Aporias of Identity and the ‘Cyprus Problem’

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Hasanpoulia, Hasanpoulia, flying like birds,
Dressed in different clothes everyday
Greek today and Turkish tomorrow.
(Anonymous Cypriot poem)

The communities in Cyprus were divided according to their religious beliefs and not according to their ethnic origin, for reasons only known to the joint committee established with the duty to complete a draft constitution for the independent Republic of Cyprus, incorporating the Basic Structure agreed at the Zurich Conference. It may be true that what distinguishes the communities may not only be the factor of religion but also their ethnic origin. Whatever the description of the community may be, the fact is that we cannot change the description given by the drafters of the Constitution. Nevertheless, the gist of the difference is not how the groups are described but whether their rights are safeguarded.

(Report Submitted by the Republic of Cyprus to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, CERD/C/299/Add.19, 1997, par. 68)

I

In contemporary Cyprus, the ascription of ethno-religious identity is highly political and juridical. Contrary to the submitted report of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), this paper argues that the gist of the difference—and of the ‘Cyprus problem’—lies precisely with how groups and communities are described in official and popular discourse. It is on the basis of such socio-legal representations that rights are granted or denied, duties enforced, both north and south of the Green Line. This situation is problematic and should be unacceptable. Especially in cases where religious beliefs and ethnic origins are conflated as suggested above, the regulation of ethno-religious identity becomes not just a complex but paradoxical exercise with serious power implications on the ground. This means, crucially, that certain politicised routes and discursive possibilities are enabled in Cyprus, and others are marginalized or disabled.
This paper argues that the dominant bicomunal framework that is the colonial legacy of the island has bequeathed an aporia to the bearer of Cypriot identity; an aporia that requires sustained critical attention and reflection.¹

The most disturbing thing about being a Cypriot is that one can only be a Greek or a Turkish Cypriot. Postcolonial Cypriot identity is quintessentially and inescapably hyphenated; and hyphenated across a fixed Greek-Turkish axis. Being simply and singly Cypriot is a constitutional impossibility.² Who is Turk or Greek has been decided on the basis of religious beliefs and less, or not at all, on the basis of language or other cultural markers. Maronites, Latins and Armenians had to collectively choose at independence, or individually later on, to be members of either the Greek or the Turkish Cypriot community. Gypsies did not bother to choose, so ‘Muslim’ Gypsies were officially branded Turks and ‘Christian’ Gypsies Greek, despite their religious practices being often ambiguous. Naturalised Cypriots of whatever national origin also had (and have) to formally become Turks or Greeks; to this effect they are given up to three months following the act of nationalisation to make up their mind as to their ethnicity. Cypriots who married across the Muslim-Christian divide before the advent of the civil marriage, had to change their religion (almost always the women) and in addition required by the state to change their ethnicity. Even today, the RoC constitution does not allow a married Cypriot woman to belong to a different ethnic community to that of her husband (it is possible for her to belong to a different nationality but not ethnicity). Citizens of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) are, or formally assumed to be, Turkish Cypriots.³ Cypriot ethno-religious ‘minorities’ in the north, such as the Maronites of Kormakiti and the Greek Cypriots of Karpasia, come under the administrative responsibility of the TRNC Ministry of Foreign Affairs; they are not Turkish Cypriot ‘natives’ but north Cypriot ‘foreigners’ with only limited rights. All of which means that Rauf Denktash’s terrible aphorism that only the island’s donkeys are genuine Cypriot nationals caricatures, but sadly also captures, a legal reality.

¹ By aporia I mean a paradox and an impasse, perplexity as to which route to follow. If one opts for a particular political route, then one legitimates this because one is already perceived as that; and that is even if one does not necessarily condone the this, nor feel the that fairly and adequately represents her. For a sustained reflection on the concept of aporia, see Jacques Derrida, Aporias, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).
² Note Article 2 of the RoC constitution.
³ Note the Preamble of the TRNC constitution.
What Mr Denktash and other ethno-centric do not accept—and indeed may find most abhorrent—is the Hasanpoulia dimension of Cypriotness. That individual Cypriots can re-hyphenate their identity, transverse ethnic boundaries with the force and gusto of rural bandits, is seditious to the dominant ethno-national regimes. These regimes will readily brand such attempts as deceitful, criminal and treacherous. They will point out that ethnicities and religions are total and mutually exclusive. They will view Greekness ‘today’ and Turkishness ‘tomorrow’ as an anomaly, monstrous hybridity or false consciousness. Consequently, they will miss how such transgression may constitute a deliberate political move, an act of resistance to power regimes, a counter-performative against the forgotten performances that fix and police the boundaries of ethno-religious identity. For one does not need to romanticise Cypriot hybridity or the banditry of Hasanpoulia to appreciate that subverting the fixity of ethno-religious identity can work against the forms of domination that are being legitimated in the name of that fixity and the fixation that follows from it.

One may content, however, that this fixity and fixation are the price to be paid for establishing consociational systems of government, where ethnic cleavages are already prevalent. Some fine-tuning has to take place ‘at the margins’, some small or ‘nomadic’ groups have to be boxed in the dominant groups, or sacrificed altogether, in order to keep the power balance and secure the rights of the larger groups and viability of the system. Such practices are not uncommon in countries that experimented with consociationalism; be it the assimilation of the indigenous people in Malaysia or the marginalisation of Maroons and Amerindians in Suriname. Yet the paradox of consociationalism is that while it appears to make a virtue of heterogeneity at the national level, it assumes and intensifies homogenisation at the ethnic level. Its multi-ethnic vision is limited, not only in reinforcing cleavages and propagating ethnic nationalisms, but also in practically undermining ethnicities that unsettle the norm or transgress the logic of the system.

Notwithstanding the merits and demerits of consociationalism as applied to Cyprus—from its inception during the British colonial period to its collapse in 1963—the effects of ethnic homogenisation are highly disturbing. Besides the adverse legal
and political effects of the bicommunal conflict on the official constitutional ‘partners’, i.e. the Greeks and Turks of Cyprus, the viability of the small ethno-religious communities has been affected and continues to be at risk. For example, the community of the Linobambakoi, the Muslim-Christian Cypriots, has virtually disappeared. They have been viewed at best as exotic anomalies or crypto-believers; at worst as traitors and crude opportunists whose ethno-religious normalisation was necessary and inevitable. The Gypsies of Cyprus have no cultural rights whatsoever. In fact, quite ironically, just about the only thing that the Greek and Turkish-Cypriot delegations agreed upon in the Bürgenstock talks was the need to delete all references to a ‘Roma community’ in Cyprus as included in the UN (Annan) Plan IV, and consequently erased from Plan V that was put to the April 2004 referendum. Maronites, Armenians and Latins are registered ‘religious communities’, but constitutionally grouped as ethnic Greeks and increasingly assimilated into the Greek-Cypriot community. Yet, there is often suspicion and resentment as to these groups’ perceived privileges and community allegiances (e.g. that the eligible males of these communities can opt out of military service in the south). This is especially with respect to the Maronites, who after 1974 managed to cross the Green Line on the basis of formal arrangements with the Turkish-Cypriot authorities and recently offered TRNC citizenship in order to regain full civil and economic rights in the north. Finally, the ethno-religious ‘converts’—who are almost always the result of mixed marriages—have been a tragic but silent problem, given that these people are often a source of shame for their parental family, and even sometimes for their new family. They generally had to repress their ethno-religious background so as to gain a degree of normality and social acceptance within their adopted communities.

This paper will examine the effects of bcommunalism with respect to the regulation of ethno-religious identity. It will also examine bcommunalism’s wider human implications. Following from works that have challenged the idea of the nation

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6 Following complaints of discrimination from Greek Cypriots nationals, the ombudswoman has recently criticised the voluntary military service in the Cyprus National Guard for Maronites, Armenians and Latins while having compulsory conscription for all other ‘Greek Cypriots’. See *Phileleftheros*, 14 March 2006.
as a perennial phenomenon, it will underscore the contingent and performative character of ethnic, national and religious identity, and to that extent it will adopt a genealogical perspective. My hypothesis in relation to Cyprus is that the advent of modern governmentality and biopolitics has made it more difficult for individuals to use ethno-religious identities flexibly and pragmatically, including using them as a tactic to resist the policies of the ruling elite. Still, I maintain that certain groups and individuals continue to use their ethno-religious identity as a tactic and as a means of resistance to power regimes, and I propose that this situation should be enhanced.

To be sure, the discourse of western modernity also challenged religious hierarchies and domination, and so empowered means of resistance. However, its secular and ‘rights of man’ alternatives subtly shifted politico-theological contests to ethno-national ones, and these got increasingly naturalised as the proper categories for political action and emancipation. Specifically in Cyprus, dividing and classifying the population in order to furnish it with ‘good governance’ helped to solidify fluid and often ambiguous ethno-religious boundaries, rendering movement across those boundaries increasingly formal, and sometimes impossible. The British colonial governmentality conceived a bi-ethnic (primarily bi-religious) model for managing the Cypriot population. This model assisted and in turn was supported by the emerging Greek and Turkish ethno-nationalisms and their reifications and violence on the ground. The clash of these ethno-nationalisms led to the London-Zurich consociational agreements, a compromise that formalised and normalised bicommonalism, and abnormalised ethno-religious syncretism, hybridity and heterogeneity. We still live today the effects of this contingent historical and colonial division; effects which are sometimes projected as, and at other times hidden behind, what became known as the ‘Cyprus problem’.

II

National historiographies are obsessed with the uniformity, linearity and continuity of the nation over long periods of the historical past. Ordinary social practices

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8 In relation to Cyprus this has been clearly illustrated in the work of Yiannis Papadakis. See for example his *Perceptions of History and Collective Identity: A Study of Contemporary Greek Cypriot*
unsettling this grand picture or mixing and complicating ethno-religious narratives are brushed aside or relegated to footnotes. Still they occasionally return to bother the perplexed.

Consider the following entry in the 1943 volume of *Notes and Queries*. A perplexed reader sought information on the ‘Linobambakoi of Cyprus—What is the history and what are the peculiar tenets of this religious body? The Linobambakoi seem to have drawn upon both Christianity and Mohammedanism.’ The reply one month later utilised an Arab fable to explain their inter-faith status and mercurial character, narrating the story of the Ostrich addressing an approaching Bedouin: ‘if you seek a camel for your load, am I not a bird? But, if you come hither a-fowling, Why, behold, Sir! I am a camel.’ The respondent suggested that the Linobambakoi ‘originated in a similar way’. They shifted religions depending on the situation and to that extent employed their identity as a tactic against the policies of the ruling elite.9

A more extensive study of the ‘Muslim-Christian sect’ of the Linobambakoi earlier in the century, outlined in similar vein the tactical uses of religious identity, which led to this ‘chameleon-like sect’ to be seen by most Cypriots as ‘a religion of hypocrisy, with no little contempt and distrust’.10 For Michell, being a Linobambakos was a means through which individuals tried to avoid acts of religious persecution, or the payment of tax, or faith-based inheritance laws, or military conscription, during the Ottoman empire. Yet, in two ways, Michell also allows for a more spiritual and cosmopolitan perspective on the Linobambakoi. They could be seen as being similar to the ‘Arnaouts’, who living among Christians and Muslims ‘declare that they are utterly unable to judge which religion is the best; but, to be certain of not entirely rejecting the truth, they very prudently follow both.’ The other common title of the Linobambakoi, namely that of ‘Apostolic’ (*Apostolikoi*), suggests them perhaps also as emissaries of God, or in colloquial Cypriot as ‘trees in the wilderness’ on which John the Baptist fed.11 Thus, besides the notion of religious deceivers, it seems that the Linobambakoi were also represented as a genuinely syncretistic sect or as unique religious missionaries.

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9 Sayar and D.A. Percival, ‘The Linobambakoi of Cyprus’, *Notes and Queries*, 135 (June-December 1943), pp. 20, 115-6.
Beckingham went further, criticising the tendency to see the Linobambakoi as originating from one or another ethnic or religious community.

In fact the phenomenon they [the Linobambakoi] present is one common in many parts of the Ottoman empire. It was due, not only to a desire to escape the attentions of ecclesiastical tax-gatherers and recruiting officers alike, but to the fundamental religious beliefs of the peasantry, who share the theological hospitality of the ancient Greeks and Romans to the gods of other nations. It is an attitude which is now vanishing rapidly, not because of religious fervour, but through nationalist feeling. To many people of the eastern Mediterranean where Christianity and Islam were practised in the same or in adjacent villages, these religions did not present themselves as two mutually exclusive systems of belief, but rather as two ways of conciliating supernatural forces.12

For Beckingham, the Linobambakoi were not a sect but rather people ‘addicted to a practice which was once widespread’13 and for whom hybrid religious beliefs was the norm, not the exception. That is to say, these people participated in each other’s religious rituals and festivities, partook in the surrounding spiritual menu, without necessarily or consciously becoming ‘Muslims’ or ‘Christians’, or even Linobambakoi, which in any case was rarely a self-designation.14 Associating religion with exclusivist ethnic identity has rendered strange such theological hospitality.

To my knowledge, the above cosmopolitan and spiritual representations of the Linobambakoi are totally absent from local Cypriot historiography. Even the notion that the Linobambakoi adopted their religious identity tactically to resist the burdens of imperial rule tends to be given an ethno-nationalist spin, i.e. that this tactic displays a weaker nature than that of their co-‘nationals’ who weathered the harsh political conditions yet retained their ‘true’ identity. On the whole, they are presented as either crypto-Christians or crypto-Muslims (mostly the former) who have yielded to the pressures of Ottoman authority, or nominally converted to avoid criminal or political accusations, or paying tax or military conscription. The syncretistic dimension is therefore deliberately set aside. Whereas I do not want to suggest that the Linobambakoi cannot be viewed as ‘publicly Muslims but really Christians’ or ‘publicly Christians but really Muslims’, I have a problem with the thesis that they

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13 Ibid.
14 The classic work looking at syncretistic religious practices during the Ottoman empire is Frederick W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam Under the Sultans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929).
were just that, or that all of them were just that. I think this is an oversimplification of a complex historical phenomenon, which is not, of course, peculiarly Cypriot (note, among others cases, the Donmeh, the Bektashis, the Druze and the Yezidis during and after the Ottoman empire; or across the world, the Iberian Marranos, the Russian Molokans, the Dalit converts in India, and the Caribbean followers of Santeria). Such oversimplification is typically the result of historiographies that are written on the basis of ethnic purity and perennial national identity. Yet, it is not uncommon for such historiographies to have an implicit (and sometimes explicit) agenda that challenges the purity of the opposing ethnic group (e.g. the idea that Turkish Cypriots are really or mostly Islamicised Greeks) and this as a means of undermining the other group’s autonomy and collective rights.

Contra ethnocentric/nationalist historiographies the universality and ‘normality’ of the syncretistic cannot be denied. In Cyprus, this is quite evident in a variety of different ethno-religious practices, which already precede the rule of the Ottoman Empire. For example, Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela who visited the island in the 12th century CE writes that besides the Orthodox Jews, there were in Cyprus also a peculiar sect of ‘Epicurean’ Jews that were known as ‘*kaphrosein* [Arabic for infidels] or Cyprians’. According to Benjamin, these Cyprians ‘profane the evening of the Sabbath and keep holy that of the Sunday’, which shows that they must have been a collage of Judaism and Christianity, with add in ‘Epicurean’, perhaps as a derogatory epithet for their hedonistic lifestyle.

What the case of the ‘Cyprians’ illustrates is the extent to which religious syncretism may be a formalisation of attempts to dissent from the law, as laid down by dominant regimes of power. Official religious authorities may seek to ridicule, or hereticise practices that transgress the law, but history shows they cannot make them unpopular. Syncretistic transgression has been a major dogmatic problem for both the Latin and the Greek churches in Cyprus. Felix Faber, a Dominican monk who visited Cyprus on his way to the Holy Land in the late fifteenth century, reflects on the opportunism (and forbidden pleasures) of Latin-Greek hybridity.

How then can an honest man and good Catholic be a Latin and Greek curate? No one would do this except he willed to satisfy his covetousness or his fancy. For such men take on themselves what in each rite catches their fancy, but

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reject what is hard and burdensome in both. Many Latin priests go over to the Greek rite, and presume to take wives, but they wish at the same time to enjoy the privileges of Latin priests, in which they have no part.\textsuperscript{16}

For the Greek-Orthodox church, the problem lied with those who followed the 1260 	extit{Bulla Cypria}, accepting Papal authority while retaining autonomy over the liturgy.\textsuperscript{17} This was a major source of controversy and conflict within the Greek-Orthodox church, and not so much because some priests and bishops changed to the Catholic faith, but because the Orthodox liturgical identity was still retained by them, which was seen as a deception and a conspiracy to subvert the Orthodox faith from within. (This is, of course, still a source of conflict with respect to the Uniate churches of Eastern Europe and the Middle East.) Even today, the syncretistic (Latin-influenced ‘renaissance’ or ‘naïve style’) iconography in Cypriot Orthodox churches is looked down upon by the Greek-Orthodox church, which demands the purist and austere Byzantine style.

Beyond religious syncretism, there is further evidence of practices of religious simulation and dissimulation well before the Ottoman occupation of Cyprus. This seems to have specifically concerned the captives of Turkish and Arab origin that were brought to the island after the raids of Cypriot ships in Asiatic and African coasts. The status of these prisoners is interesting. Some of them where voluntarily or involuntarily baptised; others were not, so as to be kept as slaves. But as Leontios Makhairas implies the allegiance of the ‘converts’ was always suspected, especially the possibility of apostasy and rebellion during Mameluke invasions.\textsuperscript{18} This led authors, like Beckingham, to suggest that during the Latin period some Cypriots were ‘at least nominally Christians, who were of Turkish, Arab, or Egyptian origin.’\textsuperscript{19}

In short, religious syncretism and dissimulation existed before 1571 when the Ottoman rule was established in Cyprus. To simply explain the hybrid practices of the Linobambakoi as a post-Ottoman feature is to miss this specific point as well as the fact that subaltern identity tactics and syncretistic spiritualities are characteristic of different societies and epochs.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Excerpta Cypria}, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{17} For a discussion of the \textit{Bulla Cypria}, see Chris Schabel, ‘Religion’ in Angel Nicolaou-Konnari and Chris Schabel (eds), \textit{Cyprus: Society and Culture, 1191-1374} (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 201-212.
\textsuperscript{19} Beckingham, ‘The Turks of Cyprus’, p. 171.
The Ottoman rule brought forth a new system of governance: the millet. Institutionalised in the 15th century, the millet system divided Ottoman subjects on religious lines. The millet, or religious group, operated as a civil unit that was semi-autonomous, allowing the separate exercise of legal, fiscal and educational functions, though final authority rested with the Sultan and his government. On the whole, the system delegated considerable power to religious leaders who acted both as agents of the Sultan and as representatives of their religious community. Yet the hierarchy of the millets—with the Muslim millet at the top and the status of the other millets determined on the basis of perceived submission across time—meant that there was always an incentive for people to change millets, to tactically or nominally convert. (This opportunity was not however extended to Muslims, for apostasy was not allowed until the Tanzimat reforms in the 19th century.) Living on borderlines, practising dipistia or being a mezzo-kurt, that is locating oneself in-between millets and therefore maximising one’s options (avoiding additional tax if you were Muslim, or military conscription if you were non-Muslim, whatever was worse at a given period) was perhaps the most privileged position to be.

Furthermore, the semi-autonomous character of the millets, allowed Ottoman subjects to exploit and occasionally play the jurisdiction of one millet against the other.20 As shown in Jennings’ archival research, conversion to Islam was a quick and effective means through which Cypriot men and women got a divorce. If one partner freely decided to convert, the other would be given either the option to convert or accept divorce. The records show that this method of divorce was common for men as well as women, who sometimes almost immediately married other people and sometimes reaching the divorce decision by common agreement. (Given that the law forbade Muslims to convert until the 19th century, before this period, this option was only available to the Zimmis, the non-Muslim or ‘protected’ people.).21 Also, publicly becoming a Muslim was a means for men to become bigamists or polygamists. In the case of the Linobambakoi, unofficial bigamy was occasionally practised, typically

across religions as well as in different regions to enhance the individual’s double identity.\textsuperscript{22}

It has been suggested by a number of authors that conversion to Islam (and often becoming Linobambakos) or joining the Rum (Greek-Orthodox) church was especially popular among the Latin-Christian community of Cyprus in the first years of the Ottoman rule.\textsuperscript{23} Given that the Latins were the previous rulers and did not immediately surrender to the Ottomans, the status of survivors was very precarious. The Latins were not just fearful of the new Muslim rulers but also of the Greek-Orthodox population that suffered under their rule. Consequently, joining the millet of the new rulers was a guarantee of their safety; or joining the Rum millet, if that was possible, a less spiritually radical option for some Latins. In any case, converting to Islam was the most effective means for displaying allegiance to the new regime, and though mass conversion was never a policy of the Sublime Porte, it was occasionally demanded by the Ottomans if issues of insubordination were raised and in lieu of exile, imprisonment or capital punishment. Perhaps the most famous case in the Ottoman empire is that of Sabbatai Sevi, the Jewish ‘Messiah’ of Izmir, who spectacularly converted to Islam together with many of his followers in September 1666.\textsuperscript{24} The Sabbateans, or Donmeh, can still be found in Turkey today, mainly in Istanbul. They are publicly Muslims, privately Jews, and interpret the conversion of their Messiah to Islam as apocryphal.

However, conversion to Islam was also discouraged, precisely because the Ottoman subjects used it as a tactic to undermine imperial policies and assigned millet duties. Noel Dominique Hurtrel, visiting Cyprus in 1670, comments on the tribute system and its adverse economic effects on the Christian inhabitants of Cyprus: ‘No wonder that they are very poor, and have scarcely bread to eat the whole year through. Very many of them, unable to bear any longer this cruel tyranny, wish to turn Turk, but many are rejected, because (say their lords) in receiving them into the Moslem faith their tribute would be so much diminished.’\textsuperscript{25} Hurtrel does not elaborate on how

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\textsuperscript{24} The classic account of these events is Gershom Scholem, Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, translated by R.J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).
\textsuperscript{25} Excerpta Cypria, p. 233.
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many the ‘many’ were, or under what conditions the less than many managed to convert. But it seems clear that, by at least 1670 if not before, the Ottomans were aware of the millet mobility tactics of their subjects, probably allowing conversions only for those who were more likely to genuinely (rather than nominally) convert.

Nonetheless, other opportunities were also available to Ottoman subjects to escape the traditional millets, specifically by associating themselves with western powers that increasingly gained new rights and immunities for their representatives and protégés in the Ottoman Empire. Visiting Cyprus in 1806, Ali Bey (a pseudonym for the Spaniard Domigno Badia-y-Leyblich) noticed the elevated status of certain Cypriots who managed to put themselves under the protection of a European consul: ‘These protégés enjoy all the immunities of the subjects of the nation which protects them. They are distinguished by a tall black cap of bear’s skin, called calpàc.’²⁶ An interesting case is mentioned, namely that of Andrea Zimboulaki, who as a protégé of the British consulate was flying the British flag on the roof of his house in Yeroskipou, and ‘had adopted entirely the costume and manners of an Englishman.’²⁷ Furthermore, as Ali Bey notes, a number of ‘Greeks who were not protégés [were also] wearing the calpàc unnoticed by the Turks.’²⁸

Such opportunities increased in the mid-nineteenth century, following from the Ottoman reforms, which made it legally possible for Muslims to apostate.²⁹ This also made it easier for Linobambakoi or heterodox Muslims, who were officially registered under the Muslim millet, to genuinely or nominally convert, or re-convert if they so wished, depending on their collective and individual circumstances. The Greek Consul’s Report of 1869, states that the Linobambakoi (10 to 15 thousand according to his estimates) where given in that same year the right ‘to freely declare their will and to be registered as Christians or Turks’.³⁰ For those using religious identity as a tactic this was a period of great excitement, making the most of the decline of the Ottoman empire and its increased inability to enforce authority vis a vis

²⁶ Excerpta Cypria, p. 397.
²⁷ Excerpta Cypria, p. 405.
²⁸ Excerpta Cypria, p. 397.
western powers and their consuls and protégés. During this period, consulate records contain many examples of Cypriots seeking the intervention of European consuls to nullify or reverse the decisions of the local Ottoman authorities based on religious discrimination or ‘mistaken’ religious identity.\[31\]

IV

The advent of British colonialism in 1878 changed the identity politics game. The British colonial authorities sought to ‘modernise’ rather than abolish the millet system. They retained the religious divisions of the Ottoman administration, and progressively recharged them as ethnic divisions on the basis of which modern governmentality could be exercised. They introduced rudimentary democracy by establishing an ‘advisory’ Legislative Council, where representation was decided on the basis of two separate electoral rolls. Specifically, following the 1881 Cyprus Census, it was decided that nine representatives were going to be elected by ‘Greeks’ (Christians) and three by ‘Turks’ (Muslims). A similar system of democratising through segregation was replicated at the municipal level. City and village council representation was distributed proportionally, and representatives were elected through separate electoral rolls by their co-religionists. Even though in practice this was not implemented in all councils, the colonial mentality propagated the perception of a deeply divided society, comprising two antagonistic groups that run down to all minute aspects of public life and decision-making.\[32\]

The contingency and periodic revision of the census categories through which the Cypriot population was measured and reified provide in themselves a most fascinating narrative. The clearly religious categories of the earlier censuses (for example in the 1881 Census, ‘Mahometan’, ‘Greek Church’, ‘Roman Catholic’ ‘Maronite’, ‘Gregorian’, ‘Church of England’ etc. later on ‘Mahometan’ and ‘Non-Mahometan’) by the time of the 1946 census changed into ethno-religious (e.g. ‘Moslem Turkish’ and ‘Greek Orthodox’) and by the time of independence into two ethnic ‘Greek’ and ‘Turkish’, and with the ‘others’ as religious groups ‘Armenian’,

\[31\] Ibid., A.1, A.3, A.4, A.7, C.4.

‘Maronite’ and ‘Latin’. Categories such as ‘freethinker’ which measured only 1 person in the 1881 Census seem to disappear later on when the matter becomes ethnic and therefore not something one can opt out of; i.e. at least not in the way secular societies allow atheists, agnostics and freethinkers to opt out. Crucially, if secular societies allow in principle—one could even say assume—the freedom of individuals to choose or change their religion, this freedom is not extended to choosing or changing one’s ethnicity, unless specific constitutional provisions allow, or even demand (e.g. mixed marriages).

What is important to note here is that the British colonial authorities did not have to go down this route. In fact, as the colonial archives show, there were no specific instructions from the metropolitan centre that the religious beliefs of the population be ascertained at the 1881 Census. London—which did not include questions on religious beliefs in the Census in Britain—left it to the local colonial governors to decide whether knowledge of religious beliefs was necessary for good governance. For example, in Barbados the local colonial authority decided not to census the population as to the religions it practised. That the colonial authorities in Cyprus decided to do so, is probably a combination of not wishing to radically modify the existing millet system while also creating the necessary conditions for a strategy of divide-and-rule, when expedient. So the decision to ‘measure’ religious beliefs was of great significance, especially since unlike the Ottomans, the British wish to know the religion of the Cypriot population was not for tax purposes or military conscription, but for developing modern and more liberal forms of governance.

From this perspective, it is especially interesting to see how British colonialism approached the whole question of ethno-religious hybridity and heterogeneity. The strategy was on the whole ambivalent; on the one hand, officially ignoring the hybrid and in-between and, on the other hand, when ethnic communities increasingly put forward nationalist claims the British authorities responded by proposing that Cypriots were a highly heterogeneous group, a melange culture. Thus British policy on the matter was not monolithic but shifted according to historical circumstances.

33 To check.
34 Cyprus State Archives, SA1-5698.
35 Cyprus State Archives, SA1-5747.
Note, for example, that the 1881 Census, and subsequent ones, offered only a single group for Muslims (‘Mahometan’) yet a number of subgroups for Christians, who of course also included the rulers (‘Greek Church’, ‘Roman Catholic’, ‘Maronite’, ‘Gregorian’, ‘Church of England’, ‘Protestant’, ‘Presbyterian’, ‘Wesleyan Methodist’, ‘Baptist’, ‘Plymouth Brethren’, ‘Lutheran’ and ‘Unitarian’; the last four categories returning only one person each). Thus a number of heterodox Muslim groups, like the Behtashis and the Kizilbash, were not registered. This also concerned the Babis, who can be seen as an entirely different religion altogether; their prophet, Subh-i-Ezel was actually resident in Cyprus, exiled there by the Ottomans and during the British colonial period received a state pension (after his death in 1912 the pension was given to his descendants until at least the 1940s). Furthermore, since the modern imaginary saw religious beliefs as mutually exclusive, the community of the Linobambakoi were practically given the possibility of selecting only one category, despite the colonial authorities recognising their double Muslim-Christian life. A note written by the officer in charge of the 1881 Census, assumes that the question of the Linobambakoi had been more or less settled through the census.

It is an interesting fact that all the members, so far as can be ascertained, of the community of the ‘Linobambaki’ [sic] (who were formerly chiefly to be found in the villages of Athiaenou and Liopetri), returned themselves as members of the Orthodox Greek Church.

But more than twenty years later, other colonial officials such as Michell, continue to find that the Linobambakoi are still an organised community and actually in regions not mentioned in the note above. As mentioned, Michell also identifies them as a ‘Muslim-Christian sect’. This begs the question why the modern (secular) imaginary could conceive ‘Freethinker’ or ‘Plymouth Brethren’ as respectable categories of ‘religious belief’ but not ‘Muslim-Chrisitans’. Beyond this point, it has been suggested that there was a deliberate move by the colonial authorities, especially with respect to the first census, to massage the size of the population so as to make the case for two separate sizable/viable communities: one of Muslim/Turkish origin and the

other of Greek/Christian origin. So it was in the interest of the British to subdivide as much as possible the Christian community and not the less sizable Muslim community, as well as present the issue of the Linobambakoi as being ‘solved’ in favour of the Christians; i.e. not registering the fact that there were many Linobambakoi around that could further boost the size of the Greek Orthodox community. The non-publication of village-by-village results, which were nonetheless available, but only of District results in the 1881 Census, added further suspicion to propositions that the British massaged the result in order to build an early case for bi-ethnic governance. The fact that the Muslim community measured around 25% of the population in the 1881 Census, but later went down to 18%, is viewed by some as evidence of the British deceit by way of legitimating bicommmunalism, while others qualify this suggestion with the proposition that the Linobambakoi were tactically beginning to shift their allegiance to Christianity. Whatever the case, the British colonial policy institutionalised bicommmunalism in ways the Ottoman empire never did; namely as part of a ‘democratic’ system of governance, that assumed and enhanced the existence of separate homogeneous religious and increasingly ethnic communities with elected representatives. The establishment of two separate Boards of Education, created with the otherwise noble purpose of fighting illiteracy, imported teachers and books from the two ‘motherlands’, and as Pollis put it, ‘probably accounts more than any other single factor for the assimilation of notions of Greek versus Turkish nationality among the populace.’

However, when the local population, especially the Greek Christians, used their nationality as a way of challenging the British presence on the island, the British policy tried to promote the idea that (Greek) Cypriots were really a melange culture, a hybrid community with only dubious connections to ancient Greek culture as well as modern Greece. In other words, homogeneity was used to support the bi-ethnic model of governance, and heterogeneity was employed to undermine nationalist claims and aspirations. This had the obvious effects of creating a defensive attitude among the Cypriots, further supporting pressures of homogenisation and viewing

38 On this point see Papadopoulos, Turks, Muslims and Crypto-Christians, p. 130-2.
cross-national hybridity as implicit betrayal, legitimating the continuation of imperial domination.

Hybrid groups came up for grabs by the two rival, and officially censured, ethno-religious communities in Cyprus. The Linobambakoi were pressured to make a final choice, either for Christianity/Greekness or Islam/Turkishness. The Orthodox church and Islamic authorities were mobilised to gain their allegiance; the latter with successes as in Lurudjina and partly in Tylliria, the former with more successes elsewhere is Cyprus. The momentous choice of moving from the ‘hybrid’ to the ‘pure’ was often celebrated in heroi-comic ways. In the case of opting for Christianity “[i]t became standard practice upon a “conversion” for church bells to be rung and guns fired in the middle of the night, for a baptism to take place, and for a man (for it was typically a man) to be paraded through the village eating a large chunk of pork.”

As Bryant puts it, this had important implications for the politics of identity in Cyprus:

What is significant about such incidents is that before this period [the British colonial period] the linobambakoi had not been ascribed some ‘underlying’ identity, some ‘true’ identity that was hidden behind name or outward signs of confession. Their identity was in their practice, which was both Christian and Muslim, and in their kinship networks and friendships. They were marginal and ignored. They became important only in a period in which it was considered important for them to declare their ‘true’ Greek [and I would add Turkish] identity through professing their ‘true’ faith. Hence, religion became a part of a fixed, ascribed identity.

This is not to suggest that the formal ascribing of ethno-religious identity had the same dramatic effects for all Cypriots. For some, it would have been easier and more natural than others. For others, it became easier and more natural following the ‘progress’ of education, which followed strict ethno-religious lines (with the exception of the English School in Nicosia, which was a colonial institution and only a few of the local Cypriot elite sent their children). The crucial point is that the bi-ethnic system of governance established by the British colonial authorities forced individuals to choose between religious, social and cultural aspects of their identity and repress those aspects that transgressed or contradicted the official definition of

42 Ibid.
who they were or ought to have been. Typically, important syncretic sites, such as the shrine of Kirklar or Agioi Saranta, holy to both Muslims and Christians (besides the Linobambakoi) increasingly lost its religious significance for both.43

V

The formalisation of bicommmunalism in the London-Zurich Agreements that led to the establishment of the RoC propagated the colonial mentality of dividing and segregating the population. By this I do not want to suggest that the local ethno-nationalist pursuits are blameless, especially how these contributed to the hardening of ethno-religious identity and the eventual territorial division of the island. Nor do I want to suggest that a bicommmunal framework for settling the Cyprus problem is impertinent and should be abolished. The symbolic value that ethno-religious identities acquired in Cyprus and the ‘security’ (however real or illusory) they continue to furnish those that feel these identities adequately and sufficiently represent them makes it extremely difficult to brush aside bicommmunalism and still deliver a ‘meaningful’ and ‘just’ settlement.

This should not mean, however, that we cannot critically engage bicommmunalism under the false impression that we are undermining realistic prospects for a solution. Nor is the otherwise correct perception that the anti-colonial rhetoric is nowadays employed to support maximalist positions and demonise foreign powers, detract from the fact that the colonial structures have left a deep mark on how Cypriots think of themselves and each other. Coming to terms with both the historical contingency of bicommmunalism and its multiple and ambivalent effects on individual Cypriots could sensitise interested parties to become less fixated with promoting ‘true’ and ‘perennial’ identities on the ground. What is more, there are currently individuals and groups that transverse the bicommmunal frame of reference and whose voice and predicament must be heard. The status and predicament of these groups and individuals cannot wait the settlement of the Cyprus problem.

Consider, for example, the plight of Greek Cypriots living in the north and Turkish Cypriots living in the south. Both groups lack basic liberties and both regimes, north and south of the Green Line, offer various rationales that support

derogations or temporary suspension of rights. It is not until very recently that Turkish Cypriots living in the south (and officially considered as citizens of the RoC) have been given the right to vote in Presidential and Parliamentary elections. This has been agreed only after a Turkish Cypriot living in the south took the RoC to the European Court of Human Rights and won. Still, the House of Representatives in the south, which subsequently passed an amendment to allow Turkish-Cypriot residents in the south to vote, did not extend to them the right to be elected. So Cyprus is, as far as I know, the only European country where eligible citizens and residents cannot be elected into office because they belong to a specific ethnic group. The Greek-Cypriot government’s rationale that the 1960 constitution provides that Turkish Cypriots can only be elected to the post of Vice-President and to their separate quota of MPs is in my opinion no longer sustainable for the government has abolished separate electoral lists with regard to voting. Furthermore, the Republic through the Minister of Interior has recently rejected the application of Turkish Cypriots to contest the 2006 parliamentary elections on a separate electoral roll as provided by the 1960 constitution. Arguments of the kind that these Turkish Cypriots have no legal standing to contest the elections as they are living in the north run against the discriminating hard fact that Greek Cypriots living in the north can both elect and be elected to offices in the south.

The legal status of Greek Cypriots living in the north is worse, both in terms of daily discriminatory practices as well as in relation to TRNC’s constitutional provisions and Turkey’s overall responsibility as an occupying power. The European Court of Human Rights pointed out a number of violations in its ruling on Cyprus v Turkey (2001), including discrimination and degrading treatment, and violations of freedoms of movement, expression, conscience and religion as well as the right to education. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in Resolution 1333 (2003), which examined both the rights of Greek Cypriots and Maronites living in the north, stated that it was ‘particularly shocked by the imposed division of families, the prohibition on young people returning to their homes, the arbitrary confiscations and expropriations and the general climate of apprehension and uncertainty, even fear, to which members of these communities are deliberately subjected.’ (Par. 8). Though the situation has improved since 2003, it still leaves a lot

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to be desired, and in any case it is well below the standards of the European Convention of Human Rights.

The case of the Maronites is especially interesting because they have managed to negotiate, through the intervention of the Holy See, certain rights and freedoms in the north that Greek Cypriots have not been able to enjoy (even the PACE 1333 Resolution calls for Greek Cypriots living in the north to be granted ‘at least the same rights as those already granted to Maronites’). This has created a degree of resentment among Greek Cypriots, exacerbated recently when additional rights concerning the Maronites have been announced in the north. Specifically, those Maronites who express their willingness to reside permanently in the north are to be granted the necessary TRNC papers and identity cards so that they can fully participate in the social and economic life of the TRNC. A number of Maronites have already taken up this option.\(^{45}\) This has fuelled anew the debate concerning the community allegiances of the Maronites; how ‘Greek Cypriot’ are they and the extent to which they are using the Maronite identity tactically in order to maximize their options and get the best deal from both sides; being Greek Cypriot in the south and TRNC citizens in the north. In short, their formal ethnicity (‘Greek Cypriot’), which of course has no historical basis but is only a postcolonial designation, has now become a trap and has to be negotiated away or anew, in order for the exercise of their rights in the north to become socially acceptable in the south. Still, it should also be noted that the Maronites’ peculiar status is precisely what allows them a certain freedom to manoeuvre across the bicommmunal divide, which other groups lack.

This new situation has split the Maronite community. Some of their representatives think that this is an opportunity that needs to be exploited to the full, while others feel that before anything happens the Greek-Cypriot government should fully and unequivocally endorse their taking up the offer of the Turkish Cypriot regime. Just to complicate matters more, there are currently different Maronite representatives in the north and south, some recognised by the authorities in the north, some by those in the south, so the favourite Cypriot game of recognition is being replicated now within and across the Maronite community. Recently, and following the Turkish-Cypriot initiatives in the north, Maronites complained that the Greek Cypriot government has deliberately not credited agricultural subsidies into their bank

\(^{45}\) Politis, 9 March 2006.
accounts, as commonly done in the past, instead giving the cheques to the Greek-
Cypriot designated representative, so that those who do not, are ‘essentially made to
recognise him’. Moreover, the RoC President, Tassos Papadopoulos, made an
interesting, if ambiguous statement, that can be read both as a note of support and as a
veiled threat. After attending mass in the Maronite cathedral in Nicosia celebrating
the day of St Maron, he stated that he went to the celebrations ‘in order to reconfirm
what is common knowledge, namely that the Maronite community is an inalienable
part of the Greek-Cypriot community [anapospasto meros tēs ellēnokupriakēs
koinōtētas].’

The position of the Gypsies is more precarious and ambivalent than that of the
Maronites. The Gypsies are at the margins of Cypriot society and, like elsewhere in
the world, they have been the victims of discrimination for decades. The fact that they
have not been organised in order to make claims in the way the Maronites and others
have done, has rendered their position even more marginal. But, ironically, this very
marginalisation has also made it possible for them to acquire a certain critical distance
from the two dominant communities in Cyprus. Thus, more than any other group in
Cyprus their very existence and lifestyle challenges the dominant bicommmunal
framework. As the Ombudswoman in the south confirmed, their legal status seems to
be sui generis in Cyprus, given that there is no evidence of most of them having
formally opted to join the Turkish-Cypriot or Greek-Cypriot communities at
independence or thereafter. So they find themselves literally in-between; they have
suffered but also predictably utilized their peculiar status to the full, tactically shifting
‘ethnic’ allegiance according to the circumstances.

Following the 1974 division, Gypsies found themselves either north or south
of the Green Line; but with the vast majority of them actually moving to the Morphou
region in the north, given the number of vacant Greek-Cypriot properties and
subsequent opportunities there. From this perspective, on the ground the majority of
them seemed to have identified ‘ethnically’ with the Turkish-Cypriot community. In
2000, however, when work opportunities became scarce in the north, a number of

46 Politis, 26 March 2006. The Maronites living in the north have also complained that they are
discriminated against both by the Turkish-Cypriot and the Greek-Cypriot governments in terms of
agricultural rights and subsidies, though in relation to the Greek-Cypriot government ‘discriminatory
practices’ may also be the result of EU regulations and the complexity/impossibility of implementing
economic support in the north.
47 Politis, 13 February 2006.
them started moving to the south. Initially, there was government confusion in the south as to whether they should be treated as ‘Turkish Cypriots’ or not, given that they themselves insisted that ‘they were Gypsies and not Turkish Cypriots’. When their numbers increased to three digit figures, the Greek-Cypriot government tried out some rough tactics. It treated those who had no identity papers (i.e. most of them) as ‘illegal immigrants’ and put them to prison. When the Greek-Cypriot Attorney General pointed out that this was illegal and that the Republic would be internationally accountable for this action (especially at the time it was claiming that the Turkish-Cypriot regime was mistreating Gypsies in the north), the police said that they were never put to prison as ‘prisoners’ and that nobody was stopping the gypsies from leaving. The police only put them to prison because they did not know where to accommodate them! The Greek-Cypriot Minister of Justice and Public Order also let it be known that the Gypsies were suspected of espionage for the Turkish army. When all these failed, and given the media focus home and abroad on the matter, the government decided to arrange for ‘appropriate places’ for them to stay. Given that no Greek-Cypriot village or district seemed keen to accept them in their locale, the government suggested makeshift places near Kotsiati next to the Nicosia rubbish site and Kofinou near the main Cyprus abattoir, both sites quite telling as to how the Gypsies were officially and popularly perceived. In the end, and following protests from the Gypsies as well as locals, they were moved to the Turkish Cypriot section of Limassol town and the village of Makounta in Paphos. But by this time, the Greek-Cypriot government realised the communication significance of properly treating ‘our Gypsy compatriots’ who fled the ‘oppressive regime in the north’.

What is important to note in relation to the Gypsies, beyond the unacceptable though perhaps unsurprising harsh treatment they received both north and south of the Green Line, is how far their very presence and actions challenge the bicomunal framework in Cyprus. For example, it seems that a number of them have baptised their children or some of their children, even though they themselves are not baptised. Those in the south have consented to their children going to Greek-Cypriot schools but the Turkish-Cypriot Teachers Association have taken the Greek-Cypriot

49 *Cyprus Mail*, 16 February 2000.
50 *Cyprus Mail*, 19 and 20 April 2001.
51 *Cyprus Mail*, 3 April 2001.
52 *Cyprus Mail*, 14 April 2001 and 5 February 2002.
54 Interview in *Politis*, 2001 (check exact date)
government to the Supreme Court of Justice in the south, claiming that their education should be separate as provided by the 1960 constitution.\textsuperscript{55} So both ethnic communities, even when they discriminate against the Gypsies, make claims as to the Gypsies’ formal ethnicity. This may also explain the unwillingness of both communities to accept any reference to a ‘Roma Community’ with specific cultural rights, as part a future settlement of the Cyprus problem.

Beyond communities and groups, there are also isolated individuals that have managed to live lives that cut across the ethno-religious divide. Two notable cases are those of the shepherd of Androlikou (a Turkish Cypriot married to a Greek Cypriot and living in the south) and of Fatma Usta in Potamia, both of which have been celebrated in the documentary ‘Our Wall’.\textsuperscript{56} The case of the latter is especially interesting, if somehow exoticised, because until her death a few months ago, she very consciously transversed ethno-religious boundaries and fully embraced a hybrid culture. I interviewed Usta several times during the last four years as well as a number of her co-villagers in Potamia.\textsuperscript{57} She was a Turkish Cypriot who had stayed in the south after 1974. What was most notable about her was that even though she had no doubts as to her ethnicity (‘Turkish’) or religion (‘Islam’) she wore the black attire of a Greek-Orthodox widow. She was not baptised but she crossed herself, smoked the house in Christian fashion and occasionally joined mass. She also tried to receive communion though this was denied to her. She still visited the mosque when she went to the north and has been buried in the Turkish cemetery of Potamia. In her single-room house, three pictures were prominent and quite revealing: Archbishop Makarios, Kemal Attaturk and King George.

In her village, Usta was liked by some, disliked by most and tolerated by all. Those who liked her, saw her as an independent, even heroic figure, who stayed in the south despite almost all Turkish Cypriots moving to the north. Her presence was a reminder of the times of peaceful coexistence and to that extent they respected and admired her flexible approach to religion and ethnicity. Those who disliked her, saw her as a crude opportunist who stayed behind for the government benefits and despite

\textsuperscript{55} The TC Teachers Association in primarily and rightly referring to the rights of Turkish Cypriots living in Limassol, though it may not always be easy to distinguish who is ‘ethnically’ Turkish Cypriot and who is a Gypsy, which of course refers back to the question on whether the Gypsies should be ‘claimed’ by the one or the other community or none. See \textit{Cyprus Mail}, 9 April 2005.

\textsuperscript{56} Panicos Chrysanthou and Niazi Kizilyurek, ‘Our Wall’ (1993).

\textsuperscript{57} I had three long interviews with Usta on 28 November 2002, 10 April 2003 and 16 July 2003 as well as shorter discussions with her and her co-villagers at other times.
Greek-Cypriot ‘hospitality’ she was constantly ‘biting the hand that fed her’, by
criticising the nationalist policies of successive Greek-Cypriot governments.
(Typically those people tended to forget her criticisms against Turkish-Cypriot
nationalists). Those who disliked her also saw her as a kind of witch, capitalising out
of fortune-telling and mixing spirituality, and therefore as someone who had no right
entering and polluting the church (though at the same time acknowledging that it was
not within their power to stop her).

In my interviews with her I found her dynamic and outspoken. She clearly
relished transgressing ethno-religious borders. When I took her to the Pergamos
checkpoint before the opening of the barricades in 2003, she told me how much she
enjoyed teasing new guards at the gate who did not know her; first talking to them in
Greek dressed in her typical Greek attire, and then changing into Turkish and asking
to see her son or daughter-in-law who lived a few hundred metres away. ‘I am
America’, she boasted, by way of explaining her unique power to cross borders and
not bothering with what other people think or say about her. There were definitely
strategic considerations for adopting particular identities in particular contexts. But
there was also a cosmopolitan spirituality animating her behaviour. On the question of
why she felt the need to visit the church, she explained that her father who was one of
the few educated in the village had in his house both the Bible and the Qur’an. He
would chant in the church and pray in the mosque, and he saw no contradiction. She
claimed that she was brought up to think, like her father, that Christianity and Islam
where sister religions and that both Christians and Muslims were ‘people of the
book’. ‘It is not who or what you are but how you go to the church that matters’ she
said, criticising those who would go to the church unwashed, or with indecent
clothing, or bad thoughts. She liked Islam because it was less formal, but she felt nice
and at peace when she visited the church. ‘Why could I not got to both?’ she
wondered.

VI

The bicommmunal system of governance has had adverse political effects in Cyprus,
not least of which was the homogenisation of ethnic groups and the rise of rival
ethno-nationalisms and intercommunal violence. It has provided a necessary though
not sufficient cause for what became known as the ‘Cyprus problem’. Under the
pretext of the ‘problem’, consecutive regimes of power legitimated policies of dispossession, ethnic cleansing and suspension or selective enforcement of human rights. This bicommunal system was not inevitable but a colonial device, which paradoxically aimed at both supporting ‘good governance’ and ‘imperial domination’. As such, and precisely because its contingency has been framed as a necessity for human emancipation, it helped to solidify ethno-religious identities and naturalise ethno-nationalist claims, be it enosis, or taksim, or co-opted ‘independence’.

Bicommunalism as the dominant form of thinking about the destiny of collectivities in the island of Cyprus has been entrenched to such an extent, that realistically, it can no longer be challenged directly. In the short and medium terms, the bicomunal mentality can only be challenged tangentially (and should be challenged tangentially, not in order to deny the collective rights of non-majority communities, as some in the south hope, but to lessen the negative and wide-ranging effects it has for individual human rights all over Cyprus). In doing so, local intelligence can be retrieved from a variety of subaltern actors subverting bicomunalism and ethnic homogeneity on the ground.

I have outlined above a range of different tactics through which subaltern Cypriots historically tried to resist the policies and demands of successive regimes of power: e.g. perform yet mock the public transcript, simulate identities that allow one to change jurisdiction, feign deference yet avoid complete identification with clerical, ethnic and imperial regimes, use the leverage of foreign powers where feasible, etc.\textsuperscript{58}

At a general level what these tactics have in common is the Ostrich discursive mobility vis a vis the Bedouin: namely, \textit{I can never be reduced to your definition of who or what I am; who or what I am always depends on what your policy is!} It is a combination of what postcolonial authors call ‘strategic essentialism’ (i.e., fully utilising performed aspects of identity to pursue juridical and ethical claims against power)\textsuperscript{59} yet quickly moving across other aspects of one’s identity, if circumstances so require, when power regimes change their policies.\textsuperscript{60}


\textsuperscript{59} A term coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, though also an abused term as explained in her interview with Sara Darius and Stefan Jonsson in \textit{boundary 2}, 20:2 (Summer 1993), pp. 24-50.

\textsuperscript{60} In this sense, I concur with the view of moving away from a modernist ‘either/or’ mentality to a postmodern ‘and’ one, as suggested by Thomas Diez ‘Introduction: Cyprus and the European Union as a Political and Theoretical Problem’ in his edited, \textit{The European Union and the Cyprus Conflict}, pp. 1-13.
By this I am not trying to paint an idealised picture of hybridity. The available options for individuals will always depend on socio-political structures as well as, in the end, the willingness of individuals to tactically mobilise different aspects of their identity. With this mind, it is pertinent to reinvent Linobambakoi—the cross-religious and cross-ethnic Cypriots—who are not just a historical and now extinct community. The Linobambakos, following from how Derrida reconfigures the Marrano, can be anyone who remains faithful to a secret that he has not chosen, in the very place where he lives, in the home of the inhabitant or of the occupant, in the home of the first or the second coming, in the very place where he stays without saying no but without identifying himself as belonging to.\(^{61}\)

Today the Linobambakoi are all those who live in Cyprus, yet without identifying with the monumental nationalist histories propagated by the local regimes of power. They are those who remain faithful to the secret that their identity exceeds imperial categories and limits, exceeds the conventional representations of political discourse. They are those who counterfeits the political currency, and so corrupt the purity of ethno-religious identity.\(^{62}\) Under aporetic conditions, to be a Linobambakos is not a choice but a destiny. In these extreme bicomunal times, one is tempted to say that the only ‘true Cypriot’, the only genuinely postcolonial Cypriot, is the Linobambakos. But that is a figure of speech whose value is rhetorical.

As the International Crisis Group pointed out in a recent report this is the time for unilateral action;\(^{63}\) though crucially this should not only be a call for governments but also for individuals. Cypriots of whatever ethno-religious colours and shades that remain faithful to the secret of their identity, should unilaterally call to account regimes of power that vilify and simplify their (historically constructed) identities and restrict how they can live and act across the territorial and mental divide. I have generally shied away from programmes for action in my writings. But there is something to be said about not adding yet another aporia in these aporetic times; an aporia that may end up inadvertently supporting the trite and cynical view that the Cyprus problem is insurmountable. This is by way of saying that I strongly believe we

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\(^{62}\) On counterfeiting the political currency as a political move and cosmopolitan culture, see Costas M. Constantinou, *States of Political Discourse: Words, Regimes, Seditions* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 126-139.

don’t need to ‘solve’ the Cyprus problem to regain basic freedoms and decency in Cyprus. We do not need yet another strategy for a solution, but tactics in lieu of a solution. Tactics that unsettle ethnic reification and communal conformity; tactics that encourage Cypriots not to unquestionably follow the contradictory and hypocritical discourses of political elites; tactics that help Cypriots learn to play one regime against the other without feelings of guilt about who they are or what they must be. At this crossroad of the ‘Cyprus problem’, I would like to conclude by recommending the following to consenting adults:

* Greek Cypriots living in the north, and indeed those of you living in the south and abroad. Play the TRNC game, even if you do not recognise it. In fact you cannot recognise a state; only the governments of recognised states can do so. In any case, occupying powers and illegal regimes still have international responsibilities and duties towards you to uphold the law and dispense justice. Especially regimes that claim they follow Council of Europe statutes and wish to be part of the EU. Don’t miss an opportunity to show how aspects of your identity are used to discriminate against you and use tactically those aspects of your identity (e.g., north Cyprus resident, EU citizen, property owner, religious worshipper) that best expose the contradictions and hypocrisies of the policies of the regime in the north.

* Turkish Cypriots living in the south, and indeed those of you leaving in the north and abroad. Play the RoC game, even if you do not recognise it. In any case, regimes that are internationally recognised and claim they represent you must act as they preach in terms of furnishing you the individual and collective rights that belong to you. Especially regimes that claim they follow Council of Europe statutes and are members of the EU. Don’t miss an opportunity to show how aspects of your identity are used to discriminate against you and use tactically those aspects of your identity (e.g., south resident, RoC citizen, EU citizen, RoC constitutional partner) that best expose the contradictions and hypocrisies of the policies of the regime in the south.

* Maronites living in the north or south of the Green Line. The bicomunal system has betrayed you. Don’t feel you owe any allegiance to postcolonial ethnic categories that have nothing to do with you historically. Utilise your formal ethnicities and
present and future citizenships to fight against discrimination and to gain whatever rights and freedoms possible.

* Gypsies living in the north or south of the Green Line. The bicommunal system has totally betrayed you. You rightly feel no allegiance to whatever ethnic categories Cypriot regimes of power ascribe to you. Both regimes of power have systematically tried—and in fact colluded—so as to deny you any cultural rights. Utilise whatever nominal ethnicities and cultural identities come your way to fight against discrimination and to gain whatever rights and freedoms possible.

* Hybrids wherever you are in Cyprus. Keep unsettling the bicommunal mentality. And dearest Fatma Usta, may you rest in peace.