Identity in Conflict:
An Exploration of Gender across Ethnicity in Cyprus

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Abstract

The protracted ethnic conflict in Cyprus has meant that life on the island is typically framed in terms of ethnicity, putting the main communities – Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot – before all other communities and identities, including gender. As society focuses on the conflict, social and human rights issues, such as the discrimination and abuses experienced by women, especially foreign women, are often viewed as being unique to their economic standing and not reflecting Cypriot society or gender and social dynamics. This study incorporated a diverse sample of mostly women from varying identities including ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, and immigration status, in order to understand gender consciousness and discrimination in the greater context. Through an analysis of interviews and observations, this article contributes to current scholarship by using a holistic approach and providing an opportunity to redefine notions of community in Cyprus.

Keywords: Cyprus, ethnic conflict, gender identity, intersectionality, domestic workers, gender consciousness

Overview

As a consequence of the ethnic conflict, Cypriot society positions Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot ethnicity above all other identities and experiences. While acknowledging that monocommunal and bicommunal approaches have their place and value, the research sought to promote a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the diverse voices of Cypriot society, with particular focus on women and gender. This study utilised a holistic, intercommunal approach to analyse interviews and observations, and provide information on the life experiences of a diverse group of individuals and identity groups. The findings challenge post-conflict nationalism and its rigid notions of identity, community, and societal priorities and, also, touch upon the manifestation of patriarchy.[1]

Methodology

The study was conducted over several months in mid-2010 and includes: 40 semi-structured, in-depth interviews; over 40 participant observations in civil society organisations and activities; and other informal interviews and group discussions. The interview participants identified themselves as Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot, Armenian, Maronite, Australian, British, Turkish, Filipina, Sri Lankan, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgendered/Queer (LGBTQ), as well as foreign-born individuals of varying immigration status. Of the participants, just over half were Greek Cypriots or Turkish Cypriots born and raised on the island, and one-third were born outside of Cyprus. The majority of them were college-educated and over two-thirds were involved in the civil society sector either through their work or volunteer activities. The majority of research participants worked as activists and/or at local non-governmental organisations, while others worked as teachers, government officials, full-time students, domestic workers, and nurses. Beginning the research with on-the-ground activists was beneficial because they were uniquely positioned to explain the issues they see, not only in their lives, but also in the community at large.

This paper sought to reveal identity at its intersections and in multiplicity. The interviews questioned participants in a number of areas including family, work, media, violence against women, interethnic relations, and what interconnections, if any, exist across different ethnicities of women in Cyprus. The interviews explored how participants understood and saw relationships between different genders and ethnic groups, and among women, as well as if/how they perceived the challenges related to their gender and sexuality. The approach used these general areas as possible prompts, but did not seek to emphasise one over the other. During the course of the interviews participants were also asked what they valued in their lives; what other questions they think should be asked; and what they would be curious to ask other participants. This approach was meant to allow participants to guide the research, and give their perspectives on pertinent issues for further exploration.

Considerations

Identity Negotiation in Conflict Societies

According to Dr Maria Hadjipavlou, political scientist and peace activist, 'In conflict cultures, there is a tendency to homogenise the communities, failing to acknowledge their complexity and, thus, prolonging misperceptions, stereotypes and misunderstandings between and among conflict groups.'[2] Identity becomes politicised and the lines defining group membership become more rigid. This means that expectations of group members – what they can say and do – are narrow and restrictive. Likewise, the concept of the 'other' community is similarly monolithic and rigid.

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2   M. Hadjipavlou (2004) *Women in the Cypriot Communities*, Cyprus: The Peace Center, p. 170.

The authorities have, in certain ways, worked to 'vilify and simplify their (historically constructed) identities'.[3] In his discussion of the damaging and debilitating nature of nationalism in conflict societies in general and in Cyprus, in particular, Dr Harry Anastasiou explains that, 'The same uncompromising ethnocentric nationalism that originally created the problem found renewed justification in the very historical events that it had triggered and created.'[4] This is to say that conflict breeds more conflict and nationalist rhetoric, and the promulgation and promotion of one's ethnic identity at the expense of others becomes justified and further politicised. In the rigid post-conflict context there is not much regard given to the experiences of individuals of other ethnicities or identity groups. This plays out not just in terms of discussions and experiences related to the conflict, but also in how individuals must adhere to socially constructed expectations of them.

Bicommunal activities, including workshops, retreats and other programming, have challenged this rigidity by bringing together Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots for the sharing of opinions, experiences, and concerns of the communities, and facilitated the beginnings of post-conflict healing. Yet, while inclusion is implied in the bicommunal approach, there is often an unanticipated side effect which is to frame Cyprus solely in terms of two homogenous ethnic communities. Costas M. Constantinou has said that, '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.'[5]

In actuality, the demographic breakdown of Cyprus is even more complex. Of the estimated 1.1 million people on the island, 80% are Greek Cypriots in the south, and the Turkish Cypriot community in the north makes up about 20%. Within each community there are historical ethnic minorities who have lived in Cyprus for generations including: Maronites, Armenians, and Latins who make up approximately 7,000 people, and a small Roma population – estimates vary between 1,000 and 2,000.[6] These ethnic minorities have limited inclusion in the greater society, a reality further formalised in the post-colonial period when Armenians, Maronites, and Latins 'were compelled to become members of either dominant community and thus they suffered "internal exclusion" by being regarded as religious sub-groups of one of the two dominant communities rather than national minorities in their own right'.[7]

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3   C.M. Constantinou (2007) 'Aporias of Identity: Bicommunalism, Hybridity and the "Cyprus Problem"', *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 42, No. 3, p. 266.

4   H. Anastasiou (2006) *The Broken Olive Branch: Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and the Quest for Peace in Cyprus*, New York: Syracuse University Press, p. 11.

5   C.M. Constantinou (2007) *op. cit.*, p. 248.

6   N. Trimikliniotis and C. Demetriou (2009) 'The Cypriot Roma and the Failure of Education: Anti-Discrimination and Multiculturalism as a Post-accession Challenge', in A. Varnava, N. Coureas and M. Elia (eds), *The Minorities of Cyprus: Development Patterns and the Identity of the Internal-Exclusion*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 241–243.

7   N. Coureas, A. Varnava and M. Elia (eds), Online Abstract, *The Minorities of Cyprus: Development Patterns*

Furthermore, an estimated half of the approximately 300,000 people in the north are said to be from, or the descendants of those predominantly from Turkey (of Kurdish and Arab origin), as well as from Bulgaria and Tajikistan.[8] Additionally, it is estimated that 14% of those living in the Republic of Cyprus are recent immigrants or foreigners, and registered residents of the island.[9] The Republic of Cyprus grants 4,000 visas annually to 'artistes' from countries of the former Soviet Union to work in nightclubs where it is known they will be engaging in sex work. Although visa information is not readily available in the north, a recent newspaper report estimated that within the nightclubs there were several hundred women engaging in illegal sexual activities at any given time.[10] These numbers do not include the 'undocumented' foreigners residing in Cyprus, or those that work in Cyprus without the proper visas. It also does not make the distinction of whether or not the foreign workers are registered or unregistered which, as Güven-Lisaniler, Uğural and Rodriguez point out, has a great impact on an individual's treatment and mobility.[11]

Overshadowing of Societal Problems

Identity and Cypriot society are seen through a very compartmentalised lens that just recognises Greek Cypriot or Turkish Cypriot ethnic identity and disregards other identities. As stated by Myria Vassiliadou, one should recognise this 'important aspect of the "Cyprus problem"… how women, as well as "other" defined "subgroups" are oppressed, marginalised, or at best, ignored'.[12] There seems to be a parallel between the predominance of these ethnic identities over other identities, and the way in which the Cyprus problem overshadows all other issues in the country. This is to say that, similar to the way that ethnicity dominates other identities, resolution of the 'Cyprus problem' also dominates, overshadows, and hides social issues. Because of this

and the Identity of the Internal-Exclusion, pp. 241–265. Available at [http://www.c-s-p.org/flyers/The-Minorities-of-Cyprus—Development-Patterns-and-the-Identity-of-the-Internal-Exclusion1-4438-0052-X.htm], accessed on 2 January 2013.

8   M. Hadjipavlou (2009) 'Trans-Border Crossings: Cypriot Women's "Liberation" and the Margins', The Cyprus Review, Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring), p. 72.

9   P. Panayi (2009) 'Ethnic Minority Creation in Modern Europe: Cyprus in Context', in A. Varnava, N. Coureas and M. Elia (eds), The Minorities of Cyprus: Development Pattern and the Identity of the Internal-Exclusion, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 21–23.

10   M. Yucel (2006) 'Women Trafficking in the Turkish Cypriot Community', Prologue Consulting Ltd., available at [http://repository.forcedmigration.org/show_metadata.jsp?pid=fmo:4919], accessed on 2 January 2013.

11   F. Güven-Lisaniler, S. Uğural and L. Rodriguez (2008) 'Human Rights of Migrant Women Workers in Janitorial Services and Night Clubs: A Case of North Cyprus', International Journal of Social Economics, Vol. 35, No. 6, pp. 435–448.

12   M. Vassiliadou (2002) 'Questioning Nationalism: The Patriarchal and National Struggles of Cypriot Women within a European Context', The European Journal of Women's Studies, Vol. 9, No. 4, p. 463.

overshadowing, problems such as those perceived to be 'women's issues' are relegated to a lower status, if they are acknowledged as issues at all.[13] Exploring the relationship between nationalism and what are seen as women's issues, however, is an opportunity to explore 'the detrimental effects of official discourses on aspects of life conventionally associated with the "private" and "personal" sphere' which is usually associated with women and, therefore, ascribed less value'.[14]

While solving the political problem is essential, so is acknowledging issues such as increasing rates of gender-based violence, human trafficking, discrimination, and the abuse of migrant domestic workers. This 'social discrimination is ignored, hidden away by the "Cyprus problem"'.[15] This is not to say that people do not know about these problems, rather these problems are not considered important. Assigning them importance would mean indirectly questioning the state and the individual's role in perpetuating injustice. In the case of sex-work, for example, questioning the individual's as well as the state's complicity in '"feminizing" aspects of its economy through the intensification of the desire industries' could be seen as going against the state itself.[16]

Women as Primary Research Participants

Using a diverse cohort of mostly women is useful in understanding the expectations of people and the varying messages they receive. In her research on the identity negotiation of women in the north, Moira Killoran states that religious propriety and sexuality intersect to restrict and shame women.[17] So conflict creates further fracture within ethnic communities. Myria Vassiliadou explains that in the south, there is a creation of 'Otherhood' whereby 'women in Cyprus become involved in an ambiguous, contradictory process through which they support and perpetuate non-feminist, hierarchical, capitalist, and patriarchal values' and distinguish themselves from categories of women including lesbians, ethnic minorities, and foreign workers. While the conflict's impact varies across different identity groups, nationalism and patriarchy are so ingrained in Cyprus that complexity or nuance of experience is not permitted.[18] In fact, the '"Cyprus problem" has created a sharper division between the island's women in socioeconomic and psychological terms'.[19]

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13   *Ibid.*, p. 460.
14   N. Kamenou (2011) 'Queer in Cyprus: National Identity and the Construction of Gender and Sexuality', in L. Downing and R. Gillet (eds), *Queer in Cyprus: Contemporary Case Studies*, Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, p. 25.
15   M. Vassiliadou (2002) *op. cit.*, p. 463.
16   A. Agathangelou (2004) *Global Political Economy of Sex: Desire, Violence, and Insecurity in Mediterranean Nation States*, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, p. 21
17   M. Killoran (1998) 'Good Muslims and "Bad Muslims," "Good" Women and Feminists: Negotiating Identities in Northern Cyprus (Or, The Condom Story)', *Ethos*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 183–203.
18   M. Vassiliadiou (2004) 'Women's Constructions of Women: On Entering the Front Door', *Journal of International Women's Studies,* Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 64.
19   M. Vassiliadou (2002) *op. cit.*, p. 468.

As the research of Simona Sharoni explains, however, the impact of conflict is less cut-and-dry than some earlier literature suggests. For instance, conflict does not work to simply exclude women from international politics or to put efforts for gender equality on hold. In various examples, it can also foster women's political participation and the interconnecting of peace with equality.[20] Yet, while certain opportunities have opened up to Cypriot women, the core of the patriarchal Cypriot society remains intact. Working to challenge nationalism's manufacturing of further discrimination and isolation, however, does not just benefit women. 'Gender equality is not only a basic human right, but its achievement has enormous socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women fuels thriving economies, spurring productivity and growth.'[21]

Questions of Exclusion and Inclusion

For an exploration of identity and the experiences associated with various identities to be effective, one must keep the complexity of the Cypriot reality in mind. In *The Line: Women, Partition and the Gender Order in Cyprus*, Dr Cynthia Cockburn discusses the essential elements of what she calls a women's gendered perspective and movement, one that is holistic, transformative, prefigurative and inclusive.[22] It is holistic in the sense that it deals not only with the issues deemed to be 'women's issues' but 'the whole spectrum of life, power and politics – including ethno-national strife'.[23] She also goes on to say that 'while certain types of feminist theory would see "men as the problem", others see that many men are themselves damaged by the system, because it generates particular masculine cultures that, in forming boys into men, deform them as human beings – in the same way as rigid dichotomies also produce ridiculously restrictive versions of femininity. Transformative feminism sees patriarchy, not men, as the problem. Men it sees as potentially part of the solution.'[24] As will be discussed in the findings section, men and women reported seeing and experiencing patriarchy's impact on themselves and on society at large in Cyprus. Exploring the impact of patriarchy in this research project has meant acknowledging its various manifestations and impacts across different groups.

Of course, while seeking to have a more holistic approach, it is important not to diminish the very real differences within and across the 'north' and 'south' of Cyprus. Taking an approach to the

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20 S. Sharoni (2001) 'Rethinking Women's Struggles in Israel-Palestine and in the North of Ireland', in C. Moser and F. Clark (eds), *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors: Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, London: Zed, p. 85.

21 UN Women (2011) 'About UN Women', available at [http://www.unwomen.org/about-us/about-un-women/], accessed on 2 January 2013.

22 C. Cockburn (2004) *The Line: Women, Partition and the Gender Order in Cyprus*, London: Zed Books, pp. 202–203.

23 *Ibid*, p. 203.

24 *Ibid*.

island that includes both sides while, in some ways, more inclusive than a monocommunal approach, runs the risk of minimising the differences of the people who live on either side of the UN-administered buffer zone. While there are many similarities, common struggles and values, the day-to-day experiences of the people living them is arguably, quite different. Any approach that seeks to be comprehensive must not over generalise or ignore these nuances.

Findings and Themes

As can be imagined when interviewing people with different life experiences and backgrounds, there were many perspectives and stories shared. The most pertinent and frequent themes will be expounded upon below.

1. *Cypriot ethnicity was named first when describing oneself, while identity and membership in other groups was, on the surface, less relevant.*

The interviews revealed that ethnicity is the primary and typically the only way of identifying oneself, particularly ethnic membership in one of the two main groups.

In the words of one Greek Cypriot activist, 'I don't think Cypriot women have a gender dimension. Ethnicity presides here.' In a post-conflict country such as Cyprus, it is no shock that ethnicity remains a key identifier, and notions of ethnic membership and belonging are very complex. For example, the ways in which individuals identifying as members of these ethnic groups refer to themselves and others (i.e. as Cypriot, Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot, Greek or Turkish) is contextual and can indicate a number of things, including the participant's political affiliation, ethnic identity, and life experience. Regardless of the specific language used, the post-war dualism continues on the island, for instance, as Greek Cypriots or Turkish Cypriots, Cypriots or others, or us versus them.

In order to explain this dichotomous and nationalistic thinking, a Greek Cypriot primary school teacher explained, 'we teach … a history of wars or male heroes, that kind of stuff … [we leave out] women, or alternative voices, or a different kind of male hood. It's the hero who dies for his country … You don't have big women, or you don't have small men, or you know, everyday life, social history, where is that?' Related to this concept of national identity and history, emerged the concept of 'Cypriotness' as a direct correlation to one's loyalty and connection to the island, the conflict, and the present situation. Part of this notion of Cypriotness is membership in one or both of the main groups (depending on the perspective of the individual and community), but there are other combinations of factors – place of birth, country where one was raised, experience with the conflict such as individual/family refugee status – which can also contribute to ideas of how Cypriot one is. By way of illustration, Cypriots of the diaspora are sometimes believed to have less of a right to contribute to national conversations and have an opinion.

Expatriates residing in Cyprus regardless of the number of years they have lived on the island are typically further removed from these larger discussions. Many times it is 'foreigners' who are

involved in the civil sector, with bicommunal work aimed to reconcile the two communities. There are communities of ethnic minorities who have lived on the island for generations – Maronites, Armenians, Latins, and Romas – who do not fit neatly into either category, even if they are affiliated with one of the two communities. This phenomenon, categorised as 'internal-exclusion', reinforces the view of the island as only Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot.[25] According to one Maronite research participant, 'you know when we say bicommunal we try to be inclusive, but in fact we are being exclusive. And I think, not only because we have Cypriot, and I say this with all of its qualifications, Cypriot minorities, as in the Armenians, the Maronites, the Latins and yeah, you might think that their numbers are insignificant, but they're here and they're Cypriot and they've been here, [and there are] migrant communities who are members of our community as well. So where do they fit into this whole, into the new Cyprus that we're trying to create, should we have a solution. Where do they fit in? Shouldn't they also have a say? Or are they not Cypriots?'

In talking about the possibility of working for gender equality in these circumstances, one Turkish activist explained that efforts have to be intercommunal, but 'It necessitates some kind of groundwork to be able to say, look we are not going to use these [ethnic] distinctions, we'll make no distinctions, we work for all women, for the general gender equality. That necessitates a lot of work … and the issues will become more politicised with the Cyprus issue rather than the women's issue.' In other words, it is a constant battle to get beyond ethnic lines, and consider a multiplicity of identities and experiences. As the remaining findings reveal, there are gender-specific experiences to warrant further discussion.

2   *While many participants did not initially define themselves by gender, the complexity and conflicting messages of gender were often reported.*

Few people identified themselves along gender lines and many women did not see themselves as different from men, but many did go on to recount experiences of discrimination and expectations resulting from the fact that they are women. Those individuals who identified gender as essential to their lives, as well as those who did not necessarily recognise it as such, reported gender-specific expectations and roles.

Participants frequently referred to the idea that more women are becoming 'independent and empowered' and cite rates of higher education as evidence. 'Postwar changes greatly affected Greek Cypriot women's place in society, especially changes which gave them expanded access to education and increased participation in the work force.'[26] Related to this, participants reported that there are more women with decision-making power and visibility in the public arena. At the

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25   P. Panayi (2009) *op. cit.*, p. 9.
26   E. Solsten (ed.) (1991) '*Cyprus: A Country Study*', Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, available at [http://countrystudies.us/cyprus/25.htm], accessed on 2 January 2013.

same time, more and more women can have relationships and premarital sex before marriage and may get married later in life. These changes have allowed women to feel that they have more options and more flexibility in their choices. One Turkish Cypriot who works in business points to grassroots organising of recent years as a sign of improvement saying, 'the political situation even brought the men and women in the Turkish side together. They join the rallies together and the political parties, have their headquarters, their own functions. [It has] brought them more together than before'.

In spite of what is understood as a shift toward equality and more choices, young women in particular reported the struggle to manage competing and often conflicting messages they receive from the media, their family, friends, and from their own internal desires. From the media, they see images of women that are very simplistic and archetypal — sex object, mother, wife, and in rare instances when a woman is in a position of power in the workplace, she is cold-hearted and cruel. The messages they feel they receive from the media are to be independent, but this independence manifests itself in sometimes confusing ways. As an example, several participants pointed to more 'liberal dress' as a sign of independence and the changing opportunities of women. But some felt that style of dress was no indication of the level of independence a woman had, or the progress as a whole that society had made. One Turkish Cypriot woman raised abroad explained, 'you know women are so modern in the sense that women can walk around in short skirts and high heels and revealing clothing and that's fine, but, there's no issue about that, but if there was to be a woman in a position of power, then that's an issue. So it's like you can look great, but don't be great, you know?' In fact, many participants of varying ages said that liberal dress was superficial as an indication of independence, and pointed to what they believe is still a conservative mind-set.

One academic confirmed that there exists a tension between your success in the workplace and your reputation. She reported that she must not only produce exemplary work, but she must also make sure she appears to be a woman of good character. She continued, '... at the end of the day, it shouldn't matter, even if I was, even if I did all of the things that would qualify, that would put me in the super slut category ... the quality of my work should stand on its own, be that the work that I do here, or my academic work. And internationally it does, but locally, it doesn't work like that, so you grow this skin and like, either you become very dignified or you become very cold, but ... you play a game, you put on a façade'.

A Turkish Cypriot woman from Girne/Kyrenia reiterated this struggle and went on to say that, 'women are so made up in most workplaces and yeah, it's as if they're more decorative or something. And at home, definitely, like all the housekeeping is the women's job and the childbearing, and all sorts of care jobs are women's jobs'. Aside from the maintenance of reputation, gendered expectations are most apparent in the domestic realm, which is still very much a woman's responsibility. As such, it is also assigned a lesser value. While Cypriot women have become financially empowered by working in greater numbers outside of the home, the notion that the domestic sphere is their responsibility still exists, which requires that women be responsible for

home life, including cooking, cleaning, and child care. If women received any help, it would most likely be from females who, in all probability, are family members such as mothers and grandmothers, or perhaps even from foreign women working in their home. In the less common instances where they received assistance from a male partner, it was considered men helping with women's work, not work that should automatically be shared. While they talked of the struggle to balance these goals, the majority never mentioned expecting or receiving help from males.

In both the distribution of labour, as well as the expectations of chastity and of being a 'good woman', the research confirmed Maria Hadjipavlou's findings that the 'the sexual division of domestic labour and the value system that sustain the patriarchal structures have still remained intact'.[27] Furthermore, many of the domestic examples and relationships cited in interviews were heterosexual. During the course of these interviews, very few people acknowledged relationships outside of the heterosexual kind, or gender beyond the male-female binary, which will be discussed later in the findings.

3. *Gender consciousness does not transcend ethnic lines, so the mistreatment foreign women face is understood as an issue of class and unrelated to gender.*

Previous research has connected the reality of migrant workers to the larger contradictory nature of women's role and position in society, namely 'that although women in Cyprus have entered the labour force, there is a lack of policies in relation to the reconciliation of family and professional life. This, in combination with the absence of the role of men in such discussions, as well as lack of a welfare services, female migrant domestic workers have replaced unpaid informal work in the household, reinforcing traditional gender roles in Cyprus'.[28] The gendered division of labour thus continues as Cypriot women, with more opportunities for growth and equality, pass these less desirable responsibilities to foreign domestic workers, for example. In fact, a recent study found that the 'entire employment sector of domestic work' is gendered because the work gets transferred from one woman to another.[29] These women, from countries such as Sri Lanka and the Philippines, often work for long hours in vulnerable conditions in private homes, uncertain of their visa extension. Areas such as construction and agriculture are reserved for foreign males.

While female domestic workers in the Republic of Cyprus are 'one of the largest migrant groups in Cyprus, reaching 25,000 in 2006, they remain "'invisible" ... when discussing issues affecting Cypriot society such as poverty, unemployment, social inclusion, as well as their legal status and their future in Cyprus'.[30] Sondra Sainsbury explains that with increasing globalisation

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27   M. Hadjipavlou (2009) *op. cit.*, p. 59.
28   'Integration of Female Migrant Domestic Workers: Strategies for Employment and Civic Participation' (2007) *Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies*, Nicosia: University of Nicosia Press, p. 3.
29   *Ibid.*
30   *Ibid.*, p. 2.

more female migrant workers are working in Cyprus under precarious conditions.[31] They are restricted from joining trade unions, most of them live in the home of their employers, and often report mistreatment including verbal abuse, threats not to have their visa renewed, and sexual advances from their employers. In discussions with interview participants about this mistreatment, some sympathised, but generally, did not see this phenomenon as an issue relating to gender at all. When asked about the challenges facing foreign women in their workplace and in the public space in particular, one participant responded that foreign women are seen in 'that way', meaning that they are considered more sexually accessible and open to advances. Moreover, mistreatment of foreign women – for example, one Filipina domestic worker in her 40s reported verbal abuse in the public space and sexual harassment by her employer in his home – is understood by many Cypriots as a manifestation of class and ethnicity, not gender.

In discussing these realities, even female participants active in women's organisations and groups, while more likely to be gender conscious, often had to make an effort to push against the ethnic lines separating them. This meant that many of the gender-relevant experiences of discrimination, and violence against women, were still, for many related to ethnicity or even socioeconomic status, rather than gender. Ethnicity, particularly if one is a member of one of the two main ethnic groups, overshadows all other identities even for individuals who are openly members of other identity groups, such as ethnic minorities and women, among others. When asked if this treatment/understanding of foreign women impacts Cypriot women, the majority of respondents said it did not and that they did not see an interconnection between different groups of women.

Though the demographic profile of migrant workers is different in the north, one Turkish Cypriot research participant explained that the stereotype and sentiment of migrants in the north is similar: 'They're [considered] dirty and ostracised, and there's a lot of racism in that aspect. It's the same with the cleaning people, and there's this hypocrisy that we don't want them, but who would do this work?' This tension is further complicated by the political situation. Another Turkish Cypriot woman said, 'It's always like an us-and-them attitude and the animosity towards mainland Turks is huge from Turkish Cypriots, from Greek Cypriots especially.' Another participant agreed, citing a recent political campaign as an example: 'they don't want them, and one of the parties in the last election, the leftist party, and their slogan was, we are from here, vote for us … There is this distinction, we are from here, we are the real Cypriots, we don't want these people, we want them to go. But we want them to do all the work also.'

The negative perception of foreign women also extends to women in the sex work industry in Cyprus, which, typically, occurs with full knowledge of the government/authorities across the island. Nightclubs, cabarets, and other sex work establishments are often visible despite the fact

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31   S. Sainsbury (2007) 'The Silent Presence: Asian Female Domestic Workers and Cyprus in the New Europe', presented at *Performing Identity/Crossing Borders* conference.

that prostitution is not legal. To make things more complicated, many women are given visas to come to the country with the purpose of sex work, but under a different name (in the Greek Cypriot south the visa is called a 'performance artiste' visa) and the police are well aware of this phenomenon. In the north, for example, where cabaret owners used to retain the passports of girls/women who arrived in Cyprus, the police have now been found to hold on to the passports of foreign women – often from countries of the former Soviet Bloc – because they are judged safer with the authorities than with cabaret owners. Their vulnerability and mistreatment seems to be generally accepted by mainstream society as well as by many Cypriot women, who believe they could not fall victim to such abuse. While the women (many of whom, in the north, are from Moldova, with the remainder coming mostly from other countries of the former Soviet Union) typically have legal documents to be in the country, their working conditions plus the terms of their contract subject them to mistreatment seen in human trafficking around the world, including: forced labour, debt bondage, passport confiscation and the involvement of police.[32]

These occurrences are often explained as a question of class, with the socioeconomic status of foreign workers used by some to give a sense of justification. In interviews and discussions with Cypriots, many reported that they feel they and their families are protected from such abuses and they would never experience them. The fact that these abuses do not happen to 'Cypriot girls' gives them less importance and, also, a sense that Cypriots are safe from such mistreatment and violence. By remaining complicit in this, Cypriot women sustain not just the exploitation of the foreign workers on multiple levels, but their own exploitation in the wider, societal framework.[33]

4. *Cypriot women are pressured to remain chaste in their strict gender roles; foreign women are sexualised.*

With all the societal changes and increased number of women in the workforce, there is still an expectation of women's chastity and maintaining one's reputation. One journalist referred to Cyprus as 'this patriarchal society that has this rule, sort of this Victorian style ethics, that everything is allowed, but not with your daughter, mother, sister, whatever'. What ends up happening is that women have varying roles and stereotypes assigned to them based on their ethnicities. The same journalist goes on to say that, 'you don't see equality in the sexual enjoyment, or participation. So the foreigner, and if you relate that with the nationalistic identity, then the foreigner becomes the object, and with the object you can do whatever you want'. This not only reinforces the notion that the foreigner is more accessible and easily objectified, but that the Cypriot woman has only a domestic and familial function in relation to others as mother, daughter, wife, or sister.

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32 M. Yucel (2006) 'Women Trafficking in the Turkish Cypriot Community', *Prologue Consulting Ltd.*, available at [http://repository.forcedmigration.org/show_metadata.jsp?pid=fmo:4919], accessed on 2 January 2013.

33 A. Agathangelou. (2004) *op. cit.*, pp. 21–22.

A Greek Cypriot said, 'There is still that kind of sense, that you don't screw around with [a] Cypriot woman, you do it with the foreigners, and even among the most liberal men here, both sides, if you have too many kind of, casual relationships, no matter how much they like you, how long you've been their friend, there is still that kind of stain or question about your honour.' She went on to say that, 'as a woman, as a woman academic if you dress in a certain way, you're sexualised immediately. So the first thing that happens to your image is that you're very careful about the way people see you, about the things you say about yourself. Um, I never, I don't even go out with my colleagues, and if I do, I never drink, because immediately, the women and the men are looking for an opportunity to gossip. And gossip is something that can be deadly to your professional reputation.'

Women, particularly young women, also explained that they share very little with others. Not just because of the small size of their community, but also because of the importance placed on reputation, these women felt it better to keep to themselves and not trust other women with their more personal thoughts and feelings. One Turkish Cypriot college graduate explained 'And I think that's something that Cyprus women especially are brought up with, you keep to yourself … so you're always talking about something superficial, some general topics, so if I'm having a tough time, I'm not supposed to tell you, I'm not gonna confide in you, because you will go and tell someone else. So people have a lack of trust.' While society has become more liberal, they still do not want to tarnish their image and reputation, or shame their families. This is then transmitted to the foreign woman who is stereotyped and portrayed as having fewer morals and being more sexual than Cypriot women. In her research on the north, Moira Killoran points to a lack of 'cultural privacy' as one of the factors contributing to this.[34]

5. Gender-based roles and expectations also impact males in Cyprus.

It also appears that men are affected by gender-specific roles and expectations to be 'masculine'. Related to the previous example of sex workers, there is pressure to have numerous sexual partners, and not the same pressure of maintaining one's reputation. In fact, one's reputation can rely on sexual prowess. One sexuality rights activist explains, 'For the boys of the family, if they have a lot of partners, it's the honour of the family. Fathers were expecting for their boys to have relationships, because it was their fear also that their boys were gay, so by having sex with women, it would let out their fear, you know.'

Male participants discussed these pressures to be more stereotypically masculine, citing compulsory military service for males as the primary form of gender discrimination they see in their lives. Additional pressures and gender-based expectations included feeling pressure to enjoy hunting and football, have numerous sexual partners, and not engage in domestic tasks. One

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34   M. Killoran (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 192.

Greek Cypriot academic explained that with the changing roles and influence of women, some men struggle to adjust: 'there's a tension between women and men and the way that, like, the more professional the women become, their partners on a personal level – unless they're really capable and really quite strong men – feel really threatened by it. So what you see even now is this game, this tense game between women and men.'

Despite that, a recent college graduate of Greek Cypriot descent said, 'Men are more willing to contribute to whatever is expected.' He perceives a willingness among his peers to contribute in ways that their fathers and other males have not done in the past, though he sometimes finds that this contribution is criticised by other men, and this unexpected behaviour makes certain women uncomfortable. This same participant who identifies as a heterosexual ally of the LGBTQ community is involved in the movement for LGBTQ rights on the island and said that his participation has concerned others around him who feel it calls his masculinity and sexuality into question. Of his participation, he says, '[I] definitely don't hide it or avoid it. Going to a meeting, my father asked, "Where you going?" [My] father said, "What? I'm not sure I agree with it." I don't see why not, obviously I have the right, [but he was] also a bit worried, asking me about girls.' A British medical professional further discussed this contradiction when she said that, 'the sexuality thing actually is really interesting because on the north side, I've met several men who ... are gay. But no, no, no mention. Absolutely not. The whole thing of being gay here is just not, not, not allowed'.

For men who go against rigid gender expectations, this seems to be familiar. One Greek Cypriot teacher explains that because of the distribution of responsibility in her household, her husband is criticised by his peers 'because we share everything, and they think this is not a good thing'. Her husband is criticised for creating a bad precedent by sharing responsibilities with his wife and, at times, staying home while she attends political events.

In particular, regarding the pressure to have numerous sexual partners, men did acknowledge that there is a contradiction between expectations for men and women. In a joint interview, two Greek Cypriot males stated that many of their friends had been to cabarets and nightclubs, but did not explicitly state that they themselves had paid for sexual services. They did also explain that they have male friends in monogamous relationships that continue to go to cabarets. And one difference between them and the previous generation is that these men hide it from their partners, whereas older generations were more open about their affairs/cheating. While there is still some pressure to get married, one Turkish Cypriot male explained that his window of time before the pressure really begins is greater.

6. *Conversations on gender focus on the gender binary and females in particular.*

While it was not the primary focus of the research, a handful of participants did mention the struggle against heteronormativity, in particular trying to acknowledge experiences outside of the male-female gender binary and a diversity of sexualities and relationships. They also discussed

what they feel are the shortcomings of current research and activism on gender that focuses just on women and heterosexuality. When discussions of gender do occur in private or in the more public realms, it is often oversimplified. Gender is discussed typically in terms of a binary of male-female, which does not acknowledge the experiences of individuals who feel they do not identify strictly as male or female. For these participants, gender expectations were even more complex, as they try to navigate through the gender expectations society assigns to them, and the ways in which they actually see themselves.

As specified by several participants, discussions of gender often leave out the importance of sexual orientation. Or, as one Greek Cypriot activist explains, gender is often confused with sexual orientation: 'There is a great confusion in the people between how they view gender and sexual orientation. I mean I, I hear a lot for men for example, if they look more feminine, they are gay. For women that are more masculine, ah they are lesbians. They don't realise the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity which are two different things.'

Conclusions

An inclusive approach can work to combat the compartmentalised view of society that defines experience in terms of a Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot binary and, by extension, ignores all challenges outside of the Cyprus problem. It can also allow for the interconnections to be explored across identities and experiences with the hope of redefining and expanding notions of Cypriot society, thereby breaking down this highly compartmentalised and rigid understanding of community. Additional research needs to be undertaken with a variety of cross-sections including women and ethnic and sexual minorities, thereby contributing to an even more holistic understanding of the community of Cyprus.

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