

Cyprus and its Places of Desire: Cultures of Displacement among Greek and Turkish Cypriot Refugees

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Lisa Dikomitis' book *Cyprus and its places of desire: Cultures of displacement among Greek and Turkish Cypriot refugees* is one of the best ethnographies written on Cyprus in recent years. As an ethnographic account of Greek and Turkish Cypriot refugees who were displaced following the 1974 war in Cyprus, it provides a fine continuation of Peter Loizos' work with refugees in Cyprus. One could argue that close to four decades after the island's *de facto* partition, the refugees from both sides have moved on with their lives and recreated their sense of belonging and community in their new localities. But as Dikomitis shows this is only part of the story: the refugees are still engaged in place-making in an ongoing effort to create a sense of home away from home while, at the same time, retaining a strong sense of attachment to what they left behind.

The study is a comparative ethnography of two communities of refugees (a Greek Cypriot and a Turkish Cypriot), the Larnatsjiotes who were displaced from Larnakas tis Lapithou (an exclusively Greek Cypriot village) in 1974 and now live scattered in different parts of the south, and the Kozanlilar who were displaced at the same time from a number of neighbouring villages in Paphos and resettled in Kozan (the Turkish name for Larnakas tis Lapithou).

The book is an attempt to shed new light on a number of key questions regarding refugees, displacement and belonging: How do refugees create and recreate a sense of place through time? What is the role of borders in such processes? How do the senses of belonging that result from such processes, enhance, complicate, or potentially prevent reconciliation and peace? Though the book is clearly anthropological in its overall approach to studying the issue in question, the author draws on a diverse literature which crosses disciplinary boundaries. Having said this, the book is theoretically informed yet accessible, which likely will increase its appeal among a non-academic audience.

The fieldwork for the study extended over a period of six years and coincided with the opening of the checkpoints in 2003, allowing Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots to cross over to the other side of their country which was inaccessible to them for close to three decades. This coincidence provided Dikomitis with an unparalleled opportunity to study the refugees' return visits to their homes and to spend two extensive periods living and doing fieldwork in Larnakas tis Lapithou/Kozan. Her own familial connection to the topic of her study – her father is a refugee

from Larnakas tis Lapithou – allowed her to live in the homes of her refugee relatives and to explore their understandings and feelings, their memories and hopes as these unfolded in the intimate conversations she had with them. Needless to say, her staying with relatives was not without its challenges. For instance, her decision, at some point, to live and carry out fieldwork in Kozan among the Kozanlilar created tension among some of her relatives who saw this as betrayal.

Dikomitis utilises ethnographic, qualitative methods to gather her data with much of it coming from close observation and informal conversations. Whether in people's homes or during their visits across the border, Dikomitis provides the kind of ethnographic detail which helps highlight the texture of people's feelings and understandings. Her use of what she calls 'mental maps' (these are maps people drew of their village from memory) allowed her to further engage with people and to explore place-making and memory productively.

Dikomitis' book is deeply personal. Without any narcissistic tendencies, she inserts her own personal story in the ethnographic narrative in a way that enhances our understanding of the study and its particular unfolding. Her ability to write her own subjectivity in the ethnography and to reflect on her own hybrid identity – as both Cypriot and Belgian and in that sense both an insider and outsider – allows us to evaluate her role as ethnographer in the production of anthropological knowledge. Her ability to critically reflect on her positionality enriches the book and our understanding of the complex negotiations between ethnographer and people that shape much of the fieldwork experience and the ethnographic outcome.

The book consists of an introduction, a conclusion and six substantive chapters. In the first chapter ('Nothing compares to our village'), Dikomitis explores the memories that the refugees from Larnakas tis Lapithou have of their occupied village and their pre-1974 life there. The chapter highlights the clear sense of injustice that the Larnatsjiotes feel for being the victims of the Turkish occupation.

In Chapter 2, titled 'A Crack in the Border', Dikomitis highlights the emotional intensity experienced by the Larnatsjiotes who visited their homes for the first time after the opening of the checkpoints. The idealised image they had of their village was shattered during these return visits where they found among others, destroyed churches, desecrated cemeteries, and strangers living in their homes.

The Larnatsjiotes' experiences from these return visits are further explored in the following chapter titled 'Pilgrims and Tourists'. Dikomitis describes these return visits as 'pilgrimages' and documents the Larnatsjiotes' attempts to reconstruct their sense of community through different religious and secular rituals they perform (e.g. visiting religious sites or cemeteries, lighting candles). What they cannot have in the south since they are scattered throughout different places, the Larnatsjiotes attempt to create through their coincidental encounters with one another in their occupied village. This behaviour of the Larnatsjiotes (which is also reflected in that of most Greek Cypriot refugees who similarly engage in pilgrimages when they cross over) contrasts with the behaviour of most Turkish Cypriots who cross for a variety of different reasons (e.g. to work, to

obtain government documents or for medical reasons) and not just to see the homes they left behind in 1974. For Dikomitis the Turkish Cypriot visits are more of the 'tourist' type (e.g. shopping, visiting touristic places or going to restaurants), much akin to what one does when one visits another country.

In Chapter 4 ('Under one Roof') Dikomitis engages with different readings of the 'border'. For Greek Cypriots, the 'border' is clearly a problem. They do not recognise it as a legal entity because it does not separate two recognised states. Crossing the border to visit one's occupied village is not an easy decision for many Greek Cypriot refugees who do not wish to grant any form of recognition to the north; hence the refusal of many to cross. On the other hand, for Turkish Cypriots the border is a necessity which ensures their safety from the Greek Cypriot majority. But, as Dikomitis shows, the border also serves as a commercial frontier. Among the Greek Cypriots who cross, there are some who do so in order to shop for certain goods that they can find cheaper in the north while for Turkish Cypriots it is an opportunity to buy goods which are not available in the north. But despite its fluidity and contrary to common sense assumptions about contact, the border has helped strengthen and reify the ethnic stereotypes of one community about the other. As Dikomitis explains, many Greek Cypriot refugees who crossed over emphasised in their accounts the 'backwardness' of Turkish Cypriots (as compared to Greek Cypriots) and similarly Turkish Cypriots often pointed out the greediness and selfishness of Greek Cypriots. These various readings of the 'border' de-essentialise its meaning which is characterised by oppositional understandings as well as contradiction, ambiguity and paradox.

In Chapters 5 and 6, the author describes the life of the Turkish Cypriots who currently live in Kozan. Dikomitis shows us how the Kozanlilar have created a sense of community and home in Kozan despite being refugees from the south themselves. The Annan Plan which Greek Cypriots rejected included in its provisions the return of the village to Greek Cypriots. This, as Dikomitis explains, created a sense of insecurity and uncertainty among the Kozanlilar and encouraged them to re-emphasise their own refugee identity which was in many ways downplayed in the past in line with the official Turkish Cypriot narrative which underscores the permanency of the *status quo*. But unlike Greek Cypriots, the Kozanlilar accentuate their refugee identity to show that they have already suffered enough as refugees and are unwilling to move yet again. This is indeed an important point that Dikomitis makes: the Kozanlilar are not indifferent about their origins and their villages in the south as Greek Cypriots often assume; on the contrary, they make distinctions between themselves and the locals where they currently live while their nostalgic stories about their villages in the south oppose the official Turkish Cypriot rhetoric which stresses the need to forget their villages and homes in the south. Their refugee identities allow them to remember not only where they come from but to also lay claim to their current home.

The problem is, Dikomitis concludes, that both the Larnatsjiotes and the Kozanlilar consider the same place to be their home. For the former it is where they come from, the place of their origins and where they lived until they were forcibly displaced. For the latter, it is also their home,

their current home, which they do not wish to abandon in light of a future political settlement. As Dikomitis poignantly puts it: 'They want to live under one roof with the Greek Cypriots, but in two separate rooms of the same house', p. 136.

At the beginning of the book Dikomitis asks in reference to Larnakas tis Lapithou/Kozan: 'What sense of belonging does the attachment to this particular village generate for the Larnatsjiotes and the Kozanlilar?', p. 19. This is a question that shapes much of the author's description and analysis throughout the book. She shows that the village is a 'place of desire' for both the Larnatsjiotes and the Kozanlilar and what it comes down to is a question of justice. For the Larnatsjiotes, justice has not been served, despite the fact that they can now cross and visit Larnakas tis Lapithou: Since they can only visit their homes as 'tourists' and since they continue to be refugees their suffering has not ended. For the Kozanlilar, justice can only be served by recognising their suffering as refugees, which started before 1974, as well as their current right to stay in Kozan. The book concludes that ultimately, the sense of injustice and suffering that both groups feel needs to be recognised in a potential future political settlement.

The book is highly accessible and readable without unnecessary jargon and makes a great read for anyone who wishes to understand something more about the contemporary lives of refugees in Cyprus. Admittedly, when I came to Chapters 5 and 6 of the book (the two chapters that focus on the current lives of the Kozanlilar in Kozan) I felt that there was some kind of discontinuity from the previous chapters which were more directly engaged with the book's main theme. In these two chapters Dikomitis discusses the everyday lives of the Kozanlilar and how they reproduce a sense of community in Kozan through class, gender and age. Retrospectively, and after finishing the entire book, I realise that these two chapters do, indeed, add significantly to the book's overall argument and, moreover, offer us an opportunity to have an ethnographic glimpse into a contemporary Turkish Cypriot community in the north, something quite rare in the ethnographic record of Cyprus.

At a time when ethnographic monographs are almost exclusively read by academics, 'Cyprus and its places of desire' offers an engaging ethnographic narrative with a literary flavour that will likely appeal to a wider audience. I highly recommend it to both scholars and students of the anthropology of Cyprus and to all who are looking for a fresh, fascinating look at one of Cyprus' still pending issues.

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