

BEYOND INITIAL IMPRESSIONS

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As part of my doctoral research, one component involves fieldwork in the Karpas peninsula, where a handful of mostly elderly Greek Cypriots remain: the enclaved.

As the grandchild of an enclaved couple, I have been familiarized with the immediate landscape of my ancestors both from stories, but also from visits. I have been driven down to the olive groves where I was told in detail about the amount of trees belonging to the family; shown where the vast fields with carob and almond trees were located. Oh and the goats, I was introduced to the goats. Lots of goats. I was shown an insight into pre-urbanisation, although with a twist: my grandfather had to cease conducting his daily business after the Turkish invasion. Greek Cypriots had to return back to solely living off their land for self-sufficiency, since they were barred from enterprise.

From my first visit to the village, one of the first things that struck me was the abundance of skinny cows. And that one of the houses on the main road had been painted a rather bawdy lilac pink. Lilac pink? Really? When most buildings were stone-built or made of particularly large brown bricks.

Lilac pink?

And that, I was told by the active but rapidly aging indigenous residents, was a house not inhabited by "Christians," but by "Turks". The semantics were interesting. There remained the undertones of the nineteenth century distinctions based on religion, merged with a modernist ethno-nationalist one. I realised that these "Turks" were not Turkish Cypriots but "settlers". I also noted that "Turks" was used interchangeably by the indigenous Greek Cypriots to either indicate the "Turkish Cypriots" from Kokkina now residing in the neighbouring village of Yialousa, or the "Turkish settlers" (Kurds and Pontean Turks) constituting the majority of residents in the Greek Cypriot enclaved villages of Agia Triada and Rizokarpaso.

During my initial visits, I only saw the village's "Turks" from afar: men in casual slacks and faded T-shirts, grazing their cows. I'd take a glimpse at the women as they marched down the street in threes, wearing colourful clothes and with their hair covered by vibrant scarves –quite distinct from the village's "Christian" women who wore dark colours and whose heads were permanently covered once widowed.

The only interactions I saw taking place at the time were exclusively between the Greek Cypriot enclave. I had met the whole community at one of the infrequent liturgies at the only functioning, although dilapidated, Church in the village. All the enclave men and women, no matter the age or state of health, were in attendance. The strict gender segregation, rarely seen in urban places of worship, was adhered to. Nevertheless, while the men stood in the front looking solemnly on, the women talked quietly among themselves, relaying the latest news of their children and grandchildren "on the other side": university graduations, engagements, wedlock, birth – life events that for many of the enclave came as bits of news from the CyBC's special radio bulletin, rather than as immediate participants in their loved ones' most significant lifetime moments.

Not once was I introduced to the village's "other" who practiced another religion, dressed differently; speaking a foreign tongue and looking poor and sad, while keeping to themselves.

From consequent visits to the village, but especially now that I bring along a voice recorder, I see and hear that from my initial impressions of the day-to-day life of the enclave there was an extensive component that was missing: That their interactions with the "Turks" are more numerous and multifaceted than I had been led to believe.

I had no idea that my grandparents' non-Cypriot neighbours would help clean my ancestral home and assist in preparing the large array of food with which my grandmother would welcome her family from "afar". That these same people would tend for her animals when either grandparent had to be away (usually because of hospitalisation). That those same people would not only assist them (sometimes for money, although it seems not always), but would also sit and drink coffee with them and *chat*.

And therein lies the paradox: the indigenous and the settler, communicating in the village's lingua franca, littered with vocabulary and expressions that have become almost extinct from urban usage. The "chorkatiko" intonations and phraseology of Greek Cypriots is flourishing among an out-group in Cyprus' panhandle, which no one would have expected.

Friendships and partnerships have blossomed between those whose traditions dictate conservative colours and those who have a preference for lilac pink houses, or to take a cue from Albert Memmi, between the colonized and the colonizer. For someone properly listening in on the Church gossip, there has been talk of romance – oftentimes with the disapproval of kinfolk, at other times with tacit acceptance. And the younger generation – a handful of adolescent Greek Cypriots amongst their more numerous Turkish peers – play together in the streets as they

slip back and forth between the Greek Cypriot vernacular and the tones of the Turkish mainland.

The beautiful vistas of the Karpas offer many uncharted areas of discovery, for those keen to step into the circle and go beyond initial impressions.