Chapter 8
What's in a Street? Exploring Suspended Cosmopolitanism in Trikoupi, Nicosia

Karen Akoka, Olivier Clochard, Iris Polyzou, and Camille Schmoll

8.1 A Street-Level Approach to Urban Cosmopolitanism

The island of Cyprus is an appealing and yet under-researched case of a highly diverse setting. Located at the intersection of three continents, Cyprus has historically been a multicultural, multilinguistic and multi-confessional space, with an ethnically diverse population originating from the Mediterranean region composed of Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, Maronites, Armenians (many arriving in the aftermath of the 1917 Genocide), Egyptians, Syrians, Palestinians (many arriving after the creation of the State of Israel), Turks, Greeks from Turkey (who left after the population exchange following the First World War), as well as Greeks from Egypt (who left after 1956, with the Suez Crisis and Nasser's regime).

Cyprus remains one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the EU (Eurostat 2019). According to the latest census (2011), foreigners comprise 21% of the overall population, 62% of whom originate from an EU country. Services, agriculture and domestic work are the primary economic sectors for the migrant population. The principal countries of origin are Romania, Bulgaria, the Philippines, Vietnam,

K. Akoka
ISP, University of Paris Ouest Nanterre, Nanterre, France
e-mail: k.akoka@parisnanterre.fr

O. Clochard
CNRS MIGRINTER, Université de Poitiers, IC Migrations, Poitiers, France
e-mail: olivier.clochard@univ-poitiers.fr

I. Polyzou
Ecole Française d'Athènes, Athens, Greece

C. Schmoll (✉)
Géographie-Cités, École des Hautes Études and Sciences Sociales, IC Migrations, Paris, France
e-mail: camille.schmoll@ehess.fr

Sri Lanka and Russia. International migration to Cyprus is strongly feminized, with 122 female migrants for every 100 male migrants. This chapter explores the issue of cosmopolitanism in Cyprus, drawing on fieldwork undertaken in the capital city, Nicosia, where one-third of the non-Cypriot population currently lives (Cystat 2015).

Recent research has witnessed an increasing interest in street-level approaches in migration and urban studies (Hall 2013). Important works such as Glick-Schiller and Caglar's "Locating Migration" (2011) have shown that the investigation of local situations enables for a better understanding of the complexities and entanglements of the multiple scales at work in shaping the situation of international migrants. In short, a local glance does not mean falling into the trap of "localism." Following such trends in urban studies and migration research, this chapter looks at the street as a compelling lens to understand less-documented forms of cohabitation, contested citizenship, and power relations.

We conducted a collective *in situ* observation in Trikoupi Street, a main thoroughfare in the southern part of the old city. Trikoupi Street makes an interesting case study because it has undergone contradictory processes of urban change and heavy migration inflows in a context of restrictive asylum and migration policies. These factors make it a good case study for investigating cohabitations and tensions in a context of social and political change.

We asked people about their trajectories, looked at the way they inhabited the street and listened to how they described their environs. We paid attention to shared and contested stories in order to grasp common as well as contrasting neighborhood practices and to situate the multivocality of the street's history.[1] Very importantly, we collected information both from "locals" – that is, Cypriot nationals – as well as from international migrants.

8.2 Locating Vulnerability: International Migration in Nicosia's City Center

Looking at Trikoupi Street through the prism of its inhabitants' eyes and practices allows for an exploration of a number of complex spatial and temporal connections. Urban change in Trikoupi Street has been embedded within multi-layered spaces and temporalities, including the daily rhythm of street-level interactions, the historically generated features of urban history, and the accelerations/decelerations of urban redevelopment programs. As an urban palimpsest, the street retains traces of significant conflictual episodes (Amin and Thrift 2002). In Trikoupi Street's recent history, generations of internal and international migrants and refugees and

---

[1] We triangulate sometimes divergent oral accounts with accounts given by the local media and interviews with various key informants such as public servants, NGO members involved in migration issues and institutional actors (municipality, asylum services, UNHCR, Ombudsman). This not only allows us to check on the information provided but also addresses the interpretative conflicts which are part of city making.

generations of traders, artisans and small-scale industrial activities have followed one after another. Many diverse kinds of people on the move – asylum seekers, refugees, students, permanent and temporary foreign workers – live, work, and consume in Trikoupi Street. A simple look at the storefronts gives an idea of the ethnically diverse atmosphere of the neighborhood: halal butcheries and groceries as well as Middle Eastern restaurants and barber shops cohabit with Filipino and Eastern European second-hand shops; Asian food shops are next money transfer services; Internet boutiques and shipping services cross stores selling African hair locks and beauty products.

Most of the migrants we met in Trikoupi – with the exception of EU citizens, who are allowed to stay and work – were clearly in a precarious legal and financial situation. Their vulnerability is closely connected to migration policy: although Cyprus has progressively adopted a number of EU directives since 2004 and even composed its first Action Plan for the integration of markets in 2011, the overall policy approach remains restrictive in terms of access to social protection and participation.

Three main issues are important to consider when it comes to non-EU migrants in Cyprus. First, the island has witnessed an increasing influx of refugees from the Middle East and Africa. Asylum seekers remain in a state of vulnerability because they receive only limited social and economic support and overall rejection rates remain high (AIDA-ECRE 2018; UNHCR Cyprus 2018; Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights (Ombudsman) 2019). Second, Cyprus, and especially Nicosia, hosts a large number of international students which tend to abandon their studies in order to seek employment (24h.com 2017). Third, most international migrants to Cyprus are defined as "migrant workers." The Cypriot legal framework for migration promotes the model of a temporary presence, proposing short-term work visas linked to a specific employer and limited to a number of predetermined economic sectors – the domestic work visa, for instance, is strictly limited to a six-year stay (Trimikliniotis 2016). As scholars point out, Cyprus's labor migration regime, linked as it is to the country's economic growth during the last few decades which created a huge demand for low-paid workers, is an authoritarian one. After three decades of heavy migratory movements flows, third-country nationals are still seen as a flexible and low-paid workforce. Since many of these migrant workers overstay their visas, they find themselves in an irregular situation and, as such, particularly vulnerable.

For these vulnerable groups, the Trikoupi area was an attractive location due to its affordable accommodation. The recent history of Nicosia city center helps explain this state of affairs. The city has not yet undergone processes of gentrification similar to those that have occurred in many European cities (Carmenos and Sabrié 2017). This is firstly due to the conflict opposing the northern and southern parts of the island: following the occupation of the northern part of the island by Turkey in 1974 the city was divided and experienced a slow and steady process of desertification. The conflict, whose scars remain visible in Nicosia's urban landscape, led to many vacancies in the residential and commercial building stock in the southern part of the city. As an immediate result of the conflict, the Turkish-Cypriot

population abandoned their properties, which amounted to around 30% of the city's buildings – most of these abandoned properties remain vacant today.[2] Moreover, desertification was reinforced during the 1980s and 1990s by the progressive sub-urbanization of the Greek-Cypriot population. Most Greek-Cypriot households prefer to settle in the periphery of the city, which has actually become its economic and commercial center. However, the desertification of the downtown has been progressively altered through urban policies. This process started in the early 1980s within the framework of the bi-communal project "Nicosia Master Plan" (NMP). The NMP aimed to revitalize the area and attract new residents in under-populated sections on both sides of the city center. This redevelopment plan grew even stronger by the addition of new actors after Cyprus's integration in the EU and a warming of relations between the two sides of the divided island. The range of actors currently involved in the rehabilitation project is therefore very wide: local and national actors (municipalities), regional actors (the EU) and transnational/supranational actors (UNESCO and the UN). Trikoupi Street has thus in recent years undergone a process of urban change, attracting a new population of foreign investors and Cypriots who see it as a centrally-located, historically charming area with significant economic potential. Only a few parts of Nicosia, however, can be described as "gentrified," since very few Greek-Cypriots settle in the old city center – the overwhelming majority prefer to live in the modern residential outskirts of the city. Other limited forms of gentrification appear connected to practices of consumption. The middle and upper-class Greek-Cypriot population started to meet in bars and cafés. They shopped in trendy stores and international clothing chains with recently opened stores in Nicosia center (in Ledras Street, in particular). Moreover, tourists, who tended to disregard the city as a possible attraction, have recently started taking day trips to downtown Nicosia.

The old city center remains, though, partially abandoned and the redevelopment process has been left unfinished.[3] Downtown Nicosia somehow stands in a sort of limbo between an apparent but very low and limited gentrification process and an urban sprawl process that eventually decelerated. For these diverse reasons, the area has since the 1990s been an affordable place for foreign residents. The large number of vacant apartments, the low rental prices, the centrality of the area and its proximity to the main bus station all proved to be important factors that led to the settlement of migrants in the available housing stock of a number of areas close to Trikoupi, Rigenis and Arsinois Streets. As mentioned above, the vulnerable and

---

[2] The Turkish Cypriot Properties Department of the Ministry of Interior is responsible for managing those properties. Mainly, they can be lent to Greek Cypriots for housing or commercial activities. The rent and conditions for utilizing such properties are based on a contract between the occupant and the Department. The management of these properties has been controversial since, in many cases, the rental price is quite low and a number of Greek Cypriot entrepreneurs who occupy them make considerable profits. The mismanagement of Turkish Cypriot properties is a topic fully covered in the daily Greek Cypriot press. See https://politis.com.cy/article/to-megalo-parti-ton-periousion

[3] The development of the centrally located Eleftherias square and the new municipal building are the two main projects under construction.

transitory social status of international migrants led to the search of affordable housing solutions. As a result, multiple forms of cohabitation, of shared apartments and precarious ways of living, emerged.

8.3 Inhabiting Trikoupi

Dina Vaiou (2007) define urban interstices as temporary situations in which pieces of the city become accessible to the most vulnerable and disempowered, most often for a relatively short period of time, before strong processes of urban change appear. The notion of "spatial interstice," in particular, refers to abandoned, neglected, or marginal spaces underutilized by the locals: gardens, roundabouts, sidewalks, spaces at the margins of urban regeneration operations, wastelands undergoing regeneration, or planning operations that have failed. For vulnerable migrants and refugees, Trikoupi Street clearly is this kind of place: a place where they can find cheap rentals and even work opportunities.

But what kind of people inhabit Trikoupi today? How do they inhabit it? We use the term "inhabit" in a very broad sense, not limited to residents, in order to point to how the street has become a crossroad of different usages and practices. Such usages, as we shall see, are profoundly interconnected. Trikoupi is a place to settle, to shop, to work, to search for work. It is a place to settle since many immigrants, students and asylum seekers have their residence in the neighborhood. It is a place to shop, as goods from all over the world are sold. It is a crossroad, as migrants scattered across Cyprus congregate here on Sundays in order to meet friends, have drinks, get a haircut, buy food, or do deals. It is a meeting place for finding work: at the roundabout at the end of the street, male migrants assemble in the morning, waiting for employers to take them to work in the fields or in urban services. It is a workplace for shop owners and employees, as well as for the Turkophone Bulgarian sex workers who occupy the street's sidewalks. It is an ambiguous "emotional labour" place, a blurred zone between sex work and flirting, as migrant domestic workers rent flats to host boyfriends and clients during their free days. Finally, it is a religious place, since Trikoupi street is located near the Omerye mosque where Muslim residents and visitors come and pray.

Mass-media representations of the street's diversity tend to be negative. Some newspaper articles see Trikoupi as a "dangerous" area associated with criminality, ghettoization and prostitution – but other press articles see a symbol of Cyprus's positive multicultural identity. The articles adopting a negative view of Trikoupi's diversity tend to depict migrants as directly or indirectly responsible for the urban and social decay of the area, which is called a "ghetto of migrants": "during the night you won't see any Greek-Cypriot, only migrants on the streets of the abandoned buildings" ("Three Problems" 2013). A documentary produced by a local TV channel, entitled "The Broken Shopfront of the Capital" (2015), underlined the point that the concentration of stores run by or for migrants went hand in hand with "dirt," alcohol and the desertification of the area. At the same time, a very different

approach towards migrants in the city center is promulgated by alternative or more socially-oriented media. The life stories of migrants who have established themselves in the city in the prior decade are a mirror into the everyday life of "other" inhabitants for the Greek-Cypriot residents of Nicosia:

> In one or two neighborhoods they are gathered in an unplanned way, creating their own Babel, making or inheriting their own Nicosia. Even if they had to overcome several misfortunes, they created their own lives and they continued to shop, walk, get a haircut, have fun and live. Everyday stories of how the migrants of our capital live. Welcome to old Nicosia.

A similar approach appears in a documentary produced from the Home of Cooperation – its central slogan is "Cyprus always was and continues to be multicultural."[4]

International migrants we met in Trikoupi describe the street and area as a resourceful place, a place to recover, in contrast to other segregated and punishing places in the country. For instance, many asylum seekers live in camps and isolated homes like Kofinou, an asylum seeker and refugee residence center with strict rules and conditions. Kofinou is isolated in the middle of the fields, rooms are in containers and shared by a large number of people, there is a curfew and a series of restrictions for residents (no cooking, no unauthorized visits, etc.). In this context, Trikoupi Street appears safer, a place of relief, a resourceful place where Kofinou residents can meet with friends, have drinks, chat or enjoy the street. The barber shop run by Cédric near Trikoupi is one of those meeting places: African asylum seekers originating from Congo, Cameroon or Ivory Coast meet there, not only to get a haircut but also to talk. The asylum speakers speak about the situation in Cyprus and their countries of origin but also more generally about politics, family life, and their current travails. The owner of the shop, who is married to a Cypriot national, states that he feels bad about his privileged situation, but admits to being worried about his co-nationals stuck in Kofinou with pending asylum claims that he is powerless to impact.

The same antithesis between Trikoupi and other places inhabited by migrants holds true for the case of women domestic workers. Mainly originating from Southeast Asia and especially the Philippines, Sri Lanka and India, they work and live in their employers' homes. The living and working conditions of domestic workers in Cyprus are quite poor; the wages are low, the workers have limited access to housing, and they are exposed to violence from their employers. For many of these women, the domestic space is a space of subjugation, without intimacy but with great vulnerability. Trikoupi appears as the antithesis of such a segregated and disempowering place. In this specific area, domestic workers find a temporary housing space on weekends and holidays – so-called "Sunday flats." These flats respond to the need for an affordable private space within the city on weekends when the

---

[4] "Another world in the heart of Nicosia" (24 October 2010, in Greek), http://www.sigmalive.com/archive/simerini/news/social/318212; "A video that celebrates the multiculturality of Cyprus" (in Greek), at http://parathyro.com/2017/05/το-βίντεο-που-γιορτάζει-την-πολυπολιτ/

domestic workers do not have to work or stay with their employer. In a number of apartment building entrances, the advertisement "room for Sunday girls" is common. This flexible model of living in the city underlines the precarious and transitory social presence of this population and the active role in shaping that precarity by the country's restrictive migration policies. In their flats Filipino women socialize with fellow nationals, exercise their religious habits and even engage in small businesses like second-hand clothes (which are sent to the Philippines in containers). For these women meeting other women, these Sunday flats on Tripouki Street are places for relaxation and sociability in a safe context.

8.4   Working-Class Partnerships, Work Relations, Moral Orders: Between Tensions and Cooperation

The most striking thing about the stores on Trikoupi Street is the diversity of origins of the migrants and traders. Most of the businesses are based on arrangements and unions – be they circumstantial or long-standing – that encompass different ethnicities and nationalities.

There are two common forms of partnerships. The first corresponds to what Pnina Werbner calls "working class cosmopolitanism": some alliances are set on the basis of the common belonging to the working class. Nikolas, for instance, is a Cypriot citizen. While working in a fish factory in the 1990s, he befriended Rakib, a refugee from Bangladesh. In 2002 they decided to open a DVD shop. They later opened a supermarket/halal butcher. At the time there were very few butcher shops, so the business was very profitable, but over time there was more competition. Nikolas finally split with his Bangladeshi business partner. Today he owns a money transfer business in the same street. He has hired a Pakistani employee to facilitate business with Asian customers. He says he has many female clients from the Philippines: "life is difficult for them," he says with empathy. On Trikoupi Street there are many stories like this, made up of a mix of friendship and curiosity towards the other in a context of limited resources. These stories speak to the capacity to engage with the other - which is commonplace in trade interactions - but also the fragility of partnerships.

Another type of cross-national alliance in Trikoupi is marriage between a citizen of Cyprus and a non-citizen or between a non-EU citizen and an EU citizen. The extent of intermarriage was seen by observing that most of the shops on the street are owned or managed by binational couples. How can this high rate of intermarriage be explained? For sure, the institutional context and the legal constraints imposed on foreigners wishing to establish a business have a strong responsibility: the impossibility of setting up a business if not Cypriot as well as the risk of deportation for many migrants contribute to an environment encouraging circumstantial marriages and alliances. However there seems to be also, in some of these marriages, something about a taste, an attraction towards a different other. These unions

refer to very concrete, sensual and embodied forms of cosmopolitanism. Fared, for instance, is a Syrian citizen born in Cyprus in 1985. Though he did not need to marry an EU citizen for administrative purposes, he says he "likes Eastern women." He has divorced his Polish wife but now has three different Ukrainian girlfriends.

It can be said that the type of cosmopolitanism described here is compelled and shaped by the unevenness of the situation. In other words, although Trikoupi is a resourceful place where people may like or empathize with one another, it is not yet a place where inequalities and subalternity are cancelled or suspended. Neighborhood life has an underlying rhythm of tensions and conflicts connected to different kinds of hierarchies intersecting in the neighborhood: legal/illegal, ethnic/non-ethnic, insider/outsider, business owner/keeper, etc. There is an important social distance between more established residents and newcomers, between the old waves of immigration that came to the neighborhood decades ago and the newly arrived refugees and migrants. This is particularly striking when it comes to the Arab community of Nicosia. On Trikoupi Street, eight shops are owned by an established and wealthy Syrian family of Turko-Cypriot origins. According to various talks with members of this family, they are descended from a Turko-Cypriot woman from a rural area who married a Syrian merchant who traveled to then-British-ruled Cyprus for business. In the mid-1960s the couple, spurred by the conflict in the island, moved to Kuwait. Their children and grandchildren settled in different cities in the Middle East but also Europe. Due to the Gulf War and the unstable situation in the Middle East, some of those who had settled in the region moved "back" to Nicosia where they acquired, thanks to their mixed origins, Cypriot citizenship and thus the right to own shops in Trikoupi. The family continues to build on these transnational ties and networks for the development of its shops and businesses. As an established family in business they hire newcomers such as Palestinians fleeing the Israeli occupation or Syrians fleeing the ongoing conflict to help and work in their shops. They also serve as a support for newly arrived refugees. In this way, the generation of arrival in Cyprus is very important for understanding the neighborhood's hierarchies.

Other tensions that have emerged between groups are connected to the various usages of the street in terms of different "moral orders." The neighborhood is a place for divergent and competing morals. For instance, drug sellers or sex workers are accused by local business owners of contributing to the area's bad reputation. The owners of halal shops make distinctions between halal practices versus the haram. Others point to the difference between nightlife and daytime in Trikoupi. Politics is another source of tension. We have been told that some shopkeepers side with the racist-nationalist Cypriot ELAM supporters while others are much more tolerant and empathetic toward foreigners. The issue of migration, however, is strongly felt in the public debate and is also connected to debates on gentrification. Even when they are sympathetic towards migrants, though, shop tenants are ambivalent when it comes to personal relationships with immigrants. The changes in the neighborhood have had an objective impact on their situation and brought them to marginalized positions. They stand as a minority group in a street where the majority of the customers no longer want the goods they sell (such as souvlaki, a Greek-Cypriot food). This partly explains the nostalgic tone of some of them when talking about the area

in the past. But these shopkeepers are not necessarily angry at immigrants. As one shopkeeper puts it:

> Trikoupi was full of shops; now it is full of foreigners. We were selling at least 300 souvlaki a day. There were shoemakers, industries, businesses. All Trikoupi was full of 'our' shops. Christofias (former president of Cyprus) was having lunch here everyday. Same for Hasikos (another political personality) or Eleni Mavrou (former mayor). Now it is just a foreigners' area.

8.5 Conclusion

The street is a crossroads for many kinds of different populations, the vast majority of which belong to working class and subaltern groups. Unlike upper-class groups, they did not choose and valorize their type of life. Some even complain about it, viewing the presence of other national groups as damaging the neighborhood. Thus, the kind of cosmopolitanism we describe here is of an everyday, banalised, vernacular and circumstantial kind. It is also a suspended cosmopolitanism, embedded in the city's spatial and temporal interstices. Linked to the history of conflict of the old city of Nicosia, the specific status of Trikoupi Street is also connected with the cycle of urban development and may change abruptly if there is an acceleration of the process of urban regeneration. This temporary and banal cosmopolitanism is also embedded within uneven/hierarchized citizenship regimes. As such, it is, a form of subaltern and fragile cosmopolitanism. The case of Trikoupi Street shows how looking at street-level cosmopolitanism helps to better situate broader processes of domination, politics of propinquity (Amin 2002) and the way micro-geographies of power are enacted at the local scale (Massey 1999). It also reveals how cosmopolitanism from below, like upper-class cosmopolitism, is connected to domination and inequality and embedded in a specific moment. The question that remains is about generalization. Is cosmopolitanism from below inherently stratified and connected to power relations? In the context of global urbanization and capitalism is it meant to stay temporary; is cosmopolitanism from below just a specific moment?

References

24.com. (2017). *Cyprus: A country cheating students?* 15 May. At https://24h.com.cy/society/item/151661-i-kypros-xora-exapatisis-foititon.html?tmpl=component&print=1

AIDA-ECRE. (2018). *Cyprus: Country report*. At https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/cyprus

Amin, A. (2002). Ethnicity and the multicultural city: Living with diversity. *Environment and Planning A, 34*, 959–980.

Amin, A., & Thrift, N. (2002). *Cities: Reimagining the urban*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Carmenos, Y., & Sabrié, M. (2017). Effacer la frontière: nouvelles pratiques urbaines et sociales dans la vieille ville méridionale de Nicosie, Chypre. *L'Espace Politique* 33. Online at http://journals.openedition.org/espacepolitique/4458

Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights (Ombudsman). (2019). *Report of the Ombudsman: Legal framework on the material conditions of receptions of Asylum Seekers that live outside the reception center*. Nicosia. At http://www.ombudsman.gov.cy/Ombudsman/Ombudsman.nsf/All/DCA7E9260217FA42C2258415003552AD/$file/%CE%91%CE%A01799_2016_06062019.pdf?OpenElement&fbclid=IwAR0o1D5VWbMgi_bqzhyBBsizO7d-fliZ5ia1YNpCHusP2P8AzzAHDoRBOaU (in Greek).

Cystat. (2015). *National Census of Population 2011: General demographic characteristics, migration and labour force*. Number 21. Cyprus, Republic of Cyprus.

Eurostat. (2019). *Migration and migrant population statistics*. At https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/1275.pdf

Glick Schiller, N., & Cağlar, A. (Eds.). (2011). *Locating migration: Rescaling cities and migrants*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Hall, S. (2013). Super-diverse street: A 'Transethnography' across migrant localities. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 38*(1), 22–37. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.858175.

Massey, D. (1999). Imagining globalization: Power-geometries of time-space. In *Global futures* (pp. 27–44). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

"Three Problems in Nicosia's Inner City." 26 April 2013. At http://archive.philenews.com/el-gr/eidiseis-topika/43/142803/treis-esties-provlimaton-stin-palia-lefkosa (in Greek).

Trimikliniotis, N. (2016). The migration question, political parties and the Cypriot state of Dissensus. In G. Charalambous & C. Christophorou (Eds.), *Party-society relations in the Republic of Cyprus, political and societal strategies* (pp. 1–26). London: Routledge.

UNHCR Cyprus. (2018). *The living conditions of asylum-seekers in Cyprus*. Nicosia: University of Nicosia.

Vaiou, D. (Ed.). (2007). Intersecting patterns of everyday life and socio-spatial transformations in the city. *Migrant and local women in the neighborhoods of Athens*. Athens: NTUA L-Press.