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*SIT Study Abroad*

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Transnational Citizenship:  
Perspectives on Migration  
in the  
Greek Cypriot Community

Molly Bowen

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SIT Cyprus Independent Study Proposal  
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## **Abstract**

This research explores the phenomenon of rapidly increasing migration to the Greek Cypriot community. Through observation and interviews with migrants (including domestic workers, laborers, students, and asylum seekers) and Greek Cypriots the research explores the impact of residence in a foreign country on the migrants identity, questions feelings of belonging and integration in Greek Cypriot society, and asks Greek Cypriots how they perceive the migrant community. Additionally policy recommendations are made based on the ideas and problems faced by the interviewees.

## **Introduction**

### *Research Question*

How do Greek Cypriots and migrants understand the experience of migration into this community? Do migrants feel a sense of belonging and permanence here? How do they feel they have been received, and how do Greek Cypriots feel migrants impact their community?

### *Introduction and Statement of the Problem*

In the last fifteen years migration to Cyprus has drastically increased. Migrants enter Cyprus knowing that they may not stay forever, though. At some point these short-term workers, students, refugees and seekers of asylum may attempt to gain citizenship, may stay in Cyprus without full legal documentation, may choose to return to their country or move elsewhere, or may be deported back to their country of origin. This increasing diversity caused by likely temporary individuals raises interesting questions about how migrants and Greek-Cypriots interact, co-exist, tolerate, and/or appreciate one another. In this paper I will narrate eight migrants' experiences living in the Greek-Cypriot community. I will focus on their expectations of Cyprus, their perspective on Greek-Cypriots, maintenance of connections to their place of origin, and future hopes and plans. I will also hear how three Greek-Cypriots feel migrants affect this community, and include background information from one academic (also a migrant) and two individuals working in migrant support services (one Greek Cypriot, one Armenian).

This research employs the framework of citizenship theory to understand how citizenship, and thus identity, is constructed by the Greek-Cypriot government and by immigrants currently residing in the Greek Cypriot community. The lens of citizenship is

useful here because it shows how states, nations, and communities legally and socially react to the increasing presence of migrants in their midst, how these migrants relate to their own transnational identities, and how native members of the population imagine the migrant population.

### *Historical Background*

Although the last fifteen years have seen a drastic diversification of Cypriot society this is not the first time that a non-Cypriot population has lived here. Cyprus's position in the Mediterranean Sea, an hour south of Turkey, a ferry ride from Israel, and a short plane ride to Egypt gives this island great strategic importance. It was ruled by Richard the Lionheart in 1190, the Lusignan knights of France from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Venetians from 1489 to 1571, and then the Ottomans from 1571 to 1878. With the decline of the Ottoman Empire Britain was asked to be a protectorate of Cyprus and in 1878 leased the island from the Ottomans, eventually making Cyprus a crown colony. Six years later the first movement of Greek Cypriot in opposition to British rule occurred; the focus of this fight was not an anti-colonial push for independence but rather for a closer connection of Cyprus to mainland Greece. This movement for enosis<sup>1</sup> grew with a referendum held in 1950 by the Greek Orthodox Church where 96% of Greek Cypriot voters supported enosis. This decade saw the rise of militant nationalist groups in both the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot ethnic communities: EOKA, the National Organization of Cypriot Warriors made up of some Greek Cypriots and working for enosis, and TMT, the Turkish Resistance Organization made up of some Turkish Cypriots and working for taksim<sup>2</sup>. In 1960 Britain declared Cyprus independent, though retained some control as a guarantor power. Greece and Turkey were also guarantor powers. One stipulation of the new Cyprus was that the island could not be partitioned or unified with another country, could not amend its own constitution without approval of all three guarantor governments, and the guarantor nations reserved the right to intervene if either of those previous rules were broken.

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<sup>1</sup> "Unification with mainland Greece" (Broome 277)

<sup>2</sup> "Division of the island into two geographical areas, with each ethnic group controlling one of the areas" (Broome 277).

Consequently, great tension erupted when in 1963 President Makarios<sup>3</sup> proposed thirteen changes to the constitution that were vetoed by the Turkish Cypriots and Turkey. Inter-communal violence broke out and Turkish Cypriots were forced into small enclaves across the island (O'Malley 4). The Turkish Cypriot community demanded taksim (division) of the island, with half belonging to Greece and the other half to Turkey, and then the Greek Cypriot national guard held a coup against Makarios and declared enosis with Greece. Then the Turkish Cypriots withdrew from the Cypriot government and Turkish troops entered the island, causing the Greek Cypriots to move south and the Turkish Cypriots to move north (Papadakis 255). The United Nations intervened at this point and created a buffer zone across the island, splitting the capital city of Nicosia in half and forbidding movement from one side to the other (Broome 278). In 1983 the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus declared itself an official state but the United Nations denied recognition to this government and declared international embargoes on trade, flights, or interaction with the TRNC by any UN member nation.

In 2002 the Greek, Turkish, British, Greek Cypriot, and Turkish Cypriot governments began negotiations with the United Nations on the Annan Plan for reunification of the island. The over-arching goal of the plan was the creation of a united, federated Cyprus, but in that it also addressed contentious issues such as property reclamation, citizenship rights, and the maintenance of sovereign British bases. In 2003 the UN and both governments agreed to open the border between the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities in a few locations, allowing access and freedom of movement between the communities. In 2004 a referendum was held on the island regarding the Annan Plan with 65% of Turkish Cypriots voting in favor and 76% of Greek Cypriots voted against. One week later the Republic of Cyprus acceded to the European Union.<sup>4</sup>

### *Rationale*

Since my arrival in Cyprus two months ago I knew that I would complete a fieldwork research but was unsure of my topic. As a student of geography I pay attention

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<sup>3</sup> Makarios was also the Greek Cypriot archbishop

<sup>4</sup> The Republic of Cyprus acceded on behalf of the entire island. Because the 'TRNC' is not recognized by the global community it does not play a role in the affairs of the European Union. However, individuals that currently reside in the 'TRNC' but have lived in Cyprus before 1974 or whose parents have been Cypriot citizens since before that date can claim European Union citizenship from the Republic of Cyprus.

to how people use space and on my first Sunday in Cyprus noticed a dramatic change in the demographics of the old city in Nicosia. On that afternoon suddenly groups of South Asian men and women were out having picnics in the park, going to church, holding a bazaar near the bus station, and playing cricket on the soccer fields. Upon inquiry I learned that Cyprus has a substantial migrant population and by law Sunday is their day off. In the following week I found myself looking around for this immigrant community in the streets, the café's and the shops. I saw people that, from their physical features, I identified as non-Cypriot but in nowhere near the numbers as I had seen on that Sunday.

But I did hear people talk about the migrants. In casual conversations I heard that migrants are stealing 'our' jobs, there are too many Asians, and that the migrants are taking over Cyprus. From other people I heard the polar opposite: that most employers overwork and underpay their domestic workers, that Cyprus has failed to obey the European Union law to naturalize immigrants, and that immigration officials deports migrants at random without access to lawyers or knowledge of their rights. These sharply contrasting viewpoints piqued my interest, and led me to focus my research on immigration.

I chose to look at migrants exclusively in the Greek Cypriot community rather than Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities for reasons of time, resources, and variation. Migration to North Cyprus is primarily from Turkey rather than South Asia, occurs in a dramatically different political setting, and has different implications for the migrants and native Cypriots.<sup>5</sup>

Because this paper studies the affect of migration and European Union accession on Cypriot identity it may seem most logical to interview native Cypriots about their opinions on the migrant community. I considered this option, and decided instead to focus on the voices of migrants. These individuals are perceived by many native Cypriots as dramatically influencing and altering Cypriot society—rather than hearing *about* them I wanted to hear *from* them regarding how they understand their own identities. By asking if these migrants experience a connection and sense of permanence in Nicosia and

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<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of migrant domestic workers in North Cyprus please see Guven-Lisaniler, Fatma, Sevin Ugural, and Leopoldo Rodriguez. 'Human Rights and Women Migrant Workers in North Cyprus'

their opinions of Cypriots I will investigate how migrants see themselves shaping the place that they are in.

In order to enhance my understanding of migration law and migrant issues I also interviewed a group of academics, activists, and an artist for this research. This population works with and for immigrants in the Greek Cypriot community and are extremely dedicated to improving the quality of life for those individuals. This group was a mix of native Cypriots and migrants, and therefore holds an interesting position between the two communities. Together these populations offer a deep insight into immigrant issues and identity.

### **Literature Review**

Citizenship theory seeks to understand who belongs to a community, what the boundaries of membership are, and how communities welcome or exclude members. Citizenship can be understood socially (a sense of belonging and connection to a group, which could be racial, religious, civic, sexual, or based on any other common trait) and legally (a member of a state with rights and responsibilities). This former type of social citizenship can be understood as synonymous with the term ‘identity;’ and individual can hold multiple layers of ethnic, religious, national, and other citizenships simultaneously (Yural-Davis). The latter form of citizenship falls under the jurisdiction of the state. State citizens must pay taxes, obey laws, perhaps perform military service, but are also granted the protection and rights of that state. The power of the state to decide who receives these rights allows governments to control the demographics of its population and who should have access to its rights. ‘Gatekeepers’ including immigration officials, governments in the sending and receiving countries, domestic recruiters, and police decide who will contribute to and benefit the society and who should not become a permanent resident of the state (Bakan and Stasiulis 42). This process occurs over time; rarely do migrants become citizens immediately upon entrance to a new state. During this time of non-citizenship the migrant may have fewer rights than he or she had in their host country and may take a downward shift in class position. Ultimately, though, the migrant may be in an improved political, social, and economic position if he or she can attain citizenship rights in the new country (Bakan and Stasiulis 46).

However, this attainment of increased rights and quality of life is often prevented due to the temporary nature of a migrants' stay in the country. Frequently governments encourage in-migration in order to fill a labor shortage but do not want migrants to become permanent residents. One reason for this is a sense of cultural fundamentalism—the perceived threat of migrants to the cohesion of the nation. This feeling means that “...economic interests legitimize foreign workers whereas nationalist discourse sees them as undesirable” (Anthias 35). Were migrants to permanently stay in a state their presence might alter the character of the host society. The cultural fundamentalist argument against immigration frames itself not as racism but rather as an effort to preserve national heritage:

“Collective identity is increasingly conceived in terms of ethnicity, culture, heritage, tradition, memory, and difference, with only occasional references to ‘blood’ and ‘race’... This culturalist rhetoric is distinct from racism in that it reifies culture conceived in compact, bounded, localized, and historically rooted set of traditions and values transmitted through the generations by drawing on an ideological repertoire that dates back to the contradictory 19<sup>th</sup>-century conception of the nation-state.” (Stolcke 4)

This idea assumes that the host-nation has a homogenous society into which migrants will bring drastically different and threatening ideas and cultures. With the expansion of the European Union towards the south and the east Europe will likely see increased migration by non-Europeans and the question becomes how these countries will respond to the new populations. One reaction has been ‘Fortress Europe,’ an attempt to place walls around Europe to control any entrance of migrants and to restrict immigrants’ access to citizenship once inside a state (Vovou 93). States become demographically more diverse but there is not integration of the various populations. In other words “The de facto multiculturalism does not in itself entail either the respect of diversity or the fruitful exchange and osmosis of the ‘diverse’” (Vovou 9).

Whether it is viewed as threatening or not, the presence of migrants is felt beyond the host nation they enter. Many migrants retain social, economic, and symbolic connections to their state of origin (Anthias 22). Globally immigrants are estimated to remit<sup>6</sup> over \$67 billion annually, making these remittances the second largest trade commodity after oil (Boyle, Halfacree, and Robinson 5). Many families consider the

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<sup>6</sup> To remit is to send money back to ones’ former country



income sent back by a family member abroad to be part of their income and it is necessary for their survival. If the migrant intends to return to his or her country of origin the remittance is also an investment in his or her future. For sending countries, supporting out-migration<sup>7</sup> can be a way to protect their own economy in a situation of high unemployment. Out-migration allows residents to leave the country, work elsewhere, and send home money. Additionally, domestic jobs are created in placement agencies and the government.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In the last fifteen years Cyprus has experienced the same increase in migration that has occurred across Europe. Before the 1990s the Cypriot population primarily emigrated out to find work elsewhere, particularly to England and South Africa until an economic boom in the early 1990s led to a labor shortage and a need to bring in an outside work force (Trimikliniotis 4). According to the Ombudswoman's report of 2004 there are 50,000 foreign workers in Cyprus including domestic workers, agricultural workers, cabaret 'artists'<sup>8</sup>, day laborers, and skilled employees in the tertiary sector (Esembe 5). The main source countries of immigrants to Cyprus are Greece, Bulgaria, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Syria. In addition to foreign workers a large group of foreigners come to Cyprus as students or seeking asylum or refugee status.

Immigration policy requires migrant workers to be short-term, temporary, and limited to specific labor sectors. Work permits last for one year and can be renewed for up to five years, at which point the migrant can attempt to acquire Cypriot citizenship. Before coming to Cyprus migrants need a work permit with a specific employer in Cyprus. There is a high level of dependency on one's employer, with domestic workers as perhaps the most drastic case. Legally these women are expected to live in the home of her employer and cannot work for multiple employers simultaneously (Trimikliniotis 8). For any migrant to leave a position he or she must receive a release paper from his or her employer; this means that the employer can fire a migrant at any time but the migrant must have the consent of his or her employer in order to leave a job (KISA leaflet).

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<sup>7</sup> Out-migration is the movement of people out of their country into another country.

<sup>8</sup> 'Artists' is the preferred euphemism for women employed in cabarets as dancers and/or sex workers

‘Artists’ contracts are for six months only and by law they are not allowed to change professions once they arrive in Cyprus (KISA leaflet).

Cyprus’ entrance into the European Union has changed migration law and may also bring about a change in attitudes towards migrants. Currently Cyprus is harmonizing its laws to match with European Union standards. Cyprus ascribes to the *acquis communautaire* for long-term residency; this law allows for long-term residency and increased employment migrants to a migrant who has resided legally in Cyprus for five years. A hope for this yet-to-be implemented law is that it will allow migrants to better settle into Cypriot society. Because migrants will be in Cyprus for perhaps the rest of their lives they have an incentive to try and make this place their home. A less positive perspective is that the position of Cyprus on the edge of the European Union will draw floods of migrants trying to use this island as a launching point towards the rest of the European Union (Trimikliniotis 10). With the accession of Cyprus to the European Union so recent it is impossible to know yet which attitude towards migrants will prevail.

However, at present reactions towards migrants frequently take the culturally fundamentalist stance described earlier. Arguments against migration state that Cyprus is too small to handle a large migrant population, politics need to focus on the relationship between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, and the migrants’ cultures cannot mesh with Cypriot culture. In the words of one Greek Cypriot woman:

‘If you go back fifteen years, you wouldn’t have found anyone that wasn’t Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot, or British...when I go for a walk on a Sunday morning, downtown, by Paphos Gate you don’t see a single Cypriot there; it’s like another country. It is when they have their day off, they have a bazaar there. We were not used to this kind of thing. I don’t like what I see; it’s like I’m not in Cyprus. I walk the streets I walked before and it’s like somebody has intruded into our space.’ (Cockburn 218)

This is not to suggest that every Cypriots is unwelcoming to migrants; on the contrary, some individuals have dedicated themselves to protecting the legal rights of migrants, doing anti-racist education in the Cypriot community, and advocating for increased citizenship rights. Nor does this paper suggest that Cyprus is more racist, xenophobic, or nationalist than other places. The issues discussed in this paper are common to migrants all over the world. Rather, the intention of this research is to explore what happens here; to understand the laws and rhetoric surrounding migration in the

Greek Cypriot community and then to hear from migrants themselves about how they understand their identity and create connections here and elsewhere.

### **Conceptualization of Definitions**

The words used to describe a situation can greatly influence a readers' understanding of that topic. For clarity I have compiled a list below of operational definitions that will be used throughout this paper. When discussing issues of identity and citizenship language becomes especially important as terms and labels can carry great personal meaning. The term 'citizenship' is integral to the framework of this paper and its meaning is discussed in the literature review and conceptual framework.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Migrant*—An individual that has left the state of his or her birth and now resides in a new state. This individual may not hold legal citizenship in the new country and the length of the residence may be undetermined. This is distinguished from the term immigrant, which indicates a person who has permanently moved to a new state.

*Immigrant support service provider*—An individual who offers legal counsel or does charitable work, raises awareness of immigrant issues or somehow provides assistance to the immigrant population. In this paper this includes NGO employees, academics studying immigration, and artists creating work about the immigrant community.

*Transnational*—Connections between two or more states. These connections may involve movement of people, money, goods, or services. It also includes emotional connections and relationships between people in different places, or the relationship of one person to multiple places.

*Greek Cypriot community*—This is a geographical and cultural definition referring to the areas in Cyprus where Greek Cypriots are the numerically dominant ethnic group.

### **Methodology**

#### *Research Design*

This study seeks to understand individual experiences and perceptions of identity; therefore, my research was conducted in a qualitative manner through interviews and participant observation. This report is micro-analytical (looking at the decisions of individual people rather than broad group patterns) and humanistic (recognizing the agency of individuals in decision-making, the emotions involved in migration, and the

potential irrationality of the choice rather than seeing migration as a logical and economic response to outside circumstances).<sup>9</sup>

### *Population and Sample*

This report includes three diverse and overlapping populations—migrants, individuals involved in migrant support services (some of whom are also immigrants), and Greek Cypriots. Everyone that I studied currently resides in the Greek Cypriot community (see operational definitions for an explanation of this term). The migrants that I spoke to include three political refugees, one female domestic worker, two individuals that came as students one of whom is now a worker, and three male foreign workers. These individuals are from Palestine, Cuba, Bangladesh, Britain, Poland, Cameroon, Iraq, and two from the Philippines. I interviewed a Greek Cypriot involved in migrant support services and an Armenian residing in Cyprus who also works in migrant support services. One academic, who is also a migrant, provided me with background and theory on migration and we also spoke briefly about his experiences as a migrant (hence he is also included in the migrant sample. Finally, I spoke with three Greek Cypriots to hear their thoughts on migration.

My research was conducted through three methods. The primary way I obtained information was through formal one-on-one interviews with all of the previously mentioned individuals. I also spent ten to twelve hours a week volunteering with an immigrant support organization. This group does legal counseling, social advising, awareness-raising, and sponsors cultural programs. Working there allowed me to make friends in the migrant community and intimately see the problems they have faced in the Greek Cypriot community. This observation led to many informal interviews with employees and patrons.

### *Ethics and Limitations*

Lack of permanent residence status, incomplete paperwork, legal violations, and other factors make the immigrant population in Cyprus rather vulnerable. Therefore ethics and anonymity are of paramount importance in my research. No information was withheld from interviewees regarding my work here in Nicosia or what my plans are for

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 3: Contrasting conceptual approaches in migration research in Boyle, Halfacree, and Robinson for a more in-depth discussion of conceptual frameworks for understanding migration.

the data that I gathered. All interviewees signed a consent form (see reference section), received my contact information in case they would like to rescind or change a comment, and were asked if they would like to attend my research presentation or receive a copy of my final draft. The names of all individuals and organizations have been changed in this paper. I tried to make a comfortable environment for my interviewees and give them a chance to direct our conversation to the issues that were important to them. When I was volunteering I clearly explained to everyone that I was conducting a research about immigration so they would fully understand the intentions of our conversations.

All researchers have limitations, and mine are extensive. These factors cannot be overcome but hopefully by considering and acknowledging my limitations I have done my best to minimize them. My major limitations include:

- Communication challenges—My research sample is limited to individuals who speak English, my native language. Because English is a second language for all of my informants there may have been misunderstandings in our dialogues or information that the interviewee could not articulate. Because I do not understand Greek I did not have access to all government documents, speeches, academic articles, and potential informants.
- Time—I am in Cyprus for less than four months, and have only one month to dedicate to this research. This results in a very small research sample and inability to deeply develop my theoretical and historical background.
- Positionality—As a white, American, middle-class college student I am a definite outsider to both the migrant and Greek Cypriot societies that I discuss in this paper. It is very likely that unwitting assumptions and generalizations have found their way into my research, interviews, and writing. Further, my role as researcher conducting a study can create a power dynamic that may have influenced the information shared with me during interviews and informal conversations. However, I also feel that my status as a non-Greek Cypriot allowed migrants to express feelings that perhaps they would have otherwise withheld.
- Sample bias—Because virtually all of the migrants that I interviewed were connected to an immigrant support NGO my sample may have been

skewed to migrants with unusually activist tendencies and with the most severe problems.

- Lack of experience—This research is my first attempt at fieldwork. A more experienced researcher would likely have been less hesitant about making contacts, more skilled at conducting interviews, and better able to analyze and synthesize the data acquired.

### *Generalizability, Reliability, and Validity*

The data in this paper represents a very small study conducted in a very short time. In no way is this research generalizable to all migrants in Cyprus or to all native Cypriots. My work represents anecdotal qualitative evidence from informants that I met through snowball sampling. I cannot guarantee that the information shared with me in interviews is true, but I can state that the information provided in this paper is a valid and reliable representation of what I heard and experienced.

### **Data Analysis**

#### *Arrival in Cyprus*

Real fears and great hopes drew my interviewees to Cyprus. Religious persecution, war, and lack of economic opportunity drove some from their countries. Many believed that Cyprus could offer them a better life and a way to support their families. One woman from the Philippines said that she did not want her daughters to have what she had when she was small, to feel upset and hungry, so she came to Cyprus. Two men came to Cyprus to study. Reasons for coming to Cyprus specifically include its proximity to the migrants' country of origin, previous connections through family or friends who had already migrated to Cyprus, and memories of family holidays here. A crucial reason was the limited visa requirements during the early 1990s; in order to draw migrants the Cypriot government made entering the country very easy, and from the responses of my sample we can see that this method worked.

Those that had previously visited Cyprus held happy memories of the island from their family vacations. The rest had a very limited idea of what Cyprus would be like. They imagined a tropical island with bananas and mandarins growing on the streets and beaches everywhere. They expected Cyprus to be a place where a person can work, be happy, and prosper. Two individuals mentioned ideas of Europeanness that were not

realized. A student said that when he exited the plane what he saw was ‘Totally something we didn’t expect.’ He and his friends were imagining somewhere like England and were amazed at the small size of the Larnaca airport and the lack of development along the highway from Larnaca to Nicosia. A political refugee said that when you come to a European Union country you expect the situation regarding treatment of migrants to be better than what he found. These individuals all arrived in this country with very little knowledge of what they may be putting themselves into; it was an act of great trust motivated from the idea that what they found in Cyprus would be better than what they had left behind.

### *Challenges faced*

At the beginning of each interview I asked the informant why he or she came to Cyprus. From this question every person except the two students began a complicated tale of leaving their country, arriving here and having trouble with paperwork, run-ins with the police, and exhaustion with waiting for the resolution of their case. I did not specifically ask to hear about challenges, but for most of the migrants that I spoke to it is the problems that stand out in the story of their life in Cyprus. The main challenges were feelings of being overworked and underpaid as compared to Greek Cypriots, inadequate living conditions, verbal and sexual harassment of employees, obstacles with government bureaucracy regarding handling of cases, receipt of work permits, and the timely provision of welfare benefits, police brutality, and experiences of racism and xenophobia. Here are a few stories:

- A laborer had worked legally in Cyprus for two years when suddenly his manager called to say that his work permit would not be renewed and he needed to leave the country in two days. They bought a plane ticket for him, but the ticket was not for his country of origin. He chose to stay in Cyprus illegally, soon ran out of money, and lived on the beach for five months. In November the weather turned cold and he had enough of this life so went to the police station and asked them to send him back to his country. They said you are crazy, get out of here, and then he

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Again, it is important to note the potential sample bias of this project. With the exception of one student every migrant that I spoke to had a relationship with an NGO that does migrant support services. Because I spoke to the people that went out of their way to ask for help it is possible that the problems they experience may be disproportionate to those of the whole migrant community. Or, they may be representative, but it is impossible to know.

- came to Nicosia. He tried to put his paperwork into order and has spent the past few months waiting to hear if his work permit will be renewed.
- One man came to Cyprus for college and after graduation was offered a job by his institution, but experienced some difficulties when they began the process of changing his student visa to a work permit. The institution needed to comply with a European Union law requiring countries to offer jobs first to native locals, second to European Union nationals, and if this does not elicit applicants after a few months then the job can be offered to individuals residing outside of the European Union. This man was told that he would need to leave Cyprus while this process occurred, and hopefully he would end up being hired for the job. He felt that if he left the country he would not be allowed to re-enter. At the time he was dating a Cypriot woman and they married so he would have access to Cypriot citizenship.
  - A domestic worker that I spoke to worked in a restaurant when she initially arrived in Cyprus. The work there was very difficult and she decided that she wanted a different job. In this situation the employee and the employer must mutually agree to end their contract and then the employee creates a new contract with her new employer. She and her original employer had discussed the issue and everything appeared to be taken care of, but when she prepared to begin her new job she discovered that her previous employer had never signed the release contract. A multi-month ordeal occurred before the situation was resolved and she could legally begin her new job.
  - A student in the tourism school was moving to Paphos for his summer work in a hotel. On the way he and his friend were stopped by the police, told to remove most of their belongings from the car and place them on the road, and then were taken to the police station for multiple hours without charges being filed.
  - An asylum seeker arrived in Cyprus a year and a half ago. He has submitted his application, completed the forms, but has yet to hear anything on his case. Should he receive refugee status it will take another year before all of the official paperwork is completed and he can be a human again, in his words.



These anecdotes illustrate some of the challenges faced by migrants in Cyprus. In reading them they may seem sensational, but they were not described to me as dramatic, unusual events; these moments make up my informants daily lives.

As well as the altercations with governments, police, and policies the migrants that I spoke to described the daily challenges of living as a foreigner in the Greek Cypriot community. A political refugee who worked as a teacher in her country of origin applied for jobs at English-language schools in Cyprus. In one rejection they told her that they were unsure how students would react to a non-white teacher. She said that as a migrant, a woman, and a person of a different color everything is against you. Since she could not obtain teaching jobs she worked as a carpenter. Others expressed similar inability to use their full skills and talents. One individual said to me that in jobs you are placed where they think you should be, not where your qualifications put you. Frequently I heard statements that Greek Cypriots in the same position were paid larger salaries. A worker said to me that he was 'Somehow exploited...the reason being I wasn't really aware of my workers' rights. I wasn't really educated about what's going on.' This sentiment of not fully understanding ones' rights as a migrant, student, or political refugee was expressed frequently; because people do not know their rights they are left open to a much greater likelihood of exploitation by individuals in dominant positions.

None of my informants spontaneously shared examples of positive interactions with Greek Cypriots but upon questioning a few were elicited. Frequently these positive ideas related to the Greek Cypriots employed or active in migrant support services. 'These people are angels' said one man, and another woman stated that she feels that the people involved at this organization are 'like a family.' However, everyone also took care to point out that those individuals are 'different than Cypriots.' Nice Greek Cypriots were categorized as separate from the general population.

Further, a class and race hierarchy began to emerge when I questioned individuals about their positive experiences. A Cuban man said that when he tells people where he is from everyone is happy and he does not have problems. However, he told me that one day when he and a Filipina woman went to a restaurant together they were not served, were not given a bag for their take-away food, and were generally ignored by the staff. He goes to this restaurant frequently by himself and nothing like this had ever happened

before. When I spoke to a British professor he stated that he has no problems whatsoever as a foreigner in Cyprus. In fact, he thinks that he is treated better than many Cypriots because he is Northern European and has the class distinction of having attended and taught in very prestigious British universities. Technically he is a foreign worker but his experience has been radically different than most. Clearly the migrant community is not one homogenous group and within this group differing identities create a spectrum of positive and negative experiences with the Greek Cypriot community.

*Political power and community strength*

One way my informants stated they want to challenge their sense of oppression by the Greek Cypriot community and government is through increased political strength and solidarity within the migrant community. Multiple people stated to me that because migrants cannot vote in Cypriot elections the government will continue to ignore their problems without consequence. Parliamentary elections are at the end of this month and to date no candidates or parties have acknowledged migration as a political issue. One woman expressed amazement that in the US a migrant could be elected governor of California but that in Cyprus she felt like migrants were considered ‘useless.’ Others stated that asylum seekers and foreign workers do have some rights (limits to working hours, access to social welfare, etc.) but they have to fight to see those rights put into practice. A few NGOs in Cyprus work to support the migrant community but resources are limited and the migrant population is large. One migrant praised the work of the Cypriots in these organizations but also stated that the migrants themselves need to take to the streets and raise their voices. My informants expressed a separation between themselves and Greek Cypriots, and stated that awareness-raising can be a powerful tool. One asylum seeker participated in a panel on migration at a local school, and said that the students were amazed by the stories. They were shocked at the conditions of people living in their country. Education alone will not change the political situation but it may create dialogues, relationships, and pressure.

In order for migrants to raise awareness and direct pressure toward the Greek Cypriot government they must first develop a strong voice within their communities. Every informant stated that almost all of their friends are foreigners rather than Greek Cypriots and that these migrants support each other. A Cameroonian told me a story

about arriving here with no money or food, and while walking down the street smelled fish roasting. It was a Filipina woman cooking food in front of her house, and she immediately invited the Cameroonian in and provided food. Some of the migrant communities have associations, but one woman stated that these organizations do not create long-term solidarity. They sponsor occasional programs but she does not feel a sense of unity. Another said that the migrants are not a cohesive unit and do not feel in a position to ask for their rights at this time. A huge obstacle to unifying and politicizing the migrant community is the generally long working hours and in-home residence of many domestic workers. However, the residence of a large migrant community within the old city of Nicosia offers a centralized base from which people can work towards collecting a stronger voice.

#### *Affect of European Union accession*

One of the topics that arose constantly in my preliminary research on migration in Cyprus was the drastic consequences of European Union accession. There is a fear of a flood of migrants coming to Cyprus in order to gain citizenship and enter other countries but interestingly, the European Union barely appeared as an issue in my interviews. When asked about the European Union the responses were the new long-term residency directive<sup>11</sup> or the afore-mentioned directive to hire locals, then European Union nationals, and finally after that to hire third-country nationals. Most of my informants came to Cyprus before its European Union accession but at this point none of them have intentions to move out from Cyprus and settle elsewhere in Europe. This fear was not validated by the individuals that I spoke to.

#### *Connections and sense of home*

The desired connections that I heard about were not to Europe but rather to my informants' countries of origin. Everyone maintains strong ties to their family through telephone calls and e-mails. The two individuals who have children in their original country also send money to support those children and their family. None of my informants have returned to their country but all expressed a deep desire to see the place

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<sup>11</sup> The long-term residency directive is a European Union policy to grant long-term residency rights to migrants who have legally been in Cyprus for five years or longer. These rights include protection from deportation, increased job benefits, social security and tax benefits, freedom of movement, and access to public goods and services. Cyprus, along with many other European Union countries, has yet to implement this directive.

that they come from. My informant from Cuba said that if he returns to Cuba he will be placed in jail and then unable to find work. Knowing that he cannot go back makes everything more difficult:

“Because of that you want to cry every day for Cuba...I never read the newspaper in Cuba here check the news every day. You miss even the bad things. I just want to see that again. Sometimes I go on Google Earth to go to Havana, to walk on the streets, to remember.”

When I asked individuals how they balance their identities and where they consider home Cyprus was not an answer that I heard. Many expressed a sense of not having a home. One asylum seeker said, ‘I forgot this meaning, to consider a place as your home. I don’t know what this means now. I used to have a place I call home but Cyprus I don’t call home. I have a home in Palestine but I can’t go there.’ Another said that if she had a choice she would prefer to stay in the Philippines but that right now she has no choice, so she is here. One woman expressed a desire to create a sense of home in Cyprus but she still has a feeling of being out-of-place: “The home is something you feel in the heart but you also have to have contact with it. Now I feel between two countries, I want here but also I want there.’ One woman had conducted a research on Greek Cypriots who had left the island for ten to fifteen years to work or study and then had returned. She found that those people, too, felt that it was difficult to gain their footing and feel at home again in Cyprus. If this was a problem for native Greek Cypriots one can imagine how difficult it may be for migrants.

#### *Hopes and Plans for the Future*

Individuals’ hopes and plans for the future were very simple: to get married, have children, continue ones’ studies, and to feel safe and secure somewhere. Most expressed a desire to see resolution of their case. Until then, ‘It’s like a hell because you’re staying but you don’t know your future.’ Everyone hopes to leave Cyprus at least temporarily to visit their country of origin or just to be somewhere different. Many feel exhausted in Cyprus and think that in a different country their situation will be better. People also shared their hopes for their migrant community as a whole. They hope that they will leave Cyprus but will return someday to find the migrant community doing better. One

man said, '[I] don't want anyone to face the same difficulties...hope in the next 500 years we'll have a different situation.'

### *Greek Cypriot opinions*

The second portion of my project focused on the attitudes of Greek Cypriots towards the migrant community. I interviewed three individuals and learned three very different opinions about migrants in Cyprus:

The first woman that I spoke to feels that migrants are dangerous and need to be more controlled by the government. She has very little interaction with migrants but had heard a story from a friend of a friend about a migrant who pulled a knife on a boy during a school fight. Also, on the news she heard about a Pakistani who beat the man he was supposed to care for. She said 'They just come here and they think the whole world belongs to them....they don't respect the country they are living in, or the laws.' This woman thinks that the government should know where migrants live and check at their houses to keep them more 'under-control,' and that there should be a limit on how many migrants can come to Cyprus. When asked if there was any benefit to having the migrant community in Cyprus she said that there was none.

The second individual that I spoke to offered a more moderate view of the migrant community. He said that migrants take jobs that could be done by Greek Cypriots and therefore are one reason that Greek Cypriots do not have jobs. He did acknowledge that people come to Cyprus because they have poverty in their countries and they want a better life. Sometimes cultures and lifestyles clash, such as if a migrants' culture does not involve frequent bathing, but integration all depends on the individual migrant. If someone has a conscience then he or she is okay. He is concerned that Cyprus is too small to handle a large influx of migrants and that it will become 'overpopulated.' When asked if there are any benefits to the migrant community he said, 'They have their own customs. Personally I like mixed communities...Why should we all look the same? That's boring.' He has very limited interaction with the migrants employed by his fathers' shop.

The final Greek Cypriot that I spoke to had a very sympathetic view towards migrants. He said that employers want foreigners because they are cheaper labor, and that you cannot blame the migrants for any affect that they have on the economy. As far as the

reason that people enter Cyprus he responded, 'People are coming to work, nothing else, they don't mean harm.' He felt that the anti-migrant opinion held by many Greek Cypriots is stupid and ignorant, and that with improved education and increased travel Cypriots will gain a friendlier opinion towards migrants. He stated that the fact that migrants do not have political power allows them to be exploited and paid less than Greek Cypriots in comparable positions. He also has very limited interaction with the migrant community but said that 'It's good to have a multi-national environment.'

These three different individuals shared a range of the opinions held by Greek Cypriots. What stood out most for me in the interviews was the strength of each person's feelings despite their limited interaction with the migrant community. Something else, whether it be other people, the media, or personal convictions, has shaped these three people's deeply held ideas about the migrant community. One wonders how conversation and interaction with migrants could positively or negatively change these opinions.

### **Conclusions and Policy Recommendations**

'If we keep denying this then what happened in France will happen here.' This was an off-hand comment made by one of the political refugees that I interviewed; at the time I barely noticed what she had said but in the month since our conversation her comment has become extremely poignant. Four days ago a group of approximately thirty Kurdish asylum seekers from Syria and Iraq arrived in Nicosia. They are three families, members of which have been in Cyprus from as short as two months to as long as eight years without receiving recognition as refugees or denial of their case. They have created a camp and are staging a demonstration to demand the right to work, receive health care, have translators and support systems independent from their embassy, and if Cyprus does not want to grant them these demands they want the right to leave and go to another country. Last night four men climbed to the top of a seven-story building and threatened to jump off if their demands are not met.

I am not a legal expert and do not know if these individuals are technically eligible for refugee status according to the regulations of the Cypriot and European Union governments, but that feels irrelevant at this point. Clearly these individuals do not feel a sense of welcoming and integration into the Greek Cypriot community. They are tired of waiting to hear the fate of their case and feel a loss of control over their lives. In two days

I will leave Cyprus without knowing how this story ends, but the last week has made the comments heard in my interviews come dramatically and painfully to life. If the government and civil society in Cyprus do not work together to create a plan to deal with these individuals then more situations like this one may occur. Some basic recommendations that emerged from my interviews:

- Increased governmental capacity—Many people consider the governmental bureaucracy to be their greatest challenge. While they wait for work permits to be renewed, asylum cases to be closed, and welfare checks to come in the mail they run out of money, become illegal, and risk being deported. Moving processes along faster could ameliorate these situations.
- Rights that migrants do have must be put into practice—Increased policing of employers regarding working hours, salaries, and non-abusive relationships with employees must occur. The long-term residency directive of the European Union will drastically increase security for eligible migrants in Cyprus, but it has not yet been implemented. Some supportive laws do exist and they need to be carried through.
- Educational campaigns and awareness raising in the Greek Cypriot community—a strong divide between migrants and most Greek Cypriots was apparent in my interviews. In order for the politics of migration to change some sort of relationship must be developed across this boundary. The first step for this is for Greek Cypriots to realize that there is in fact a huge migrant community in their midst that faces very real problems. From there perhaps we can very slowly begin the process of working together as people living in Cyprus.

The people camped in Eleftherias Square represent a tiny percentage of the global community of migrants, but people far beyond Cyprus share their issues. Their issues will not disappear any time soon, but perhaps the present demonstration in Nicosia will be a wake-up call for one country to realize and deal with the presence of an increasingly diverse society.

## Appendix 1: Question Guide for Migrants

Hi, my name is Molly Bowen and I am a student from America. I am in Nicosia now for four months on a program to learn about politics and history in Cyprus. As part of my class I am doing a research project about immigration and multiculturalism in Nicosia. I am interested in learning about the daily lives of immigrants, how you are connected to other places in the world, and how you feel about living in Cyprus. The research that I do will become a final paper for my class this semester, I will also use this to write a larger research paper at my home university next year, and I may publish this paper in a journal or present it at a conference.

You will be completely anonymous; I will not use your real name or any way of identifying you in my paper. Do I have your permission to use the information that you give me in my final paper?

It would be helpful to me to tape-record this conversation, but it is not necessary. Are you comfortable with me tape-recording this conversation? I will also be taking notes to help me remember our conversation.

Please let me know if you do not understand any of my questions, or if there is anything else that you would like to say. This is a consent form that explains more about my research. Please read it and let me know if you have any questions.

This interview will probably be an hour—is there a time that you need to be finished by?

Date and location of interview:

What is your name, where are you from, and how long have you been in Cyprus?

What is your age, your marital status, your education level?

What is your family like? Where are your family members?

Why did you originally come to Cyprus?

Did you come alone or with other people?

Did you know anyone in Cyprus when you arrived here?

What was it like coming to a new place? How did you feel?

What were your expectations of Cyprus?

Have you had any problems here? What has been the most challenging part of living in Cyprus?

Have you lived in other parts of Cyprus, or only in Nicosia?

What did you do in these other places, and how did you end up in Nicosia?

Do you know anyone in other parts of the country?

What is your job like?

Have you been back to the place that you came from since you left?

Do you communicate with your family and friends there?

How do you stay connected to that place?

Do you feel more connected to Cyprus or to your place of origin?

What does it mean to be \_\_\_\_\_?

What place do you think of as 'home'?

Do you consider yourself to be Cypriot?

Do you think of Cyprus as your home?

What does 'Cypriot' mean to you? How would you describe the typical Cypriot?



What have your experiences been like with Cypriots?  
How are you treated?  
Have you had any problems?  
What do you think Cypriots think about migrants?  
    Why do you think that?  
    Can you describe an experience that explains your feelings?

In Nicosia where do you feel most welcome/most comfortable?  
    Are there places where you feel unwelcome/uncomfortable? Why?  
    How do you wish these places were different?  
    Do you feel safe? Why/why not?  
    What is your favorite place? Where do you go for fun?

What do you think of the other migrant communities in Cyprus?  
    Do you interact with migrants from other places (Sri Lanka, Bangladeshi, Phillipines, Eastern Europe, elsewhere)?  
    Where and when do you interact with them?  
    Do you friends that are Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi, Phillippina, Eastern European, or Greek Cypriot?  
        Where did you meet these people?  
        What do you do with them?

Do you have Cypriot citizenship?  
    Do you want to have Cypriot citizenship? Why/why not?  
    Do you have European Union citizenship? Do you want to? Why/why not?  
    Do you plan to stay in Cyprus for a long time?  
        Do you want to go somewhere else?  
        What are your hopes for the future?  
        Is there anything that you are afraid of for the future?

That is all of the questions that I have—Is there anything that I did not ask that you would like to tell me?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you, and here is my information in case you think of anything else that you would like to say or any questions that you have for me.

## Appendix 2: Question Guide for individuals in immigrant support services

Hi, my name is Molly Bowen and I am a student from America. I am in Nicosia now for four months on a program to learn about politics and history in Cyprus. As part of my class I am doing a research project about immigration and multiculturalism in Nicosia. I am interested in learning about the daily lives of immigrants, how you are connected to other places in the world, and how you feel about living in Cyprus. The research that I do will become a final paper for my class this semester, I will also use this to write a larger research paper at my home university next year, and I may publish this paper in a journal or present it at a conference.

You will be completely anonymous; I will not use your real name or any way of identifying you in my paper. Do I have your permission to use the information that you give me in my final paper?

It would be helpful to me to tape-record this conversation, but it is not necessary. Are you comfortable with me tape-recording this conversation? I will also be taking notes to help me remember our conversation.

Please let me know if you do not understand any of my questions, or if there is anything else that you would like to say. This is a consent form that explains more about my research. Please read it and let me know if you have any questions.

This interview will probably be an hour—is there a time that you need to be finished by?

Date and location of interview

What is your name, where are you from, and how are you currently involved in immigrant support services?

How did you get involved in this field? Why are immigration issues important to you?

What services do immigrants need that the government does not provide to them?

What causes immigration to Cyprus? What changed in the early 1990s to bring so many people to Cyprus?

How have you seen changes in immigration since you have lived here? Have these changes been positive or negative?

What do you see as the greatest challenges faced by immigrants in Cyprus?

What do you think is the general attitude towards immigrants?

How has European Union accession changed immigration law or the immigrant experience in Cyprus?

Much of the articles I have read discussed integration into Cypriot society, or how ‘Cypriots’ feel about immigrants. What does ‘Cypriot’ mean to you? How does the increase in immigration to Cyprus affect this ‘Cypriot’ identity?

What would be your ideal situation for immigrants in Cyprus? What would be your ideal policies?

That is all of the questions that I have—Is there anything that I did not ask that you would like to tell me?

Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you, and here is my information in case you think of anything else that you would like to say or any questions that you have for me.

Appendix 3  
**Consent Form**

*Transnational Citizenships:  
Immigrant Identity in the Greek Cypriot Community*

I am conducting a study of immigrants' perceptions of their identity and reactions to increasing diversity in the Greek Cypriot community. You were selected as a participant because of your knowledge about immigration in Cyprus. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Molly Bowen, through the School for International Training's "Transnational Identities and Intercommunal Relations Program." My contact information is [mbowen@macalester.edu](mailto:mbowen@macalester.edu) or mobile number 99 24 92 06.

The information gained from this interview will be included in a research paper and presentation for the School for International Training. If you would like to receive a copy of this paper or attend that presentation please notify me. There is also the possibility that this information will be used by me for future papers, presentations, and published journal articles.

**Procedures:**

This interview will take approximately one hour. With your consent I will use an audio tape-recorder and take notes in order to accurately record what you say to me. If you would like, I can give you a copy of the transcript of this interview. I will leave you a copy of this consent form with my contact information; if after the interview is over you would like to change or take back something that you said please feel free to contact me.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

I do not anticipate any risks or benefits from your involvement in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject in any paper or presentation I make based on this research. The tape-recording of this interview will be erased after I transcribe the conversation.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact me.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 4: Activity Chart

	Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
Week 1 3/16-3/22	Rural Homestay	Rural Homestay  Work on operational definitions and rationale	Meet with Doros—KISA 9:30 (set up volunteering, set up interview time with him)  Meet with Sondra	Volunteer at KISA  Set up interviews with Beryl and Chris  Work on immigration law background	Volunteer at KISA  Set up interview with Frances at Catholic Charities and Nicos  Work on immigration background	Set up interviews with immigrant domestic workers  Meet with Anna?  Write report to ADs about process	Complete Theoretical Framework  Finish immigration law background
Week 2 3/23-3/29	Observation at Catholic Charities, park, bazaar, and other locations in the old city	Talk to Reconciliation NGO  Set up interview with Nancy  Work on question guides	Volunteer at KISA  Do interviews?  Meet with Sondra?  Work on migration and the EU background	Volunteer at KISA  Do interviews?  Work on migration and the EU background	Volunteer at KISA  Do interviews?  Meet with Anna?  Write report to ADs about process	Transcribe interviews	Transcribe interviews  Finish migration and the EU background
Week 3 4/30-5/6	Observation at Catholic Charities, park, bazaar, and other locations in the old city	Volunteer at KISA  Interviews  Transcribe interviews	Volunteer at KISA  Meet with Sondra  Interviews  Transcribe interviews  Analyze data	Volunteer at KISA  Write report to ADs about process  Analyze data  Prepare presentation	Volunteer at KISA  Meet with Anna  Analyze data  Prepare presentation	Prepare presentation	ISP Presentations  Reception
Week 4 5/7-5/13		Re-work theoretical background, introduction, and data analysis  Write conclusions  Spend night with Kurdish migrants	Spend time with Kurdish migrants  Write conclusions  Editing	Meet with Sondra  Volunteer at KISA  Editing	Editing and printing	Final paper due—before 3pm	



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