(Imposed) Division of Cyprus: Social and Political Exclusion through Passports

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Abstract

This paper positions itself as a state-of-the art paper by illustrating the past and present the division of the island of Cyprus and its exclusionary effects on economic, social, cultural, and political life on the island. We provide a brief conceptualization of passports and citizenship and their ties to nations and states, followed by the history of Cyprus that captures the governance of the island by different entities. In our analysis, we aim to explore the origins of the divide of the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities that were once united in a single state. We use the framework of Turner (1990) and research the top-down division on the island being imposed by different (trans)national actors and the manifestations of these within the communities and physical spaces. We also explore the differences in attitudes within the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities from the bottom-up. Throughout our analysis, we use specific literal and symbolic aspects of passports that characterize the exclusion faced in both the Republic of Cyprus (ROC) and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

Keywords

Passport, Cyprus, Citizenship, Political Science, Nation State, Belonging

Introduction

Every year, Henley Passport Index publishes a ranking of the passports of each country based on their ability to enter other countries visa-free (Neammanee & Lee, 2022). While for most people their passport and its strength may become a topic of discussion when considering travelling or applying for a visa, the concept of a passport is symbolic of a recent history and an ongoing division for the Cypriot people.

Our interest in passports is based in Gulddal and Payne, who see passports not only as an object of study, but also as a lens through which to look at the world (2017). This perspective of using passports as a tool for analysis allows them to meaningfully reflect on the relationship between mobility, state security and social inequality (Gulddal & Payne, 2017). Building forth on their study, we aim to uncover fresh perspectives about the division

of Cyprus by using passports as an analytical lens. More specifically, the focus of the paper is on the (imposed) division of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities manifesting as social and political exclusion through passports, both literally and symbolically.

Our focus on passport politics informed the choice of our case study, since the division of the island and differing values of the passports provides a valuable insight into its multidimensional aspect. Academic literature on the division of Cyprus is abundant, however a specific look at political and social exclusions using passports may provide new insights and spark new academic debates about who the Cypriot people are and what the possible origins of the divide might be. We position our study as a state-of-the-art paper aiming to present the past and present scholarship on Cyprus by using passports as a lens of inquiry. To do so, we benefit from a literature review of both contemporary studies in Cyprus and foundational interdisciplinary literature of the social sciences. This case study thus allows us to dive deeper into the concept of a passport and the passport as an analytical lens, as it is related to different themes within foundational social science theories, such as citizenship, the nation-state, biopower, and more.

We start by introducing the core concept of passports and their symbolic aspect. We briefly go over the history of Cyprus as it is essential for our analysis. We discuss how we come across exclusion, symbolized by passports, in the international political scene and then dive into the consequences for locals. Even though the global and the local are always connected, this division helps us to better understand whether the division of Cyprus into a Turkish and Greek side is imposed or also happening from the ground up. Turner's (1990) notion on the origin of nationalism is central to our overall analysis. Finally, we conclude by bringing both imposed and bottom-up perspectives together and providing possible points of further research to the everchanging political and social scene of Cyprus.

Conceptualization of Passports and Citizenship

In order to briefly conceptualize passports and what they reflect, we present two perspectives that are differently characterized but have significant overlapping aspects: the power perspective and the cultural perspective.

Through a power perspective, while the legal legitimacy of passports is derived from other personal documents, the signifying capabilities of the passport to represent one's citizenship cannot be understated, as the passport operates as a distinguisher between "the citizen and the alien" (Gulddal & Payne, 2017). In other words, passports become representative of legal citizenship and thus enable legal mobility between and within established states. Citizenship is seen as the foundation for the modern nation-state: a clear demarcation of who belongs, and thus has access to the rights, privileges and liberties of a particular state (Wallerstein, 2003). Wallerstein notes the duality of this. By including some, it is inevitable that others are excluded (Wallerstein, 2003). A state has limited resources, services, and positions of power. The more individuals that are allowed access to these, the more diffused they will be. Herein lies the justification for the exclusion: limit "the right to", thereby increasing "the right for" (Wallerstein, 2003, p.652). The success of one group comes at the expense of another (Wallerstein, 2003), resembling a zero-sum game where the gains of the citizens equal the loss of the non-citizens. Citizenship

is thus inextricably linked with statehood. It is a form of identification that legitimizes one's access to a nation-state; a status that is valuable, precarious, and finite.

To further highlight the role of state having authority over access to citizenship, Michel Foucault discusses biopower. Separate from the disciplinary power which the state wields over the population as individuals through more overt displays of subjugation and violence; biopower refers specifically to the subtle power and control exerted from a sovereign over humans as a population (Foucault, 2003). Through such technology as the establishment of demographics and their forecasts, for example, the state has been able to regulate individuals by speaking to them as a population (Foucault, 2003). From the perspective of a sovereign, passports are the contemporary result of this mass individualization of people, funneled into a collective 'population'. Hence, passports list the biographical features of one person, which make them an individual, yet this signifies that such individuals belong under the jurisdiction of a said state, "massifying" them into this stationary position, thus becoming a manifestation of biopower (Foucault, 2003). The key component resides in the stationary aspect, as the state must contain the identified population within a territory (Torpey, 1999). This results in expropriating the means of movement from the citizens, central to the political aspect of travel and identification. It allows the state to anchor itself to specific subjects, and by extension authorizing who is permitted into the stable population (Torpey, 1999). Passports are the products of said expropriation, resulting in a monopoly on the authority over movement to citizens and non-citizens. Herein lies the political aspect of passports: states define populations under their jurisdiction and attach a passport onto a body as a stigmata, a marker of who belongs to which state and who can travel where.

The converse is true for cultural perspectives on passports, where states cannot expropriate populations out of communal roots for apt jurisdiction (O'Byrne, 2001). The socio-anthropological stance instead emphasizes the social rift a passport connotes across distinct populations. From this perspective, the passport acts as a divider and distinguisher of societies along lines of identity and culture. Crucially, this stance proposes an alternative dimension to the exclusionary power of passports, distinguishing them further from citizenship which focuses on communal affiliation. This cultural approach positions citizenship as a collective and an active designation, highlighting its function beyond that of an identification status. It is the product of a shared history and social struggles that manifest into a political culture, where inclusion is defined through everyday interactions (Alldred & Fox, 2019). Here, citizenship is active, expansive and can extend beyond the legal boundaries of a nation-state (Alldred & Fox, 2019) For instance, a person who loses a passport does not suddenly cease to exist nor do they lose their citizenship rights, yet the legal system will be troubled to identify the individual (Koepsell & Smith, 2014). Deductively, citizenship is not a legal document and does not generate belonging in a community by wielding it. The immersion within a citizenry stems from local mechanisms of culture, native to communities. Through this dynamic, passports gain a cultural dimension: cultural contexts can surpass legality to exclude constitutional citizens. For instance, a Turkish Cypriot with citizenship from the Republic of Cyprus may be culturally excluded on the premise that they do not speak Greek Cypriot. Consequently, constitutional citizens may be limited from enjoying state resources such as public health.

Two conceptualizations of citizenship and passports correspond to a top-down and a bottom-up approach proposed by Turner (1990). The former refers to a status that is bestowed upon a person by a state, governing body, or legal framework, while the latter emerges from the community itself and characterizes cultural belonging.

Importantly, the top-down and bottom-up aspects of citizenship are not always coexistent (Beaman, 2016). One can be a citizen legally, yet not associate with, or be excluded from, being a citizen culturally and vice versa (Beaman, 2016). This inevitably creates dialogue between the two perspectives, where the power perspective describes passports as a legal symbol of belonging whereas the cultural perspective positions citizenship as the entry-ticket for immersion within communities.

Historical Context of Cyprus

Cyprus has an ancient and complex history that requires significant attention to depict a full picture of how the division was imposed between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. Throughout this ancient history, Cyprus has been in the control of many external powers or has existed separately (Goult et al., 2025), however for the purposes of this paper, analysis will be undertaken starting from the 1878 Cyprus Convention. In the convention, Ottomans and the British agreed that Cyprus will remain under Turkish sovereignty however the administration will belong to the British government. The British Empire wanted to expand their power in the Mediterranean and the Middle East and proposed to the Sultan that they would support their campaigns against Russia (Goult et al., 2025). Under British control over the island, the divide between the Christian and Muslim Cypriots started manifesting itself explicitly as British overlords favored Christian infrastructures and residents (Goult et al., 2025). During the First World War in 1914, this convention was overruled and the British annexed the island. Greece was offered Cyprus in exchange for fulfilling their treaty obligations with Serbia, which the Greek government refused. The newly formed Turkish Republic then recognized British control over the island in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Two years later, the island was transformed into a Crown Colony (Goult et al., 2025). This development was received positively by the Greek Cypriot population expecting a union with Greece in the future, however it also fundamentally angered the Turkish Cypriot population and led to major demonstrations from both sides over the following years. British officials supported self-government of the island by the Cypriots following the Second World War, which then met opposition from Greek Cypriots who supported “Enosis”– the idea of merging with Greece. The campaign for this was initiated in 1955 when a former officer in the Greek army formed an organization called EOKA– recognized by the Turkish government as a terrorist organization to this day. The organization, as a collection of far-right organizations that supported Enosis, bombed public buildings and killed people they deemed as opponents of the cause (Varnava, 2025).

Shortly after this event in Cyprus, there were a series of government instigated riots against Greek and other minority citizens in Istanbul on the 6th and 7th of September 1955, referred to as the Istanbul pogrom (Zayas, 2007). This event was argued as retaliation to the explosion that happened near the Turkish consulate in Thessaloniki. Following these violent riots, the British-influenced governing in the island left its place to a united ruling of Cyprus. In 1960, the constitution of the new common Cypriot state was prepared with the agreements of Greece, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, and the United Nations; and set into motion. According to this constitution, the president of Cyprus would be a Greek Cypriot while the vice-president would be a Turkish Cypriot, and the representatives were calculated based on the population of the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots on the island, 35 representatives from the Greek community and 15 representatives from the Turkish one (Skoutaris, 2011). The British still maintained the previous rights of trade and operated two military bases that were considered a part of the British colony within the island. The Republic of Cyprus (ROC) was not attributed much legitimacy from the

Greek Cypriots on the claim of giving more representation in government roles for Turkish Cypriots. The intercommunal violence reached its peak on December 21, 1963, when EOKA members attacked and murdered Turkish Cypriot households (Keser, 2013). This period of time until the Christmas day, filled with violence and murders, is remembered as "Bloody Christmas". These events, coupled with the dissatisfaction among Greek Cypriots with the existing political arrangement culminated in a 1974 coup d'état, backed by the Greek military junta, aimed at overthrowing President Makarios of the ROC (Skoutaris, 2011).

Following the breach of agreement in the constitution, the Turkish military intervened in the situation capturing important cities on the island. While the invasion was 36% of the land, the majority of the areas with agriculture, industries, and tourism were taken over– resulting in United Nations (UN) involvement in ceasefire negotiations. With the UN's presence, the buffer zone called 'Green Line' was drawn in the middle of the island, leaving some cities deserted and a great population of both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots as refugees. Subsequently, Türkiye began to exercise de facto control over the northern part of the island from 1975 onward. In 1983, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) announced its independence, claiming the ROC had "lost its legitimacy" (Skoutaris, 2011, p.29). In the aftermath, the UN rejected the claims of the de facto Turkish state; the European Union (EU) did not recognize the TRNC and expressed that the ROC was still the sovereign state in the (whole of the) island.

After the formal (but not recognized) TRNC came into picture, the island had two states with two separate governments operating. Following the interventions in 1974-1975, UN mediation, British presence in the military bases, and relocation of Greek Cypriots in the south and Turkish Cypriots in the north with the Green Line in between; the interaction between ROC and TRNC citizens were kept at minimum with no opportunities to cross the border until the 2003 election of the new TRNC president (Dikomitis, 2012). In 2003, crossing points were opened, starting with the one in the divided city of Nicosia. This allowed Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots holding proper papers to cross the border initially to visit their old towns while other foreign passport holders still could not cross the border.

While the passing between the two parts eased with the open borders, in the 2004 enlargement of the European Union, the ROC became a member of it. The same year, the UN proposed the Annan Plan that sketched a new "United Republic of Cyprus" that would encompass all Cypriots. Right after the admission of the ROC to the European Union, the Annan Plan was put to referendum resulting in a total of 66% "against" votes (Dikomitis, 2012). Eventually the plan was dismissed, and the division of the two communities persists to this day.

Imposed Division

The United Kingdom's (UK) colonial administration of Cyprus laid the foundation for today's imposed division of the island. Enosis and the Greek Cypriot ambitions to unify with Greece threatened the UK's sovereignty over Cyprus– and its broader geopolitical and security interests. Although the British supported the self-governance of the island, they still aimed to hold authority over Cyprus, thus they were not in favor of the merge with Greece. To minimize the possibility of Enosis, Turkish Cypriot minorities were favored by British policies granting them disproportionate levels of influences compared to their demographic representation (Demetriou, 2019). Divide-and-conquer tactics were a common strategy during British colonial rule to fragment

local societies and discourage organized pushbacks (Jawad & Shabbir, 2025). As such, the UK manufactured differences between the two Cypriot communities, institutionalizing these through policies and facilitating the growth of intrastate ethnic and religious tensions. These manifested in the violent period of 1955-1959, and the creation of the ROC in 1960. The Treaty of Establishment triangulated the interests of the UK, Türkiye and Greece as "guarantors of the new republic" (Demetriou, 2019, p.411-412). This undermined Cyprus' de facto independence by allowing the UK to maintain sovereignty over its bases and granted Greece and Türkiye the right to permanent military posts (Demetriou, 2019). Thus, Cyprus was a new and unified state, with a divided population as the result of colonial policies and whose status was determined by exterior states. The following dynamics and their implications resulted in a top-down imposed division (Turner, 1990) which is crystalized as the values of passports distinguishing respective communities in Cyprus.

Using Wallerstein's (2003) exclusion through inclusion, the distinction between the two communities can be observed through the ingroup and outgroup framework. While the ROC presents itself as a unified state, the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities are influenced by the sovereigns of the Turkish and Greek states respectively. One instance of a previous hostility that informs this separation of communities is the aforementioned Istanbul pogrom in 1955 that illustrates the manifestation of outgroup antagonism outside of the island, directed towards ethnically Greek people living in Istanbul (Zayas, 2007). Bringing the tensions fueled by the Greek and Turkish states to the island, after the foundation of ROC, the recorded instances of reciprocal acts of violence further supported the ingroup-outgroup divide. Wallerstein (2003) emphasizes that this division is a consequence of the concept of citizenship that emerges through inclusion (being equally included as a legal citizen of the ROC) and exclusion (through ethnic sovereigns fueling the divide). Some of the most significant of such events are the Bloody Christmas and the attacks on villages elaborated in the Historical Context of Cyprus section of this paper (Keser, 2013; Papadakis, 2003). Even under the roof of a singular state, informed by the previous acts of violence and the stances of the sovereigns of Turkish and Greek states, the peaceful coexistence narrative between the two communities was thus constantly undermined. This indicates a historically grounded and top-down (from external states) motivated division between the two communities.

In the further official division of the island with the presence of the TRNC, it is apparent that this divide is not neutral in terms of international recognition. While no single state effectively applies jurisdiction over the whole territory of Cyprus, both sides are not equally recognized. The ROC recognition actively hinders the TRNC recognition through the benefits it receives, namely international political agency, sprouting from the recognition of a single state, pointing to Wallerstein's inclusion through exclusion principle (Wallerstein, 2003). So, the legitimacy of the ROC passport comes at the expense of the illegitimacy of the TRNC passport. Similarly, UN recognition of the ROC comes at the expense of TRNC's official capacity to engage in international politics (Bouris & Kyris, 2017). The passport remains a looming reminder of the predicament that the TRNC is not internationally recognized.

Politics surrounding passports is further troubled by the different values of the passports that Turkish Cypriots have access to. When presented with the opportunity of strengthened mobility, Turkish Cypriots can choose Turkish or ROC passports, siphoning the authority on movement from the TRNC state to neighboring territories (Krasniqi, 2019). Since Turkish Cypriots have the chance to have the TRNC passport as well, the state thus loses its central power to formally designate its population through mobility, as using different passports make Turkish

Cypriots elusive from TRNC state control. In other words, the TRNC losing its central monopoly on mobility, by international non-recognition, it also loses its hold on its population. This creates a devious cycle on the island: in light of heightened mobility advantages, the international illegitimacy of the TRNC convinces Turkish Cypriots to choose the ROC passport instead; however, the state consequently loses its power to designate its population and becomes more illegitimate.

While the interaction between the states and the citizen designation is conflicted, the 2004 expansion of the EU perpetuated the turbulent dynamics between the ROC and TRNC. The ROC, formally recognized by the EU, was thus a recipient of EU economic and political benefits, and the residents were able to function within the EU as European citizens. Increased social, political, and economic mobility were on the rise for the citizens of the ROC; due to access to EU markets, so were economic advantages, and a voice in the EU political sphere (Christou, 2010). However, the division between the north and south resulted in an uneven playing field for the TRNC citizens, as "removing fences within [a borderless Europe] built higher fences around" (Christou, 2010, pp. 62-63; Jansen, 2009, p. 819). The TRNC thus lacked the external sovereignty which the ROC possessed. The lack of external sovereignty can be largely accredited to Greece, as the nation had used its position within the EU to limit the integration of the TRNC into the European Union (Bouris & Kyris, 2017). This was on the grounds that the economic and political integration of the TRNC into EU proceedings would, by implication, recognize the TRNC as an established state (Bouris & Kyris, 2017). This lack of recognition severely limited the capabilities of the EU to offer economic partnership, as having a potential legal agreement with a local government in the TRNC would not technically have any real legal standing (Bouris & Kyris, 2017).

As a result of being unrecognized, the TRNC faced international embargoes on trade (Günçavdi & Küçükçifçi, 2009). These embargoes further undermined the already small capabilities of the TRNC's tradable GDP, which limited a more liberal economic integration (Günçavdi & Küçükçifçi, 2009). For example, international private companies, such as McDonalds, have opened locations in the south, but have not operated in the north (*Locate: McDonald's Cyprus*, n.d.). This lack of alternative private investment into the TRNC led to the development and reliance upon non-tradable sectors, such as the tourism industry (Warner, 1999; Günçavdi & Küçükçifçi, 2009). Yet simultaneously, the tourism sector, as well as other economic sectors, was severely undermined as a result of the international stance towards the TRNC in general (Warner, 1999; Günçavdi & Küçükçifçi, 2009).

Therefore, the denial of integration efforts by Greek representation in the EU perpetuated not only the socioeconomic and spatial divide between the north and south but further influenced what Saskia Sassen describes as "embedded borders" (Christou, 2010; Sassen, 2006, p.416). Embedded borders and borderings refer to how people, things, and instruments which "endogenize the border", as the traditional borders of territories are undermined by transnational corporations, and international economic operations (Sassen, 2006). This aspect of undermining leads to the limitation of the TRNC's own governance, as international regulations and private assemblages ultimately override self-autonomizing efforts (Sassen, 2017). Resultantly, the feelings towards the EU and UN, for example, are split between the north and south, as the individual sovereignty of Cypriots in the north is heavily limited as a result of this third-party intervention, while the southerners are expressing opposite feelings due to increased individual sovereignty (Christou, 2010). In essence, the pre-imposed division takes on a stronger cultural and interpersonal character.

To summarize, this section deals with the imposed division in Cyprus, foregrounding the different international actors as they relate to central mechanisms of the state. Central to this is the recognition that the division of Cyprus can be viewed through the top-down perspective, as suggested by Turner (1990). Furthermore, Wallerstein's (2003) fundamental idea that the recognition of the ingroup comes at the expense of the outgroup, shows its significance in the context of Cyprus. This is where the passport politics come in, as both the passports of the TRNC and the state's ability to control movement and exert its sovereignty are limited due to a lack of international recognition, exemplified by the UN. Lastly, by using Günçavdi and Küçükçifçi (2009) and Sassen (2006), we explore the relation between the expansion of the EU, the advantages for the ROC, and the disadvantages for the TRNC, as these relate to recognition and external sovereignty.

Local Consequences

To analyze the implications of this division amongst the communities, we utilize the concept of a nation as an "imagined community" proposed by Benedict Andersen (2006a). This framing of a nation is a construct with four sub-parts. Firstly, it is "imagined" in the sense that no one will ever meet all the people in their nation, yet they still see themselves as part of the same community. Secondly, this imagined community is limited. It is vital that clear distinctions are made about who does and does not belong. Thirdly, the nation is sovereign, which refers to the freedom of the nation to do as they please within their boundaries. Then lastly, the nation is a "community" because it is "always conceived of as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 2006a, p.7). This leads to an intricate examination of the local consequences, as the only medium of interaction of the whole of this "imagined community" is those local consequences created by their participation. Local consequences refer to politics, local culture, language, bureaucracy, and spatial implications to the places of inhabitance that materialized through this division.

Political parties on the island reflect deeper sentiments regarding their imagined community and whether the Cypriots are one people or two. This is visible in political stances as well as their commemoration of Cypriot history. Kanol and Pirishis (2022) lay out how attitudes regarding the divide have been incorporated into political parties in the ROC. Safa (2025) analyzes how parties in the TRNC relate to the divide as well as the effect of Türkiye's influence on local politics. The distinction in attitudes between these parties is supported by Papadakis' (2003) earlier analysis on commemoration rituals of these different political parties. The public commemoration of certain historical events, the choosing which events to commemorate, which not, and what exactly is commemorated and how, builds a narrative of Cyprus' history (Papadakis, 2003). These narratives directly relate to how these political parties conceive their nation, since it is constitutive of a national memory and what they conceive as 'us'.

In the ROC, both ALEK, a social democratic party that held office in Cyprus between 2008 and 2013, and DISY, representing modern right-wing citizens and ALEK's main opposition, hold "concessionist" ideas (Bèrtoa & Dumont, 2022, p.176). This means that both parties would like to see Cyprus reunited, whether this is a moderate approach in the case of ALEK, or progressive, yet nationalist, in the case of DISY. This suggests that to these political parties and the people they represent, the imagined community extends beyond Greek Cypriots to include

Turkish Cypriots. Supporting this, in the commemoration of Cypriot history, these parties showed discontent about the division and envisioned a future in which the island is reunited in a bi-national state (Papadakis, 2003).

This is not the case in political parties in the TRNC. The UBP, a right-wing nationalist party, strongly advocates for ties with Türkiye and a so-called two-state solution (Safa, 2025). This "rejectionist" attitude goes to show that the UBP and the people it represents, do not want Cyprus to be unified (Bèrtoa & Dumont, 2022, p.176). This means that they do not consider themselves as part of the same people, the same imagined community. Papadakis shows that right-wing parties in the TRNC perceive the time before the separation of the two nations as a time of "past animosity and oppression" by studying commemorative rituals (Papadakis, 2003, p.261). In other words, the time in which the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots were still part of the same state is commemorated negatively as a time without freedom. Consequently, this supports the narrative that the current division brought independence for the Turkish Cypriots from the Greek Cypriot oppression. Their imagined community only extends to the Turkish Cypriots.

While the political parties in both the ROC and the TRNC operated based on different conceptualizations of the divide, the tension surrounding the question of whether Cyprus is one or two nations was in its height in 2004, when the Annan plan to reunify Cyprus was overturned by means of referendum (Dikomitis, 2012). Using Anderson's framework (2006), it is clear that some of the Cypriots were able to imagine each other as part of the same community more than others. The UBP and the people it represents possesses the sense of deep, horizontal comradeship only with other Turkish Cypriots, focusing on their shared historical oppression under the ROC rule (Safa, 2025). ALEK and DISY perceive this comradeship with all the Cypriots on the island focusing on their shared troubles throughout history (Bèrtoa & Dumont, 2022). Thus, it becomes clear that the narratives formed by commemorative rituals shape how groups on the island have different conceptions of either transcending or reinforcing the division. It is important to explore the reasons behind this and the implications on social and/or political exclusion.

In the chapter *The Origin of the National Consciousness*, Anderson (2006a) lays out how capitalism, print, and nation building are interconnected. In this paper, we mainly focus on his argument regarding the connection between administrative vernacular and language-power. According to Anderson (2006a), the choice of language for governing and administration has historically held much power. In the case of the nation-state, language is vital for understanding who is and who is not part of the nation or imagined community, since a shared language gives a sense of comradeship (Anderson, 2006a).

Before 1960, Cyprus had two official languages, Modern Standard Greek and Standard Turkish. However, the administrative vernacular was– reminiscent of colonial times– English (Kaplan et al., 2013). The lack of shared language culminated into strong nationalist trends for both communities and laid the groundwork for the rising tensions in the 1970s (Kaplan et al., 2013). After the Turkish intervened, the island became ethnically and linguistically separated, and both the ROC and the TRNC slowly established monolingualism. This asserts the two countries as fully independent from the British, and at the same time, excludes the bilingual and bi-national identity, which characterized Cyprus before the division. The fact that the Cypriots are missing a shared language means that they are missing "the embryo of the nationally imagined community" (Anderson, 2006b, p.44). This division is visible on the island by the changing of place and street names, converting churches to mosques, and giving them Turkish names (Potapkina, 2020).

It is clear that the residence configurations are almost completely altered after the Green Line was drawn. Following the separation of southern and northern parts of the island, there were masses of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots, who had to leave their homes (Dikomitis, 2012; Gurel & Ozersay, 2007). To make visible the social impacts of the formal division, we explore the exclusionary results of this separation in the events of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots becoming refugees, new ownership of the properties left behind, and the encounter with the "Other" by going back to previous homes.

Between 1955-1974, groups of both Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot populations became refugees in the island, with an undecided future (Kliot & Mansfeld, 1994). This was mainly tied to either mass forced displacements of Turkish Cypriots due to attacks on Turkish villages when the ROC was founded (1960), or to the Turkish military occupation of the north (1974). While the first event mainly resulted in Turkish Cypriots being considered refugees, the second event deemed both populations as refugees for two distinct reasons. Turkish Cypriots became refugees, or stateless persons (Wallerstein, 2003) since the Turkish state did not recognize the ROC as a legitimate state after the Greek coup, therefore rendering the island as unrepresented by any entity. Contrastingly, with the Turkish military intervention, Greek Cypriots became refugees due to being forcefully moved to the southern side by the entity they, in return, considered illegitimate. This contradiction of (un)recognition and (il)legitimacy of the two entities stripped both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots of their properties and rights to have properties.

In the newly founded TRNC, the properties that were left from Greek Cypriot refugees were allocated to Turkish Cypriots. This allocation was done through a "point system" that the elder members of the towns decided for each family to be relocated in a place based on their previous property in the south (Navaro-Yashin, 2007, p.88). While this procedure appears to be inclusionary and just in terms of finding shelter for the Turkish Cypriot refugees, it created tensions amongst the communities.

On the one hand, during the appointment of land on the northern side, the TRNC government issued land deeds based on the point system. Yet, since the state of the TRNC was (and is) not recognized by international law, the documents issued by the TRNC are considered illegitimate. Historically, the importance of land distribution and access to property is connected to the idea of citizenship and belonging (Jones, 2016). In the early stages of the development of the idea of citizenship, Jones (2016) provides an example that while human rights were assumed to be universal, a distinction of active and passive citizens were made based on property ownership. While active citizens were allowed to vote and protected by law; passive citizens were excluded from many forms of protection (Jones, 2016). While Jones mainly explores this exclusion based on class narratives, we focus on citizenship and discrimination in relation to ethnicity. While the Turkish military presence was aimed at securing the universally claimed rights of the similarly ethnicized Turkish Cypriots, the TRNC further strengthened these through creating documents that determined the ownership of the land and property. While this goal of securing rights on the international scene appears to level the playing field in terms of recognition, it deepens the division between Cypriots and leads to exclusion between the two people and reifies the categories, now with two states operating in the island that issue documents of property.

On the other hand, the ROC– even though not recognized by the Turkish state– is internationally considered the sovereign authority on the island, thus the documents of land registry belonging to Greek Cypriots were still the only documents recognized internationally. This plays into the "myth of return" created by both sides but

officially supported by the Greek Cypriot politicians (Gurel & Ozersay, 2006, p.360). While the allocation of the properties left behind from Turkish Cypriot refugees to Greek Cypriot refugees were similarly practiced, the Greek Cypriot rule of the ROC emphasized the temporariness of the situation. In this light, they did not issue new property documents and highlighted that the properties were still owned by Turkish Cypriots (Gurel & Ozersay, 2006). While the TRNC was slowly being solidified and claiming administrative authority over the northern side, the ROC imagined a future with a re-unified state that allowed Greek Cypriot refugees to go back to their homes (Kliot & Mansfeld, 1994). This idea of "being able to go back" however, paradoxically resulted in the permanence of the refugee status of Greek Cypriots, further emphasizing the "*myth* of return".

Navaro-Yashin (2007) explores this sentimental effect of government documents, showing how among Turkish Cypriots, British papers incite feelings of panic, fear and nervousness, whereas TRNC papers are met with nonchalance, irony, and indifference (Navaro-Yashin, 2007). These sentiments matter, as they relate to citizens' own agency regarding the state. For example, among Greek Cypriots, TRNC document papers and passports cause feelings of anger and frustration (Navaro-Yashin, 2007). This shows a divide between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots related to the perception of passports. Because the TRNC is not internationally recognized, any documents tied to the state are not just symbols of the state, but also vehicles for asserting its existence (Navaro-Yashin, 2007). While going back to their houses and "facing the Other" through the opening borders was an opportunity to confirm and deny the image of the Turkish Cypriot community created in the common consciousness of Greek Cypriots, some individuals actively protested "crossing as a tourist in their own country" giving reasons that point to the anger and sorrow of "[r]efugees hav[ing] to knock on their own front door and ask permission to enter their house" (Dikomitis, 2012, p.120). Greek Cypriots therefore refused to cross the border to the TRNC, even after it opened up, because they felt that by doing so and by showing their passports at the border, they would acknowledge and legitimate the existence of the TRNC as an independent state (Demetriou, 2019). So, through sentiments of belonging to a certain state, through the power and relation of passports to the state, individuals became the border itself. They became the border in the sense that it was now up to each Greek Cypriot individual to decide whether they saw the TRNC as legitimate. This meant that people who still saw the northern part of Cyprus as 'their land', were presented with a limited mobility and thus faced exclusion, for not wanting to show their passports.

The blurring of the notion of belonging points to a unique place in the concept of "imagined community" theorized by Anderson (2006a). As Greek Cypriots were now required to abide by a law of an unrecognized state to cross a legal boundary that they consider illegitimate, and to interact with Turkish Cypriots who once were considered the citizens of the same country and belonging together. While in contemporary times these imagined communities usually correspond to nations or nation-states (characterized by citizenship), the positioning of Cyprus inside this representation is not as clear-cut. The extent of imagination of individuals that once encompassed both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots, now does not go as far and gets limited at the language, nation, or boundaries characterized by passports. In this sense, the antagonism between the Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots are fueled by the separation from the other side of the border.

The consequences of the division were also reflected spatially through the towns that the Green Line ran through; these cities offer views of the divide and the exclusion to the naked eye, if one has the right passport to get there. Varosha, once a heavily desired resort town on the island's Famagusta region, was abandoned following

the war in 1974, which left the town deserted for five decades (Pieri, 2025). This sealed beachfront district illustrates ways in which geopolitical divides are reproduced as everyday passport politics regarding physical space. Mobility documents are transformed into urban design tools that arrange who can exist and belong in said space (Pieri, 2025). Varosha was partially reopened in 2020; however, access has not been equally distributed. Instead, it became a "managed visitor experience" commodifying displacement and urban decay into an experience that sidesteps the politics that displace real people (Pieri, 2025, p.3). Pieri (2025) draws her analysis from Tripadvisor reviews and states that an overwhelming majority of visitors are not natives of the island; the corridor opens for external visitors and former residents face strict exclusionary measures.

This reflects the argument that the stateless are denied the "right to have rights" as it exemplifies presence without membership (Arendt, 1958, p.296). Former residents encounter the space as visitors with their presence authorized by day passes. Their intrinsic belonging to Varosha is denied by a political sense of belonging. The fence does not only immobilize buildings but directly classifies people who call the fenced-off town home as "outsiders". This exemplifies mobility as a sorting mechanism that rests its power on passports (Arendt, 1958). Tourists gain access through widely recognized passports while former residents are denied the same access.

On the Green Line, crossing points reopened in 2003, but returns to the town remained strictly surveilled, requiring day-visas, ID checks and compulsory insurance. These measures transformed once-homes into sites that grant access based on the political legitimacy of your papers (Dikomitis, 2012). Many experienced the process of returning to their place of residence as humiliating. The border regime functions with the understanding that papers precede people, meaning that belonging is time-bound and up to the interpretation of the state apparatus. In Varosha, rights of mobility and dwelling are granted by military force of the states along with the combined political governance of those same states and the United Nations (Arsoy & Başarır, 2019). This tight management results in a list of acts that are allowed or disallowed exemplifying the power of the state in deciding the publicness of Varosha. While strolling or photography may be allowed, deviating from the managed path, and repairing the site is forbidden. Citizenship still manifests from below the beaten path in Varosha. Displaced Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots carved out space for life in the margins through building informal settlements and sustaining their community at the edge of the fence (Arsoy & Başarır, 2019).

A different story unfolds in Nicosia, with the Green Line drawn in 1974 going through the heart of the ancient city, turning once central streets into checkpoints where citizenship is enacted through passport politics (Petridou, 2003). Ledra/Lokmacı crossing is one of these crossings where the authorities grant or deny access; however, the repeated usage of these networks for varied functions leads to bottom-up citizenship producing a shared civic stage (Turner, 1990). Most essential is that these bottom-up actions also produce change at the state level, through the Bi-communal Nicosia Master Plan (Petridou, 2003). This plan coordinates sewage networks, street standards, and revitalization of the historic core showing how the imposed division fails to sustain itself as the citizens refuse to accept it. A shared understanding of heritage and action upon it by ordinary citizens results in steps towards re-unification in certain practices. Nicosia and Varosha both show how exclusionary practices are implemented through passports at checkpoints, while Nicosia exemplifies how arbitrary lines can become blurred as everyday practices circumvent them.

Ultimately, social and political exclusion on Cyprus is a lived experience by the Cypriots, which highly relates to their citizenship to either the ROC and/or TRNC, which is symbolized by the passports. This symbolic aspect

of passports, with its everyday consequences, compounded the division of the Cypriot people and led to social and political exclusion. We have illustrated this through narratives of local politics, sentimental effects of government documents, the reallocation of land deeds and houses, and the separation of Varosha and Nicosia. The individual reactions of people and the way citizens enacted their agency shows that the division of the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots is not just top-down, but is also rooted in painful history and large differences between the communities.

Conclusion

The 'Cyprus Problem' has been, and continues to be, an extensively complex situation, which teeters through the halls of politics, side-footing its way through concepts of sovereignty, citizenship, economic markets, language and more, with a quality of supreme incoordination.

Greek and Turkish forces have contested the state throughout the modern era and following the coup d'état from Greece and the subsequent intervention from Turkey in the 1970s, the UN has overseen the division of the north from the south via the Green Line. Since the imposition of this division, the EU has expanded and has claimed a stake within the negotiations towards a unified Cyprus. While both states have formal practices consistent with western statehood, there continues a division on the back of the imposition of transnational organizations, along with the unequal recognition of the new states (Christou, 2010).

The consequences of the top-down imposed division and unequal recognition resulted in multifaceted political and social exclusion. The two states which were once unified nationally, were now divided, and a process of othering occurred. This created a form of national division, which was reinforced by the alternative and pre-existent religious, linguistic, and cultural divide during the British colonial time (Potapkina, 2020). Within the national divide, the assigning of citizenship and passports assisted to signify the populations. Yet, the ROC passport was the preferred option for all Cypriots due to it increasing sociospatial mobility for its holders. This further undermined the political legitimacy of the TRNC. Moreover, the TRNC experienced limited integration into the European economic sphere, and this perpetuated the spatial divide, embedding the division into the economy and further, the people.

The more interpersonal, bottom-up effects of this division can be seen in the cases of Varosha and Nicosia. These show that the division on the island is founded on religious, linguistic, and ethnic differences, apart from being imposed by global actors. The division relegated many communities to being refugees within their own country, having to flee their homes to the side where they were represented. (Dikomitis, 2012). Afterwards, passports were used as tools to organize urban space, modifying who can exist where, undermining the established places of belonging for Cypriot communities (Pieri, 2025). The result of this displacement and the policing of space led to situations where communities had to confront "the Other". And residents who returned to their old homes revealed the sentiment of being a tourist in their own country. Today, Cyprus remains divided despite multiple reunification efforts, as socioeconomic, spatial, and cultural divisions persist.

Limitations and Futures

The process of writing this paper was influenced by the educational backgrounds of each author, leading to an analysis which discusses multiple aspects. However, focusing on fewer or one aspect could potentially improve the analytical clarity or depth of certain complexities present in Cyprus. Future efforts to discuss and build upon this paper could focus on the dimension of Cyprus as a territory, specifically the significance of its geographical position within the current geopolitical landscape and how that influences the operation of both governing bodies in Cyprus. In addition, while this paper discusses the presence of the British military bases, the political implications of it could be researched further. Conducting a survey or series of interviews in the future which contrast the lived experiences of both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots would develop nuance and richness in the understanding of current and historical political conflicts. Lastly, this paper aims to present the history and dynamics at the time of writing, and we recognize that some of the analysis may be outdated at the time of publishing as the politics of Cyprus are continuously changing.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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