

Strangers at Home: Images of Turkish-Cypriot 'Others' in Contemporary Greek-Cypriot Fiction

Maria Kallousia*

RÉSUMÉ

La situation de facto que la Turquie a créée à Chypre depuis 1974 n'a pas encore réussi à faire disparaître le désir des Chypriotes grecs et des Chypriotes turcs de vivre ensemble de façon pacifique. L'espace de la littérature (ici de la prose des Chypriotes grecs) reste le terrain le plus propice pour réaliser ce désir. Dans ce cas l'«Autre» est le Chypriote turc d'une autre religion et qui bien souvent se différencie du colon turc venu de l'Anatolie.

ABSTRACT

The de facto situation created by the Turkish invasion of Cyprus since 1974 hasn't quashed the desire of Greek and Turkish Cypriots to live together in peace. Literature, namely Greek-Cypriot prose, remains the most propitious vehicle for this desire. Here, the "other" is Turkish Cypriot, has a distinct religion, and is frequently portrayed as different from the settler who came from Anatolia

This is a condensation of work done for a Master of Philosophy in Modern Greek Studies in Birmingham University under the supervision of doctor Dimitris Tziovas. The original idea and the primary literary sources were given to me by professor Lefteris Papaleontiou. The central issue is how Greek-Cypriot authors present Turkish-Cypriot and Turkish characters as the Other in relation to Greek-Cypriot characters and how this demarcation of an ethnic Other is related to the process of identity construction. The aim was to show that in the Greek-Cypriot fiction that dates after the 1974 war, the presentation of Greek-Cypriots' literary Other, being Turkish-Cypriot and Turkish, is a positive one and that this positive image reflects a Cypriot identity which differentiates itself from the Greek or Turkish identity, in the same way as most of the fictional characters of these texts differentiate themselves from mainland Greeks and Turks.

* Philologist

It is a qualitative study and the resources used for this research have been selected from various disciplines; anthropology, social science, critical and cultural theory, education, and literature. The primary literary sources have been drawn from a study of twenty-eight literary texts (novels, novellas, short stories and narrations) by sixteen Greek-Cypriot authors of the second half of the 20th century onwards. The texts concerned were published between 1954 and 2004 with a greater concentration in the period after 1974 (only six of the selected works were published before 1974, the greater part being published between 1974 and 2004). What this study aimed to achieve was find traces of the vague concept of the Other in contemporary Greek-Cypriot fiction and to deduce how this concept may be associated with the determination of a Cypriot identity that disassociates itself from Greek or Turkish identity affiliations.

Differentiation from 'Motherlands'

In semiotics, *differentiation* is the principle of meaning production. "A sign does not *have* meaning, but *receives* meaning in its contradistinctive relation with other signs. A meaning is not a thing which exists, but the product of the process of differentiation".¹ According to Marco Cinnirella, the "differentiation function" of social stereotypes, which was introduced in social identity theory by Henri Tajfel, "helps the ingroup maintain positive distinctiveness from other groups".² On the micro-social level, this "differentiation function" was utilized by Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots alike to differentiate one from the other, especially during periods of inter-communal dispute. During such periods, both communities, in order to protect their sense of identity, had to find support from an independent state (Greece or Turkey), through linguistic and religious identification. In other historical and social contexts though, this "differentiation function" worked on the macro-political level, differentiating Cypriots from foreigners, that is, British colonizers, mainland Greeks and mainland Turks.

In some passages of the texts examined, there is a tendency to 'other' the Turks and Greeks. As postcolonial theoreticians have shown, it is necessary for a group to identify its Others, so as to identify itself as a coherent group that is different from those Others. Joep Leersen notes that "a nation is most itself in those aspects wherein it is most unlike the others" and because of that, "what is described is always a cultural difference, a sense in which one nation is perceived to be 'different from the rest'".³ Instances of such

'othering' of the Turks (by the Turkish Cypriots) and the Greeks (by the Greek Cypriots) are evident in a number of Greek-Cypriot literary texts; they do not, however, indicate that these Greek-Cypriot texts can speak for the reality of Turkish Cypriots or the psychological reality of either Greek Cypriots or Turkish Cypriots. The texts will merely represent their authors' ideological viewpoint, and the complex fabric of national identity.

The novel *Proteleftea Epohi* [*Penultimate Era*, 1981] by Ivi Meleagrou has several instances of such 'othering' articulated by Turkish-Cypriot characters.⁴ Specifically, the Turkish-Cypriot character Hanoumissa blames mainland Turks for her community's misfortunes and their recent misery, saying that "those Turks destroyed us, this is what I know. Had they not come, we would have been in our village now".⁵ As well as Hanoumissa, another Turkish-Cypriot character in the same novel, Zaim-beis, expresses his frustration against the Turks, who – according to him – took over their properties and "deceived the peasants with the Koran and the national flags [...] and there is no one [...] to tell them to get out of here..."⁶ A third Turkish-Cypriot character who differentiates himself from the Turks is Halil in the short story "Proskarteria" ["Waiting For", 1978] by George Filippou-Pierides.⁷ Halil refers to the Turks as 'rascals', thus showing his disapproval of their actions against his Greek-Cypriots compatriots and expressing his idea of them as the intruders who invaded Cyprus and caused destruction and the division of the island. More specifically, Halil, in discussion with his Greek-Cypriot friend Zenios, says that mainland Turks are destroying Greek-Cypriot properties: "The rascals are plundering your homes".⁸

Andreas Onoufriou also differentiates between mainland Turk and Turkish-Cypriot characters in many parts of his novel *I Gi pou mas Gennise* [*The Native Land*, 1989].⁹ The Greek-Cypriot character Fotis conveys the idea that Turkish Cypriots were not to be blamed for the hostility that grew up between the two communities, since they were propelled by mainland Turks.¹⁰ In another part of his novel, Onoufriou describes in a vivid way the acts of violence perpetrated by mainland Turkish soldiers against Greek-Cypriot characters in the book. The Greek-Cypriot character Marios has been violently beaten and then slaughtered by a group of five Turkish soldiers, while Stella has been raped by the same group of Turkish soldiers.¹¹ On the other hand, the Turkish-Cypriot character Salih is presented as a modest, decent person who maintains his humanity and sensitivity and who helps the Greek-Cypriot character Michalis by sending representatives of the Red Cross to him and his family.¹² The narrator comments on the decent

behaviour of the Turkish-Cypriot character that “there was still some pride left during these dark hours of loss”.¹³ The portrayal of such incidents supports the opposition between the Turkish Other (which is vicious and violent) and the Turkish-Cypriot Self (which is decent and sensitive), an opposition which runs through the whole novel.

The same opposition is conveyed in a number of other Greek-Cypriot fiction texts, such as the short stories “Kravyi” [“Outcry”, 1977] by Andreas Onoufriou and “I Mana tou Agnooumenou” [“A Missing Person’s Mother”, 1989] by Aggeliki Smyrli,¹⁴ as well as the novels *Refugee in my Homeland: Cyprus 1974* [1979] by Rina Katselli and *Archipelagos: I Pagida* [*Archipelagos: The Trap*, 2002] by Christakis Georgiou.¹⁵ The short story “Kravyi” [“Outcry”, 1977] presents an encounter between a Greek-Cypriot soldier and a Turkish-Cypriot girl during the 1974 war. The Turkish-Cypriot girl helps the Greek-Cypriot soldier by dressing his wounds (“She stood up, brought some water, cleaned away the blood, and made some coffee for him”),¹⁶ while the Greek-Cypriot soldier intervenes in an effort to prevent the young girl’s rape by a group of Turkish soldiers. In this case, the Greek-Cypriot Self identifies and sympathises with its Turkish-Cypriot Other, which feels part of that Self since the characters help one another and unite against the Turkish Other. The sensitivity expressed by a Turkish-Cypriot female character is contrasted with the brutality shown by Turkish soldiers, suggesting the distinction between Turkish-Cypriot and Turkish characters in fiction.

In her short story “I Mana tou Agnooumenou” [“A Missing Person’s Mother”, 1989], Aggeliki Smyrli also draws a distinction between Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot characters. The Turkish-Cypriot character Niazi supports the wife of his Greek-Cypriot friend, Giangos, who was killed during the 1974 war, and participates in her efforts to find her missing son, Alexandros: “I’m looking for him each and every day, said Niazi, and, by the look and the sorrow that came up on his face, I realized that he was telling the truth.”¹⁷ The author conveys the words of Niazi, who refers to mainland Turks as Others (“... , now others have the authority, they won’t even think of letting me out of the village.”),¹⁸ differentiating himself from them and identifying himself with Greek Cypriots.

Another example of differentiating tendencies in relation to mainland Turks expressed by Turkish-Cypriot characters is detected in the novel *Refugee in my Homeland: Cyprus 1974* [1979] by Rina Katselli.¹⁹ The Turkish-Cypriot character, who is friends with the Greek-Cypriot character Eleni, appears to distinguish himself and a number of other Turkish Cypriots

from Turks, by expressing a desire to be rid of the Turks' interventions and presence on the island. His declaration: "we want neither mainland Greeks nor mainland Turks. Let them leave us alone" is used by the author to claim that even for Turkish Cypriots, mainland Turks are intruders and foreigners.

In *Archipelagos: I Pagida* [*Archipelagos: The Trap*, 2002], Christakis Georgiou portrays both the Turkish-Cypriot and the Greek-Cypriot characters of his novel as working people who are united in their day-to-day labour in the fields, in their common anxiety to put food on the table and to care for their families. These characters are represented in this way to make the author's point that whatever propagandist nationalistic sentiments others (mainly mainland Turks and Greeks, or those affiliated with the mainlanders) tried to infuse in them, were lost on these labourers: "The man in charge who came from Turkey was an officer of the Turkish army...He used to repeat the same words...about a great Turkey and a strong army. [...] Young people enjoyed it, middle-aged people began to lose patience. Somewhere in between, the people in their thirties remained totally indifferent."²⁰ The village people described in *Archipelagos* are more or less united in their way of thinking, and they express these feelings of unison in their choice of clothing and their choice of language, which is a fusion of both Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot dialects: "For them, the two languages became one and the same and, any attempt by each language to dispose of the other's elements collided with their weariness and sweat, and failed in the field of daily experience."²¹

As well as Turkish-Cypriot fictional characters, Greek-Cypriot literary discourse introduces several Greek-Cypriot fictional characters who differentiate themselves from mainland Greek characters in a group of texts. These include the short stories "Simptoseis tou Kerata" ["Cuckold's Coincidences", 2001] and "Na Ntrepomaste na Poume t' Onoma mas" ["Ashamed to Speak our Name", 2001] by Christos Hadjipapas,²² as well as the novels *Anne Simeni Mana* [*Anne Means Mother*, 2003] by Stelios D. Stylianou,²³ *I Gi pou mas Gennise* [*The Native Land*, 1989] by Andreas Onoufriou and the chronicle *Refugee in my Homeland: Cyprus 1974* [1979] by Rina Katselli.²⁴ For example, the son of the narrator of the short story "Simptosis tou Kerata" ["Cuckold's Coincidences", 2001], Avgerinos, believes that the events of 1974 were caused by nationalistic tendencies on the part of some Greek Cypriots, tendencies that were fuelled by the then totalitarian Greek government. The author communicates to the reader these political beliefs in a narrative monologue: "No enemy could ever harm

someone more than he could hurt himself”,²⁵ implying that Greek Cypriots provided the excuse for the war to begin. The author’s ideological stance is reflected in Avgerinos’ depiction as a Greek-Cypriot who had the opportunity to study in Greece, but chose to study in Germany instead, in an attempt to “erase his Greekness” (“afellinisti”): “But why Germany? He had always been a good student, he could have chosen anywhere he wanted and, above all Greece. However, he went there to “erase his Greekness””.²⁶ The character’s choice reveals his sense of a Cypriot identity rather than a Greek one, since he distinguishes his Cypriot Self from mainland Greeks.

Similarly, the Greek-Cypriot character Michalis of the short story “Na Ntrepomaste na Poume t’ Onoma mas” [“Ashamed to Speak our Name”, 2001] ascribes the responsibility for the 1974 war to the Greeks, and declares that it was “the biggest, the most conscious, the most organised betrayal by Greeks” against the Greek Cypriots and that “from now on, we should be ashamed to speak our name” [that is, calling ourselves “Greeks”].²⁷ This differentiation from mainland Greeks expressed by a Greek-Cypriot fictional character in Hadjipapas’ short story relates to the argument that Greek-Cypriots do not aspire to establish a Greek identity. Social analysis endorses such claims. According to Argyrou, during the 1970s, Greek-Cypriots “began to draw an unequivocal cultural boundary between themselves and their “brothers” on the mainland”.²⁸

Such a cultural boundary is also noted in *Refugee in my Homeland: Cyprus 1974* [1979], by Rina Katselli. The Greek-Cypriot narrator prefers to attribute to herself a Greek identity that has nothing to do with contemporary mainland Greeks: “We knew of the civil war in Greece after the Second World War, but we said, ‘No, it’s not possible that we Cypriots could go that far. We are not Kalamarades’. By that we meant that we were more genuine Greeks and that we would never sacrifice our age-old bonds of race and kinship in order to take up arms against each other”.²⁹

Katselli’s narrator uses the term ‘Kalamarades’ when referring to mainland Greeks, indicating the difference between Greek-Cypriots and mainland Greeks. The term ‘Kalamarades’ has negative connotations for Greek Cypriots, and is used by the author to express the hostility that the Greek-Cypriot characters felt against those who took control of the island with the excuse of protecting them from the ‘Turk’. Greek-Cypriot characters in the chronicle complain about the Greek soldiers who invaded their island and took control of everything; “But what is happening now at the General Hospital is unimaginable. Mainland Greek soldiers, swearing and threatening, hold guns

over the doctors and tell them who to treat and who to leave to die. Unimaginable!”³⁰ In this case, Greek characters are sketched as arrogant, cruel, rude and dictatorial. According to Ioanna Oikonomou-Agorastou, the employment of negative stereotypes of ethnic Others in literature helps to establish or consolidate “antithetic constituents in the group that the author represents”.³¹ The characteristics that the author ascribes to mainland Greek characters in her chronicle could reveal just such an antithetic function.

A similar delineation of mainland Greeks is suggested in the novel *Anne Simeni Mana* [*Anne Means Mother*, 2003] by Stelios D. Stylianou. In a discussion that takes place in the central jail of Nicosia in 1973, some political prisoners refer to mainland Greek officers, describing them in a negative way. The narrator explains how the prisoners’ discussion ended in a quarrel, since “most of them did not trust the mainland Greek officers”.³² Greek-Cypriot characters who take part in the discussion differentiate themselves from mainland Greeks. The Greek-Cypriot character Kimonas conveys the idea that mainland Greeks are opportunists who had taken advantage of the situation in Cyprus for their own benefit: “All that they do is buy cheap English cashmere and cigarette lighters to sell them back in Greece ... I cannot trust those wheeler-dealers”.³³

Andreas Onoufriou, in his novel *I Gi pou mas Gennise* [*The Native Land*, 1989], also presents a negative image of mainland Greek characters and, through the words of the Greek-Cypriot character Notis, conveys the idea that officers of the Greek Junta were trying to impose a dictatorship on the island by causing discord among Cypriots.³⁴ The negativity of the Greek characters’ image contrasts with the harmony of the two Cypriot communities, which is emphasized by the narrator in several passages in the novel: “We Cypriots, Christians and Muslims, have been living together in brotherhood for ages...”,³⁵ and, “Both Turks and Greeks were people who had nothing to split. Others caused feelings of antagonism among them to serve their own interests.”³⁶ These passages suggest a notion of a unified Cypriot Self that emerged after the 1974 war; a Self that feels the need to form a Cypriot identity (which is never stable or unified) by drawing attention to elements that unite the two communities and by presenting the representatives of ‘motherlands’ as foreigners and Others: “Cyprus belongs to those who inhabit and care for it”.³⁷

This Other that helps the narrator and, by extension, the Greek-Cypriot author, to build a sense of Self is portrayed in a negative context (negative stereotypes). The Greek army officer labels Cypriots as ‘uncivilized

Easterners': "Shut up you stupid man! Have I given you the right to speak? You Cypriot donkey! ...Everyone in this dammed place is just a donkey. Barbarous, uneducated ...Uncivilized Easterners!"³⁸ In this case, there is fusion of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, since the word 'easterners' is used here negatively, like the ancient 'barbarians', and points to a perception of Cyprus as the 'East' of the Western world. Such perceptions reveal the disjuncture between self-images of many Cypriots (who wish to be recognised as "western people", e.g. by entering into the E.U.) and the overall picture that Others attribute to Cypriots, a picture which often identifies them with the East.

The authors of the novels mentioned above have stated their ideological stance on the idea of 'Cypriotness' through their characters. They have used their Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot characters as signs of a new national identity, that of the Cypriot, as opposed to the Greek or the Turk. Therefore, differentiation between the Cypriot characters and the mainland Greeks and Turks has been essential in these Greek-Cypriot literary creations, in order to give credibility to this new identity. In "Image and Power", Jan Nederveen Pieterse notes that "assigning attributes of otherness serves multiple functions for the labelling group. It may be an expression of critical social distance, of a claim to status on the part of the labelling group. It may serve to negotiate internal group relations by reference to an out group".³⁹ The new Cypriot implicitly portrayed by the authors mentioned in this research is still unsure of how to 'feel' him/herself. If the assigned identities of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot are to be deconstructed, and a new identity to be proposed (one that would be dynamic and not stable and barren), the Others of this identity need to be delineated. Pieterse's conclusions are once again pertinent here: "Otherness is the boundary of normality. As such, images of otherness exercise a disciplinary function, as mirrors of difference, as markers and warning signals".⁴⁰

NOTES

1. Ernst Van Alphen, "The Other Within", in Raymond Corbey and Joep Leerssen (eds.), *Alterity, Identity, Image: Selves and Others in Society and Scholarship*, Series: Amsterdam Studies on Cultural Identity, Amsterdam: Rodopi 1991, 2.
2. Marco Cinnirella, "Ethnic and National Stereotypes: A Social Identity Perspective", in C.C. Barfoot (ed.), *Beyond Pug's Tour: National and Ethnic Stereotyping in Theory and Literary Practice*, Series: DQR Studies in Literature, Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA: Rodopi 1997, 46.
3. Joep Leerssen, *Images, Information, National Identity and National Stereotype: National identity and National stereotype*, <http://cf.hum.uva.nl/images/infoleers.html> (04/03/2004), 3.
4. Ivi Meleagrou, *Προτελευταία Εποχή*, Athens: Kedros 1981.
5. *Ibid.*, 363.
6. *Ibid.*, 383.
7. George Philippou-Pierides, «Προσκαρτερία», *Ο Καιρός της Δοκιμασίας*, Thessalonica: Agrotikes Sineteristikes Ekdoseis 1978, 17-23.
8. *Ibid.*, 21.
9. Andreas Onoufriou, *Η Γη που μας Γέννησε*, Nicosia: Theopress 1989.
10. *Ibid.*, 36.
11. *Ibid.*, 249.
12. *Ibid.*, 254.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Andreas Onoufriou, «Κραυγή», *Κραυγές στ'Αυτιά του Κόσμου: Διηγήματα*, Cyprus 1977, and Aggeliki Smyrli, «Η Μάνα του Αγνοουμένου», *Η Μάνα του Αγνοουμένου και Άλλα Διηγήματα*, Athens: Pentadaktilos-K.Epifaniou 1989.
15. Rina Katselli, *Refugee in my Homeland: Cyprus 1974*, Nicosia: Chrysopolitissa Editions 1979, and Christakis Georgiou, *Αρχιπέλαγος: Η Παγίδα*, Athens: Livanis 2002.
16. Andreas Onoufriou, «Κραυγή», *op. cit.*, 65.
17. Aggeliki Smyrli, *op. cit.*, 13.
18. *Ibid.*, 25.
19. Rina Katselli, *Refugee in my Homeland: Cyprus 1974*, *op. cit.*
20. Christakis Georgiou, *Αρχιπέλαγος: Η Παγίδα*, *op. cit.*, 483.
21. *Ibid.*, 474.
22. Christos Hadjirapas, «Συμπτώσεις του Κερατά» and «Να Ντρεπόμαστε να Πούμε τ' Όνομά μας», *Έρωσ εν Καμίνω: Διηγήματα*, Athens: Livanis 2001.

23. Stelios D. Stylianos, *Αννέ Σημαίνει Μάνα*, Athens: Mondernoï Kairoi 2003.
24. Rina Katselli, *Refugee in my Homeland: Cyprus 1974*, *op. cit.*, and Andreas Onoufriou, *Η Γη που μας Γέννησε*, *op. cit.*
25. Christos Hadjipapas, «Συμπτώσεις του Κερατά», *op. cit.*, 44.
26. *Ibid.*, 42.
27. Christos Hadjipapas, «Να Ντροπέμαστε να Πούμε τ' Όνομά μας», *op. cit.*, 64.
28. Vasos Argyrou, *Tradition and Modernity in the Mediterranean: The Wedding as Symbolic Struggle*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, 51.
29. Rina Katselli, *Refugee in my Homeland: Cyprus 1974*, *op. cit.*, 17.
30. *Ibid.*, 28.
31. Ioanna Oikonomou-Agorastou, *Εισαγωγή στη Συγκριτική Στερεοτυπολογία των Εθνικών Χαρακτηριστικών στη Λογοτεχνία*, Thessalonica: University Studio Press 1992, 87.
32. Stelios D. Stylianos, *op. cit.*, 257.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Andreas Onoufriou, *Η Γη που μας Γέννησε*, *op. cit.*, 59.
35. *Ibid.*, 71.
36. *Ibid.*, 76.
37. *Ibid.*, 77.
38. *Ibid.*, 61.
39. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, “Image and Power”, in Raymond Corbey and Joep Leerssen (eds.), *op. cit.*, 198.
40. *Ibid.*, 201.