recognition into perspective, challenge its monopolisation of international cognition and political discourse, and so open up debate about other forms and cultures of recognition. For it is becoming increasingly evident that state recognition is not the self-determination panacea it is commonly presented to be, but can instead be self-totalising and other-totalising with disastrous implications for multiethnic societies. Claims to statehood can and have become, in cases like Cyprus, more than often an instrument of domination. To that extent, the issue of state sovereignty is less whether it will be recognised by, divided or shared between, Turkish and Greek Cypriots, but rather how sovereignty as a territorial ideal should not be used in ways that discriminate against or take control over the lives of either ethnic group. The record and the discourse of both regimes of power has been—in this respect too—very disappointing.

The current UN Secretary-General in a recent report to the Security Council on his mission of good offices in Cyprus succinctly described the problem:

In the decades during which it has resisted efforts at settlement, the Cyprus problem has become overlain with legalistic abstractions and artificial labels, which are more and more difficult to disentangle and which would appear increasingly removed from the actual needs of both communities.\textsuperscript{54}

Perhaps, at some point in the future, the cognition uses to which the state is currently put will figure as absurd as the past uses of chairs—utilised by “civilised” colonialists to separate themselves from squatting natives, or by 13th century Spaniards to differentiate themselves from Muslims, animals and women.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{54} S/1999/707, 22 June 1999. \\