

Freedom Square: The unspoken reunification of a divided city¹

Olga Demetriou

ABSTRACT

This article explores the relation between the structures of division and political subjectivity in Cyprus. The failed attempt to open a crossing point along the main street running through the two sides of the island's capital is taken as the starting point for a discussion of how "division" is related to and internalized by the city's inhabitants. Focusing on a set of locations in the city where the "division" is experienced in different ways, I elucidate how these experiences problematize and normalize what is universally considered an abnormal situation. The analysis borrows from psychoanalytical theory to investigate how this normalization gives rise to views of the self as a (non-)political subject, i.e., a subject whose engagement with the political centers on distancing the self from politics.

Bridging division and breaching reunification

Since December 2005, Nicosia's oldest shopping lane has been divided by a footbridge meant to reunify the heart of the city center, separated into Greek and Turkish sectors since the splitting of municipal authority along ethnic lines in 1958. My aim is to explain how a structure of reunification came to signify the entrenchment of division. The building of the footbridge is situated within the wider frame of political developments in Cyprus in the period 2003-2005 in order to elucidate the processes

1 This paper was presented at the "Globalization, Unification and European Cities" workshop held at the Center for the Study of European Politics and Society, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Beer Sheva, in May 2005 and at the "Greek-Turkish Encounters" Seminar at King's College, London in May 2006. I would particularly like to thank Julie Scott for her invaluable comments at the second presentation, as well as Murat Erdal, Haim Yacobi, Themis Demetriou and the reviewers of *Hagar*, who commented on various versions of the paper.

that rendered it possible for reunification and division to coexist. The article focuses specifically on the way in which these political developments have been marked on the Nicosian landscape and in the associations this landscape carries in the imagination of the city dwellers.

Throughout December 2005, the Cypriot media was preoccupied with the question of whether Ledra Street would open for Christmas and New Year's shoppers. The opening of this particular street had been a question in the minds of many since the relaxation of restrictions in movement between the two sides of the island in April 2003—an event that many Cypriots refer to as “the opening of the border.”² Although relatively recent, this relaxation of restrictions has changed life on the island in considerable ways. It can be argued that it has instituted a reunification of sorts in a number of spheres: it has enabled thousands of Turkish Cypriots to seek (mainly low-paying) jobs in the south while still living in the north; it has opened various markets (from food to antiques to entertainment) to people from either side; it has made Greek and Turkish Cypriots visible in each other's public spaces; and it has catalyzed profound changes in two of the areas that have constituted key points of contention in negotiations to solve the conflict (property rights, and citizenship rights of Turkish Cypriots in the Republic³).

Keeping these changes in mind, it would seem that the opening of one more crossing point would not fundamentally change conditions on the ground in the way the 2003 opening did. However, the opening of this particular crossing point would significantly further the process of intercommunal socialization in the Cypriot capital. In this article, I want to explain why this would be so. To do this, I analyze the significance of this particular area of Nicosia to understandings of Cypriotness, where “Cypriotness” refers particularly to those aspects of identity that the city's authorities lay claim to. I do so by exploring different concepts of “reunification” associated with particular spaces in the Cypriot capital.

Processes of reunification in Cyprus should be understood within the specific context of division that prevailed in the island in previous decades. It could thus be argued that Cyprus' modern history has been marked by processes of division. The period of British colonial rule (1878-1960) saw the onset of Greek and Turkish nationalism (Kızılyürek,

-
- 2 From the viewpoint of Greek Cypriot official rhetoric, this is a misnomer: the Greek Cypriot leadership holds that the Green Line that has divided the island since the war of 1974 is not a “border,” but a ceasefire line maintained illegally by the Turkish occupation forces, who also control all aspects of political life in the unrecognized state in the north (i.e., the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, or TRNC).
 - 3 The reference is to the Republic of Cyprus, which has been staffed by Greek Cypriots since 1963 and has been in control of the southern part of the island since the partition of 1974. At present, this remains the only internationally recognized state in Cyprus.

2002; Loizos, 2001:24-41), the development of separate educational systems (Bryant, 2004) and the gradual separation of villages into Greek and Turkish (Attalides, 1979). Administration was divided on the local level in 1958 with the separation of municipalities (Markides, 2001), and the constitution that inaugurated Cyprus' period of independence in 1960 was concerned chiefly with the separation of powers between the island's two main communities of Greek and Turkish Cypriots (Adams, 1966). The "intercommunal strife" that began in 1963 caused the vast majority of Turkish Cypriots to flee their homes and live in autonomously administered enclaves on 3% of the land and in degrading conditions (Mehmet and Mehmet, 2003); and the war of 1974, when Turkey landed troops on the island following a Greek nationalist coup d'état against the more moderate leadership, resulted in the division of Cyprus along a ceasefire line, north of which Turkish Cypriots were transferred, the Greek Cypriots being evicted to the south. Since then, and until 2003, the line of demarcation, known as the Green Line, had borne all the hallmarks of a closed border: impenetrable to traffic, as well as telecommunication and postal service.

The opening of this border in April 2003 was a surprise event (Demetriou, n.d.) initiated by the Turkish Cypriot leadership, virtually without the involvement of the Republic's authorities. This element of surprise forced the Greek Cypriot leadership to respond through recourse to its staple nationalist rhetoric, i.e., that the Green Line is not a border anyway and that it is the Turkish authorities who are responsible for impeding movement across the Line, that Greek and Turkish Cypriots can live together and that coexistence is impeded only by the presence of the Turkish army in the north. Since this discourse precludes arguments that prohibit crossings, it was impossible for the Greek Cypriot government to oppose movement across the Line. To date, the Greek Cypriot police has estimated that nearly half the island's Greek Cypriot population have crossed, a large number more than once and many regularly, while the figures for Turkish Cypriots are even higher. On May 1, 2003, alone, 25,800 Greek Cypriots were estimated to have crossed (*Phileleftheros* newspaper, November 30, 2004), while in the first three months, the total number of crossers from the south was estimated at 200,000 (Republic of Cyprus Statistical Service, July 2003).

In contrast with the events of 2003, the opening of Ledra Street has been under consideration by the authorities on both sides of the island since the opening of the first crossing point. During that time period, the failure of an April 2004 referendum to endorse a UN-proposed plan (the Annan Plan, named for the UN Secretary General in charge at the time) that would reunite the island, through its rejection by the leadership and majority of the Greek Cypriot population, has soured relations between the two sides, both at the highest political levels, as well as at the popular and political level in both the north and the south. The governmental campaign on the Annan Plan in the south, which took place prior to the referendum, produced a series of arguments for rejecting any form of reunification that did not satisfy all Greek Cypriot requirements (e.g., requisition of all Greek Cypriot properties in the north, expulsion of all Turkish

nationals to Turkey, strict limitations to the political representation of Turkish Cypriots).⁴

Most importantly, with the failure of the referendum, the prospects for another round of negotiations and thus a solution to the political problem in the near future have dimmed. As a result, the government in the south is now armed with a series of arguments for rejecting isolated initiatives and for linking its evaluation of them to an integrated and holistic (and therefore divisive) approach to the island's political problems. The stance of the Republic's government on the opening of Ledra Street exemplifies this approach.

Paradoxically, the major point of contention was the building of a bridge by the Turkish Cypriot authorities, where they planned to install their checkpoint (see Figures 1 and 2). The purpose of this bridge was to pass over a section of the road that had been used by the Turkish military, since it took over this specific position in 1974, as a passage for vehicles and soldiers. In one sense, then, it could be said that the building of the bridge was a solution that allowed Turkish Cypriot authorities to respond to public pressure to open this crossing point, while avoiding a significant change to the logistics of military presence on the ground: quite literally, social change could be effected on a superstructural level by the movement of civilians, but the military would remain firmly on the ground. This is precisely what the Greek Cypriot government objected to concerning the opening of the crossing point. It argued that if Ledra Street was to be opened, the presence of the military was unacceptable. The Cypriot government thus refused to consent to the opening until the bridge was torn down and the military passage rendered defunct.

The moral merits of this position notwithstanding (from a pacifist perspective, at least), refusal to allow the opening of any crossing point across the Green Line flies in the face of Greek Cypriot rhetoric that maintains that freedom of movement is only impeded by the authorities in the north. Abandoning this rhetoric places the status of the Green Line as "not a border" into question. The bridge thus appears to have solved, for the Turkish Cypriot leadership, the paradox of army presence and a growing desire for reunification. At the same time, it appears to have brought two hitherto compatible elements of Greek Cypriot governmental rhetoric, namely the support for freedom of movement and removal of the Turkish army, into conflict. In short, the story of the opening of Ledra Street (and its failure to be opened) illustrates how the building of a bridge came to divide rather than unite the two sides of the city, and how the rules of reunification politics were breached. This is not simply a lamentable instance of political failure. It is a telling example of the tensions between concepts of "division" and "unity,"

4 For different perspectives on the position of the Greek Cypriot government to the Annan Plan, see Heraclides (2004) and Coufoudakis (2004).

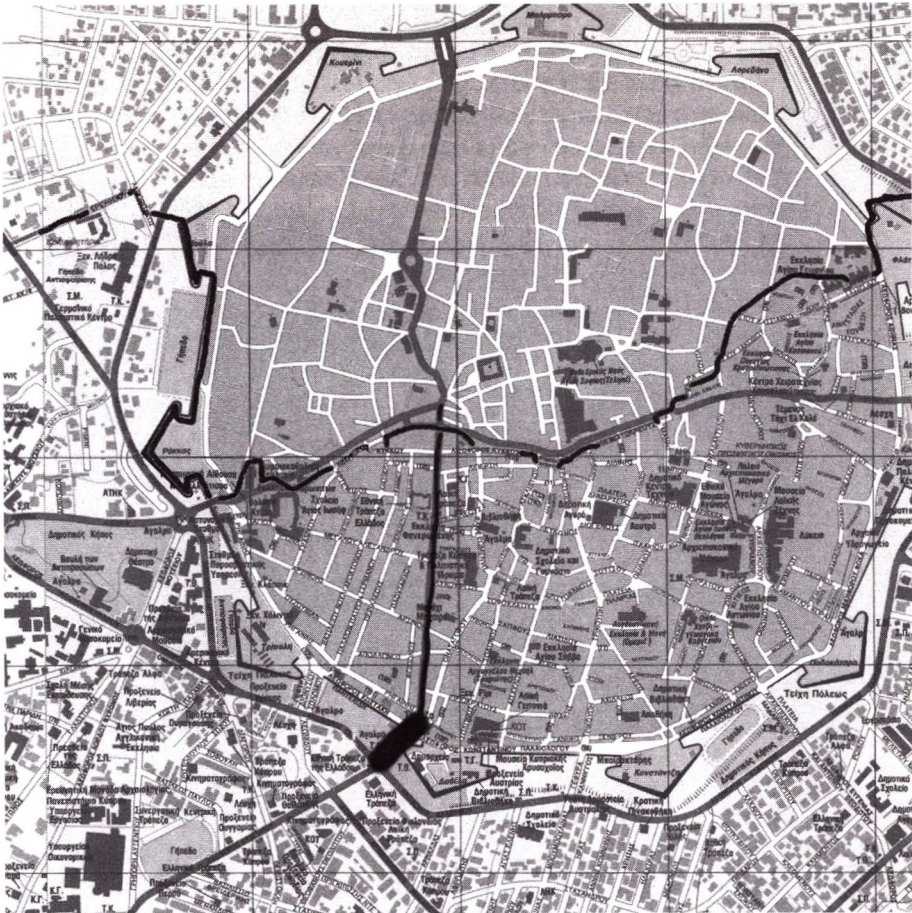


Figure 1: Map of Nicosia showing Ledra Street (adapted from the Nicosia municipality web site, <http://www.nicosia.org.cy/english/xartis.shtml>)

“conflict” and “reunification,” that inhere in official, public and private understandings of “the political” in Cyprus and in the manifestation of these understandings in Nicosian daily lives.

Division and the limits of desire

Rhetorically formalized descriptions of Nicosia project it as “European” and “divided.” The logo of the Nicosia Municipality declares it to be “the last divided capital in Europe.”



Figure 2: The footbridge built by Turkish Cypriot authorities (author, February 2006)

While the logo of the Nicosia Turkish Municipality in the north has no words, the welcoming statement of the mayor in 2005 on the main page of a web site (<http://www.lefkosaturkbelediyesi.net/>) was entitled “Come: Let’s open up Nicosia all together!”—a call that, as the text next explains, refers to opening it up across the division line, as well as opening it up to Europe. The two adjectives “divided” and “European” are thus explicit in the authorities’ presentation of what Nicosia is. Yet in so branding the city, I would suggest that these descriptions also index the ambivalence underlying them.

While the Greek Cypriot Municipality logo appears to lament the division of the city, presenting it as an aberration within a unified Europe of reconciliation, and projecting “division” as a condition of backwardness that should be left in the past, it also brands Nicosia as a unique European remnant where the legacy of ethnic strife can still be experienced. Indeed, one of the practical impediments to crossing from Ledra Street on the Greek Cypriot side, once the opening is secured on the northern side, is the presence of a structure designed to pay homage to the division, which has, over the decades, become a popular tourist attraction. The structure consists of a wooden

platform that stretches along a wall marking the end of the Greek side of Ledra Street, cutting it in two. On one side of the platform is a Greek Cypriot military post, painted in the blue and white stripes of the Greek flag, from which a sentry (usually a secondary-school male graduate in his late teens posted there as part of his compulsory two-year military service) is supposed to keep watch of his counterparts on the other side (see Figures 3 and 4). The entrance to the post can be reached via a short flight of metal steps that visitors are encouraged to ascend. Normally, the sentry is available to offer his services, by providing a set of binoculars through which to view the elusive “other side” and, whenever asked, obliges tourists shocked by the horror of the division with answers about the nonsensical situation of a street divided in two, with part of it unreachable.

It is interesting to note that, though the elusiveness of “the other side” and the impossibility of reaching the other side of the street have waned since the opening of



Figure 3: The Greek Cypriot military post, its sentry and tourists (author, February 2006)

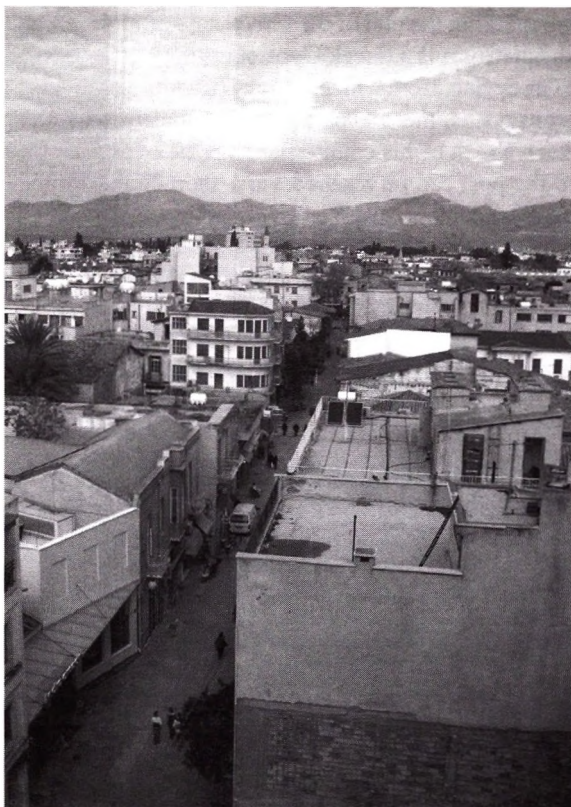


Figure 4: Elevated view of Ledra Street (author, February 2006)

the border, foreigners I spoke to who visited the site in the last two years still express shock at the experience, because it “distilled” for them—in the physicality of a street that stops at a wall and then continues on the other side—the monstrosity of the division of the island. “I only understood what the division was about when I went to Ledra Street and looked through the binoculars,” remarked Dimitris, a middle-aged Greek who had gained good background knowledge on the Cyprus issue through a substantial amount of reading. His comment echoes the impressions of people of various nationalities and with differing levels of knowledge about Cyprus and the political problem.

That the division is an atrocity is the basic line of argument of the Greek Cypriot side, whether the argument is for a unitary state (against Turkish Cypriot claims for structures ensuring their political equality), unification of territory (against maintaining a Turkish sector in the north) or even brotherly coexistence between Greek and Turkish Cypriots (against nationalist rhetorics of both sides). The significance of this site lies

in the power of the visceral and ocular experience it offers—an experience that translates into a compelling argument, convincing, without further deliberation, international visitors of the righteousness of Greek Cypriot arguments. This is by no means relegated to the realm of the “public.” The significance of this experience is considered so important that high level politicians visiting Cyprus for the first time are also taken here, to see and feel the injustice of division. This significance is also well understood by the Turkish Cypriot authorities; in 2006, shortly after the collapse of negotiations over the opening of Ledra Street, a large sign appeared on the building opposite the bridge and the military post that could easily be read by the tourists looking onto the other side. It read “FOR THOSE WATCHING FROM THE WALL OF SHAME, THIS IS THE BRIDGE OF PEACE” (Figure 5). This was an attempt to usurp a key platform for Greek Cypriot propaganda and replace it with another propagandistic argument, for reunification at all costs, presumably even at the cost of accommodating the demands of the military. Given the significance of this site, then, it is worth questioning whether the hesitation of the authorities to consent to the opening of the street is not also a

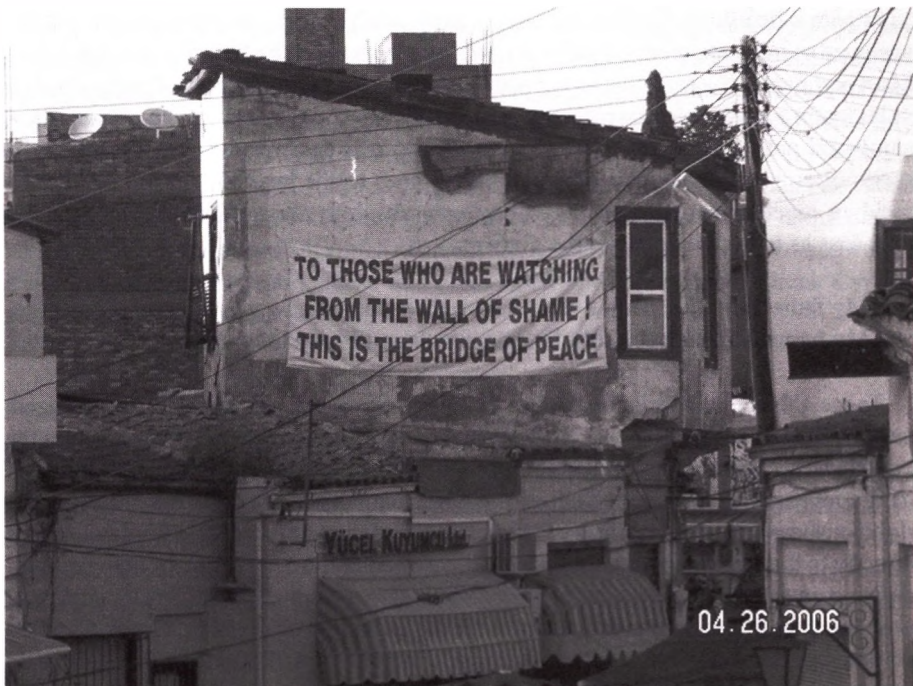


Figure 5: Sign on northern side erected in 2006 to be seen from the sentry post in the south (author, April 2006)

hesitation to consent to the demolition of this memorial of division, and thus a hesitation to part with a core part of Greek Cypriot identification that is symbolized by the division.

This symbolism is omnipresent in Nicosia. Many points on the Green Line are publicly accessible. One can see the Greek Cypriot soldiers in their posts, rifles on their shoulders, behind signs banning access and photography. These points are often marked with symbols that declare and lament the division: a wall graffitied with the words “our borders are not here; our borders are in Kyrenia” (the island’s northernmost town); or another, painted in the blue and white stripes of the Greek flag, declaring symbolically the presence of the nation where one might have thought the nation stops (leaving open the question of whose nation is being presented). The border, symbolized by the barbed wire of separation, is widely used to invoke the trauma suffered by Greek Cypriots on account of “the invasion and occupation of a third of our homeland by Turkish troops,” as one of the official phrases goes. This barbed wire features on a postage stamp worth one cent, issued after the war and levied on each item being posted from the Republic, as a contribution to the (Greek Cypriot) refugee fund; it also features on the logos of a number of non-governmental organizations concerned with Cypriot politics—in fact, in most visual representations of the Cyprus problem, from political documentaries to video clips for songs about the conflict. There are many such songs decrying the division; some play on the theme of the homeland being enslaved or in bondage (*sklavomēni patridha*); others extol the beauty of the lands lost. Most pertinently, the song that has united Greek Cypriot nationalists and non-nationalists in lamenting the division (written by a Turkish Cypriot poetess from the leftist radical camp and put to music by a Greek Cypriot musician known for having organized a series of concerts in support of the military) goes to the heart of this symbolism by welding together nationalism, its critique, an absolute sense of victimization and a total loss as to how to relate to the division:

My father says that people should love their homeland
My homeland has been split in two: which part is one to love?

To me, this stanza succinctly depicts the aporia of a conflict that is being internalized, an aporia at the heart of Greek Cypriot political subjectivity, whereby “division” is the knot that binds nationalism and innocence (the father’s advice and the girl’s heeding of it), trauma and pride (the breakup of the homeland and the knowledge of one’s own righteousness), the continuation of the conflict and pursuit of peace. This knot relates directly to the question mentioned above, i.e., whether the destruction of memorials of division entailed in the opening of Ledra Street threatens the Greek Cypriot edifice of post-war identification constructed around the existence of division. Greek Cypriots commenting on their fellow citizens’ attitude to politics will often say that people do not care and that, as long as their own side can moan and shout about the occupation and at the same time have their pockets full, they are happy—without a solution. While

this argument may make sense, it in fact probes a much more fundamental issue about the way people have come to live with the division over the last few decades.

This question can be probed from a psychoanalytic perspective, by reference to the Lacanian concept of the symptom as “sinthome” (1977). In this view, the sinthome holds together the knot of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. The traumatic encounter with the real is manifested as symptom and thus denounced as aberration.⁵ Yet, as Žižek explains, the sinthome is not simply an aberration; it exists in a universe where there are only symptoms, it is a universalized symptom, and its dissolution, “far from bringing about the non-pathological state of full desiring capacity, leads, rather, to a total psychotic catastrophe, to the dissolution of the subject’s entire universe” (2000:116-117). If the division is then such an aberration, an aberration that has held together conceptualizations of what it is to be a Greek Cypriot political subject, in a universe (i.e., its symbolic domain) discursively defined by the legacy of conflict, then the absence of division must also imply a looming crisis: that of encountering a reality in which this subjectivity collapses.

This collapse thus entails a reconfiguration of political subjectivity. Elsewhere (Demetriou, n.d.), I have argued that the opening of the border in April 2003 was an event that spurred a dramatic reconfiguration of this subjectivity. Here, I want to extend this argument to show that this reconfiguration drew on discourses that were previously available but did not figure prominently in official rhetoric. In that analysis, I further argued that, in the aftermath of this event (of the opening), the state reasserted its role as a guarantor of the limits of political discourse and of the field of the political (a role that was momentarily put into question). Drawing on this, I here want to explore how the state is related to in this context. I argue that the minute ways in which Nicosians experience the political post-2003 are inextricably tied to the processes of reunification taking shape on the ground but which nevertheless remain unarticulated. In other words, it is in this unspoken reunification that clues about the formation of Greek Cypriot political subjectivity are to be found.

Freedom and globalization

It is my contention that a lived reunification currently exists on the ground in Cyprus. This lived reunification is one the Republic’s authorities have found difficult to acknowledge. Since the opening of the border in 2003, people have ceaselessly crossed from one side to the other. Nicosia has been the central node of this movement, with two crossing points, one for pedestrians and another for cars. Nicosia was the obvious

5 A lucid account of these relations is provided by Stavrakakis (1999:56-70).

point from which to begin reunification for several reasons: it is the capital; it is in the center; and it is divided by the Green Line. It is exactly for these reasons that Nicosia led the drive to reunification long before the border opened. Despite its logo phrase, the Greek Cypriot Nicosian Municipality has famously been cooperating with its Turkish Cypriot counterpart to “render the city able to function as a unified entity at the moment of solution.” The Nicosia Master Plan has been driving development towards this end over the past two decades, starting with the sewage system and culminating in the renovation of large parts of the old city (Demetriades, 1998; Papadakis, 1998). Yet, despite the structural unification, Nicosia remains divided, most strikingly perhaps between the affluence of the south and the lack of it in the north (Cockburn, 2004).

Essentializing as these categories may be, glossing over the similarities between the poor housing conditions in the old town in which immigrants live on both sides, for example, affluence and its lack is the dichotomy that divides most comparisons of the north and the south, including those voiced by Cypriot crossers following the opening of the border. This affluence (sometimes also expressed by the concept of “development”) is closely bound with globalization, expressed in the idea of being “open to the world.” Thus, one recurring comment by Greek Cypriot crossers up to 2005 was that the north “has not been developed,” which had both positive connotations of preservation and authenticity and negative connotations of backwardness, neglect and stasis. Turkish Cypriot crossers, by comparison, saw the south as primarily a gate to the world—allegedly, a favorite initial destination had been that arch-symbol of globalization, the McDonald’s outlets of the south. Another was the Passport Department of the Republic, issuing that all-important travel document that does not require visas for the vast majority of destinations across the globe. These discourses (including crossing practices) are of course highly political, in that they are determined by what kind of political subject one is. Here I want to explore the links between this subjectivity and the Nicosian spaces in which it is shaped.

Freedom Square (*Platía Eleftherías*) is the main square in southern Nicosia. Its name was changed from *Platía Metaxá* (after the Greek dictator of the 1940s) in 1974, following the division, for which, in the minds of many Greek Cypriots, the coup-instigating Greek dictatorship of 1967-1974 was to blame. Reportedly, Turkish Cypriot crossers who had not visited it since the change of name called it Plat’a Metaxá in 2003 (*Kıbrıslı* newspaper, May 29, 2003). Others translated its current name (Freedom) to Turkish, calling it *...zgürlük Meydanı*. These names are worth exploring in detail, as they provide references to the differences between Greek and Turkish Cypriot political experience.

The first name of the square (the old one celebrating a dictator who ruled “motherland” Greece) is a reminder of a past of nationalist fantasies (e.g., of Cyprus’ union with Greece to which the 1974 coup aspired, while at the same time provoking the Turkish army to invade/intervene) that successive Greek Cypriot political leaderships have sought to “put behind us” in the name of internal unity and common loss. This is

a process that Turkish Cypriots have not experienced. Since 1974, their own leadership has proclaimed that the Turkish army has restored the peace and brought safety after years of persecution following the collapse of the common state in 1963. Since 1983, when the TRNC unilaterally declared independence, its leadership has maintained that division is the best way to guarantee this safety. There has been little renaming of squares in northern Nicosia, because this has been the town's Turkish sector since the division of municipalities in 1958; in contrast, in other areas, names of villages, streets and squares were changed into Turkish.⁶ But there has been considerable building of monuments to celebrate the newfound "peace," "security" and "independence" in the new state.

In contrast, the Turkish name used for the square since 2003 (the translation of "Freedom Square" into Turkish) has direct relevance to Turkish Cypriot political experience since 2000. From that year onwards, a strong and audible opposition started forming in the north, which turned against the traditional leadership when the effects of long-term international isolation and dependence on Turkey became obvious on all social levels: through mass emigration of young and educated Turkish Cypriots, a series of economic collapses that were linked to the dependence of the economy on Turkey, and the foreclosure of prospects for unification, at a time when the south was bidding to become an EU member, due to the intransigence of the leadership. In 2002 and 2003, a series of massive demonstrations were held in the main squares of northern Nicosia in support of a "solution [to the problem] and [accession to the] EU," where the demonstrators also asked the leadership to "sign [a solution] or resign." By this time, the view of northern Cyprus as an "open prison" was becoming widespread. Thus, the solution, in the form of unification with the south, came to be imagined as the answer of "freedom" to this imprisonment. The opening of the Green Line, which was widely seen as a feat of the opposition's struggle, was viewed (in 2003 at least) as the beginning of the end of this freedom-seeking struggle. It was in this context of the expectation of freedom to come that Freedom Square (Plat'a Elefther'as) became ...zgürlük Meydanı.

The onomastics of the square should be analyzed alongside the multiplicity of meanings associated with the utilization of its space. In this sense, the square should be seen above all as a connection point where multiple interpretations of the political are concentrated. In fact, the "square" is a 100 meter-long, four-lane unidirectional stretch

6 It should be noted that the issue of naming and renaming locations is quite complex. For example, whereas many locations only had Greek names that were changed, sometimes more than once, other locations had double names even before 1974. Thus, for many locations in the south, the Turkish names had been "forgotten." For a more detailed approach to the significance of this renaming and forgetting of names, see Papadakis (2005). For a detailed discussion of the complexity of space naming and its relation to place-making, see Demetriou (2006).

of road, leading from the now pedestrianized part of the old city to the main modern shopping area (pedestrianized as part of the Nicosia Master Plan). In a recent international competition, won by Zaha Hadid in collaboration with a Greek Cypriot and a Turkish Cypriot architect, it was decided to pedestrianize the square as well.⁷ Because the “old” and “modern” parts of the city are clearly divided by the Venetian walls that encircle the former, the square is quite literally a bridge over the moat running outside the perimeter of the walls, which has now been converted to a series of spaces of differing functions underneath each of the eleven bastions that punctuate the walls. The bastions are the key symbol for Nicosia, used in the logos of both Municipalities. The Eleftheria Square bastion currently houses the Town Hall (which overlooks the square), and the moats on either side of it are now public parks (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Platía Eleftherías (Freedom Square) (author, February 2006)

7 A view of the plans is available on the Nicosia Municipality web site at <http://www.nicosia.org.cy/pdf/diagwnismos/1st%20Prize/panel%206.pdf> and <http://www.nicosia.org.cy/pdf/diagwnismos/1st%20Prize/panel%207.pdf>, accessed December 27, 2005.

Apart from providing a diffusion point for the traffic moving between the old and new parts of the town at rush hour, the square is also the central point of the town's connection to the world. The two kiosks located on its west side are uniquely the best stocked in international news publications. They are also open 24/7, which means that on Sundays and especially at odd hours of the morning, they are the most accessible suppliers of canned and bottled drinks, snacks, tobacco, batteries, light bulbs, phone cards and the like.

As a hub for consumers, Eleftheria Square is also a bridge between Cypriot locals and foreigners. There are European tourists strolling between the historical and folkloric sites inside the walled city and the "noteworthy capitalist contrast" outside it; Greek soldiers posted in Cyprus as part of the 950-strong "Greek Force in Cyprus" that the 1960 Constitution envisioned as implementation of Greece's "rights of guarantee"⁸; Asian migrants working in the construction sector and as domestics in and around Nicosia; and migrants from the FSU settling in Cyprus on the basis of claims to Greek ethnicity and under repatriation policies in Greece and freedom of settlement policies between Greece and Cyprus that were in place before the latter's EU accession.

In providing the venue for such coincidence of presence, Eleftheria Square also becomes the space for enacting the politics of exclusion that defines Greek Cypriot daily life. The foreigners (western Europeans, Greeks, eastern and southern migrants) are both visible and ignored. Across from the two kiosks, a row of public phone booths makes for another center of connection of Cyprus to the various "homelands" around the globe. Eleftheria Square is thus a space subjectively conceptualized in different ways; the power inherent in the relation between these different conceptualizations (what might be termed intersubjectivity) is an aspect of the political subjectivity I have been talking about.

But Eleftheria Square is a political center in overt ways also. It is the prime venue for campaigns by NGOs: from the Association of the Missing, which raises a tree every Christmas decorated with yellow ribbons, one for every Greek Cypriot gone missing in the war of 1974, as a call to the international community to pressure Turkey into taking responsibility for their disappearance or death⁹; to the yearly Radio Marathon that collects money for children; to the Movement for Support of Immigrants and Anti-Racism that held a Tsunami Appeal campaign in the winter of 2004-2005. It is also the venue for introducing world politics in Cyprus: signature campaigns for the rights of Palestinians and against the war in Iraq have been held there in recent years.

8 Similarly, 650 Turkish troops were envisioned as part of Turkey's guarantee, which made up the "Turkish Force in Cyprus." After the takeover of the north by the Turkish military in 1974, which also installed 40,000 troops in that area, this force became defunct.

9 For an insightful account of the way the process of writing the names of the missing on the yellow ribbons resembles bureaucratic procedures, see Cassia (2005:109-111).

Domestic politics has centered there as well. Over the last 30 years, crowds have gathered to hear the President speak. Such gatherings were most frequent during the 1980s, under the presidency of Spyros Kyprianou, which is now widely viewed as a period of centralization of state power and the consolidation of clientelist structures of governance and nepotism. In recent years, political parties have been setting up kiosks there as part of their pre-election campaigns. Political meetings and speeches have been dwindling, and where they have been held, most recently prior to the referendum in 2004 where both the “Yes” and “No” platforms staged support-gathering demonstrations, attendance has been low.

The square is, in short, a place where the worlds in and of Cyprus (geographical, political, subjective and class) encounter each other. In this sense, Freedom Square lives up to its double name: a context in which “freedom” as a rhetorical device can be articulated, and a space where the possibility of undoing the structures that limit freedom is daily foreclosed. This foreclosure comes into relief when one considers the meanings associated with the space that Eleftheria Square obliterates in being branded as “the capital’s center point.”

Like Eleftheria Square, the main center of northern Nicosia, Sarayönü (Palace Square), named after the Ottoman Palace (Saray) in front of which it is situated, is in close proximity to the Green Line. Under the British in the nineteenth century, the palace was transformed into courthouses, and still serves this function today. Unlike Platía Eleftherías, Sarayönü is situated within the walls at a short distance from Kyrenia Gate, or Atatürk Meydanı (after the founder of the Turkish Republic), which connects the old and new parts of town. Sarayönü is surrounded by historical buildings, the most prominent of which are the courthouse buildings. Sarayönü is indeed a square, paved around a Venetian monument and interspersed with trees underneath which the Saray Hotel, next to the square, and a nearby restaurant have laid out tables and chairs (see Figure 7). These are generally frequented by young men, immigrants from Turkey, either on a break from work or in search of it (in Eleftheria Square this otherness is also that of immigrants, but carries a different set of significations to the locals because of the difference in the politics involved—the settling of immigrants in northern Cyprus has been an official demographic policy of the Turkish state).¹⁰

Like Platía Eleftherías, Sarayönü is usually for “passing through” on the way to shops and offices at the center of town, and “idling” on it signals one’s otherness. Also like Eleftheria Square, Sarayönü is the main point for public meetings—cultural (for example, the hosting of the International Turkish Folk Dance Festival) and more clearly

10 In terms of the gendering of space, even though Sarayönü may appear more masculinized, both squares carry similar connotations. Thus, women are less visible in them than men, but, when present, are less likely to engage in stationary practices on the square than men (e.g., sitting on benches, speaking to friends or otherwise “hanging around”).



Figure 7: Sarayönü (Palace Square) (author, February 2006)

political ones. Sarayönü has been hosting political meetings for decades. Turkish Cypriot leaders like Rauf Denktaş and Fazıl Küçük have addressed crowds from the balconies of the Saray Hotel on many occasions. Most importantly for recent history, though, the large demonstrations that opposed Denktaş' stance of intransigence were held there and in the neighboring İnönü Square. Two years on, in the aftermath of the referenda—which, according to a UN official, were conceived as a way of bypassing Denktaş after the realization (through the demonstrations) that his legitimacy in the north had dwindled, and with Denktaş having lost both leadership posts (premiership and presidency of the TRNC) he had commanded for the last 22 years—the ultimate goal of the demonstrations may not have been attained, but their effects could not be described as anything other than revolutionary.

I would like to suggest that the comparison between the dwindling numbers of attendees in meetings in *Platía Eleftherías* and the surprising numbers attending the Sarayönü demonstrations (close to half the Turkish Cypriot population on the island) is another instance that highlights the difference in the political subjectivities of north and south Nicosians and north and south Cypriots. As I claimed above, it is this difference that primarily defines the kind of reunification that has been taking place since the

opening of the border. Yet, I would also like to suggest that there were points of connection in this process of formation that went beyond the imagination of an unknown or opponent Other in the decades of separation.

Most noticeably, peace activists of both sides have retained contact and held meetings throughout this period. Carried out in a climate of pervading nationalism and extreme mistrust of civilian initiatives, the existence of such contact instituted a concept of “civilian rapprochement” that was common to the two sides (even if public discourse about it may have diverged at different points in time). The significance of this institution is that it provided a template against which the (however limited) reunification process that began with the opening of the border could be conceptualized and evaluated. For this reason, I will now turn to the visions of reunification that developed in the years of separation. To this end, another Nicosian site becomes central.

No man’s hotel and the luxuries of suspension

Ledra Palace is a hotel, which, because of its proximity, gave its name to the only crossing point that has existed since 1974 between the north and south sectors of Nicosia. Built in the mid-1940s, the hotel began housing UN troops upon their arrival on the island after the first intercommunal clashes in 1964, until the complete closure of the Green Line after the war of 1974, from which point onwards peacekeepers have been its only lodgers. In the near 30 years of its life as a luxury hotel, it famously accommodated foreign VIPs and a large number of Nicosian newlyweds, who used it for wedding receptions. After 1974, Ledra Palace became both a signifier of the division and a signifier of the attempts to overcome it.

Since the early 1990s, bi-communal meetings between reconciliation activists from north and south were held there, facilitated by the UN, and under the close surveillance of the authorities from the two sides, who kept rigorous control over who sought and had access to the areas beyond their checkpoints (including the “neutral” space of the Green Line). As these meetings became more frequent, more open and more acceptable, the scope of events at Ledra Palace was widened. An annual celebration of UN Day was instituted, during which Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots had permission to cross the checkpoints and attend the festivities organized at Ledra Palace, subject to relatively little control. Political meetings, such as conferences where politicians from both sides and across the political spectrum were invited to speak, were also organized there. From the opening of the border until 2005, meetings of the major parties from the two sides were held there on a regular basis.

But at the time that the Green Line symbolized total division between north and south, and was the main target of reconciliation efforts, Ledra Palace became the symbol of the utopia that bi-communalists were working towards. It was a space in which the Other could be met, the political problem could be solved, and socialization could

occur among “friends” who shared the vision of a Cyprus without the conflict and shared experiences of harassment by authorities because their fraternization with the Other lent them a “traitor” identity.

A number of conflict resolution trainers have allegedly expressed surprise at the infatuation of the two communities’ bi-communalists for each other. One of the recurring points made to me since the late 1990s by a number of Cypriots who attended such meetings (from both sides) was the surprise of trainers at the amicable relationships between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot trainees:

- It was as if they expected us to knife each other or something.
- When they saw us greeting each other, they asked, “So where is the problem? You treat each other like brothers!”
- Right from the first session, they said, “You were supposed to get to this stage at the end!”

It is my belief that this mode of socialization has something to do with the common imagination of an ideal embodied in the concept of “Ledra Palace” (for example, as a place defying the reality of complete separation), which pertained even in meetings held in other locations. This commonality of imagination would also explain what puzzled a Greek conflict resolution practitioner at a workshop she held with Cypriot women activists—a reflection she shared with me in January 2005:

We were discussing projects that might be proposed for funding, and they began talking about a space where they would feel secure and relaxed, and then they started mentioning a swimming pool. It was strange, as if their vision of the future was a spa resort on the Green Line...!

I suggest that this aporia with how Cypriots ultimately envision a solution to the political problem is also reflected in the recent interest in research on Cyprus with “imagination” (Bryant, 2005). Much like the image of a spa, the vision of a luxury hotel, restored to its former glory and open to all, points to a utopian image of universal affluence that is telling of the limitless possibilities imaginable in a world without conflict—and thus telling of the extent to which the conflict is imagined as utterly stifling. Ledra Palace Hotel provides a salient symbol for cultivating such conceptualizations in a number of ways: as a hotel, it invokes associations with the concepts of cosmopolitanism and liminality; moreover, its location on the Green Line and outside the jurisdiction of authorities from the north or south invokes a sense of freedom from state rule, as well as ideas of internationalism and transnationalism (both of which are further reinforced by the involvement of the UN and foreign specialists in these conflict resolution workshops).

I further suggest that this concept of the “conflict” (as utterly stifling in the reality of the world outside the gates of Ledra Palace Hotel) also partakes of a discourse of victimization that places the blame for the trauma, caused directly or indirectly by the conflict, on the outside. This is a favorite motif in Cypriot discourse, unsurprisingly perhaps, whether the outside is foreign powers (Greek Cypriot state rhetoric), nationalism (a good deal of social science analysis), politicians (staple argument from individuals adopting a “man on the street” identity) or state authorities (bi-communalist discourse). But at the same time, this discourse of victimization leaves little room for agency and encloses the self in the center of attacking forces. There are of course ways to overcome this. Many discussions on the fringes of bi-communal meetings focus on sharing experiences of how to deal with surveillance, the tapping of phones and police harassment. But the kind of space caricatured by the image of a spa is absent. For me, this shows that the discourses of calm, of healing and of the care of the self that could associate the internalization of the conflict with the image of the spa are far from explicit. Thus, I would suggest that the caricature is not about escaping the toils of daily life in the way any spa image might imply, but rather it is about the location as much as the spa itself—i.e., the caricature of a spa *on the Green Line* provides a way of escaping the toils of specifically Cypriot daily lives, on both sides of Ledra Palace, lives steeped in a (non-violent) conflict.

Outside the bi-communalist movement, spas and other body regime establishments thrive in Nicosia. There are a number of luxury beauty salons offering relaxation treatments in the south, and New Age healing techniques are on the rise in the north. Explicit links to the conflict are not made, and I would not suggest that they are direct. But as Chantler notes, the kind of “person-centered therapy” that is offered in these institutions “fails to address structural dimensions of inequality,” which feed into the ways in which the conflict and its solution are conceptualized (2005:239). Thus, I argue, if the body is viewed as a social template (following a number of analyses, from Douglas, 1973, and Foucault, 1981, to Csordas, 1990, and Turner, 1995), then the “healing” regimes under which it is subjected could be indicative of the pervasiveness of discourses on “suffering” (that in their explicit manifestations in Cyprus are generally centered on the conflict) in the domain of the personal. Moreover, if this is indicative of an “ethics of illness” (Garrett, 2001) that ties the political to treatments of the body, then the kinds of “healing” techniques chosen might also relate to the structure of political subjectivity.

Especially in the south, where such “healing” is delegated to experts in a relation of trust (teachers of small groups, masseurs, personal trainers, or more generally, as I heard somebody describe them in one instance, “gurus”), one can find parallels between such delegation and the delegation of reproductive work to specific groups of immigrants who are categorized by employers and authorities alike along a spectrum tying race to particular kinds of work (Agathangelou, 2004). And, I argue, one can similarly find parallels to the delegation of political decisions to the experts (i.e., politicians chosen

to perform exactly this role, as one informant put it). I further argue that this delegation of healing, reproductive and political work to different “experts” whose relation to the self is permeated by power is also implicated in the production and re-production of a reality welded by the concept of “division” as *sinthome*.

A comment worth reflecting on is the following statement by a young Greek Cypriot a day after the referendum, as she was sitting in an expensive café in southern Nicosia: “Thank God it’s over; the whole referendum story has completely stressed me out—at last back to normality!” This comment should be read in parallel with the rumor circulating within Greek Cypriot Nicosian society at the time of the referendum that all the pharmacies had ran out of valium and other sedatives.¹¹ In light of what I have said above, I read this comment as yet another expression of the “de-stressed normality” that the “conflict” is defined against. Using “spa” as a symbol of such “de-stress,” for those whose ideologies bring them face to face with the conflict on a daily basis, such normality is only imaginable in the fantasy of a Green Line spa. And for those whose daily lives escape the “conflict,” dealing with it in the pre-referendum period upsets their unconflicted routines. Yet as much as a “de-stressed normality” is longed for, a distressed normality exists across the division line. Since 2003—with the border open, coexistence (in whatever terms) a fact, and the political future in abeyance pending the finalization of a “solution” that refuses to be defined (most doggedly by the Greek Cypriot leadership)—political subjectivity is being redefined and reshaped. One of the ways in which this occurs is through the experience of crossing to the other side, an experience that the opening of Ledra Street has the potential to alter substantially.

Conclusion

I have argued that the concept of “division” is a major point of reference in Cypriot conceptualizations of the political. I have suggested that this view of Cypriot political subjectivity allows for the exploration of “the conflict” as a concept that structures, in explicit and implicit ways, the everyday. This is particularly relevant for Nicosia, where the division between the two parts of the city is embedded in the ways space is experienced. In this sense, the concept of “division” becomes the knot around which understandings of identity are configured. Exploring this for the case of Greek Cypriot political subjectivity, I have also argued that, in this process, division and its very abnormality are normalized to such an extent that processes of reunification become invisible. Instead, division is memorialized, in the sense that there is an emotional and

11 See also Papadakis’ reference to his doctor diagnosing “political symptoms” around the same time and claiming that he had seen many patients exhibiting them (2005:250).

political dependence on it. It takes on a primordial quality in Greek Cypriot rhetoric that harks back to the violence and violation of dislocation and loss, and links back to the imagery of the body and the techniques of the self. These techniques, in turn, reinstate a sense of the significance of the subject, as well as the *interchangeability* of bodies in the north and south of the city, as they turn to the alternative therapy and healing regimes opening up on both sides of the Green Line.

Yet, there are instances, such as the opening of Ledra Street, where these processes of reunification have the potential to substantially alter the experience of division, and thus of political subjectivity. Opening up the most major street in the old part of the city would be tantamount to opening up the “heart” of the city. The effects of this could potentially prove as major as the effects of the opening in 2003. It might mean, for example, that Cypriots would cross as shoppers rather than as pilgrims visiting “lost lands,” economic migrants, would-be citizens or fervent peace activists. It might allow crossing to be undertaken casually, during one’s stroll to the center of town. This kind of crossing would, in turn, have the potential of bringing reunification home and perhaps making it much more apparent than it has already been. In light of this prospect, the refusal of the Greek Cypriot authorities to consent to the opening, and of the Turkish Cypriot authorities to alter their military arrangements, might be indicative of a refusal to radically transform the structures that sustain the division.

References

- Adams, T. W. (1966). “The first Republic of Cyprus: A review of an unworkable constitution.” *Western Political Quarterly* 19:475-490.
- Agathangelou, A. M. (2004). *The Global Political Economy of Sex: Desire, Violence, Insecurity in Mediterranean Nation States*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Attalides, M. (1979). *Cyprus, Nationalism and International Politics*. London: Macmillan.
- Bryant, R. (2005). “Fantasies of the everyday: Institutions and memory in Cyprus.” Seminar paper, Dorfman Centre, St Peter’s College, Oxford.
- . (2004). *Imagining the Modern: The Cultures of Nationalism in Cyprus*. London: Tauris.
- Cassia, P. S. (2005). *Bodies of Evidence: Burial, Memory and the Recovery of Missing Persons in Cyprus: New Directions in Anthropology*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Chantler, K. (2005). “From disconnection to connection: Race, gender and the politics of therapy.” *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 33:239-256.
- Cockburn, C. (2004). *The Line: Women, Partition and the Gender Order in Cyprus*. London: Zed Books.
- Coufoudakis, V. (2004). “Cyprus: The referendum and its aftermath.” *The Cyprus Review* 16:67-82.
- Csordas, T. J. (1990). “Embodiment as a paradigm for anthropology.” *Ethos* 18:5-47.
- Demetriades, L. (1998). “The Nicosia Master Plan.” *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 8:169-176.
- Demetriou, O. (2006). “Streets not named: Discursive dead-ends and the politics of orientation in Thrace.” *Cultural Anthropology* 21,2:295-321.
- . (n.d.). “To cross or not to cross? Subjectivization and the absent state in Cyprus.” Unpublished paper.
- Douglas, M. (1996 c1973). *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1981). *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Vol. 1. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Garrett, C. (2001). “Transcendental meditation, reiki and yoga: Suffering, ritual and self-transformation.” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 16:329-342.

- Heraclides, A. (2004). "The Cyprus problem: An open and shut case? Probing the Greek Cypriot rejection of the Annan Plan." *The Cyprus Review* 16:37-54.
- Kızılyürek, N. (2002). *Milliyetçilik Kısılcancında Kıbrıs [Cyprus in the Claws of Nationalism]*. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları.
- Lacan, J. (1977). "Le Sinthome: Séminaire du 13 avril 1976. Le réel est sans loi." *Ornicar* 10:5-12.
- Loizos, P. (2001). *Unofficial Views. Cyprus: Society and Politics*. Nicosia: Intercollege Press.
- Markides, D. W. (2001). *Cyprus 1957-1963. From Colonial Conflict to Constitutional Crisis: The Key Role of the Municipal Issue*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mehmet, K. A., and Mehmet, O. (2003). *Family in War and Conflict: Using Social Capital for Survival in War Torn Cyprus*. Ottawa: The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Occasional Paper Series No. 28.
- Papadakis, Y. (2005). *Echoes from the Dead Zone: Across the Cyprus Divide*. London: Tauris.
- . (1998). "Walking the 'hora': 'Place' and 'non-place' in divided Nicosia." *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 8:302-327.
- Stavrakakis, Y. (1999). *Lacan and the Political*. London: Routledge.
- Turner, T. (1995). "Social body and embodied subject: Bodiliness, subjectivity, and sociality among the Kayapo." *Cultural Anthropology* 10:143-170.
- Zizek, S. (2000). *The Fragile Absolute- Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* London: Verso.