

Aphrodite delights

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The complexity of this goddess [Aphrodite]—mother, protectress, slayer, standing midway between Asia and Europe, instinct and order—is the complexity of Cyprus herself.¹

Stacked in large piles, boxes containing the same sugar-coated sweets will greet you in any souvenir shop in Cyprus. Only the name on the box differs: if you are on the Turkish Cypriot side of this divided island you will be buying *Turkish Delight*, or *Cyprus Turkish Delight*, while on the Greek Cypriot south you get *Cyprus Delight*. In English, they are known as *Turkish Delight*, but Greek Cypriots would be rather hesitant to sell *Turkish Delight* as their local, authentic and traditional sweets. Greek Cypriots call them *loukkoumia*, from the Turkish *lokum*—which is what Turkish Cypriots call them—though these terms are said to derive from the Arabic *hulkum*.

The promise of sensual pleasures is present in their very name. Greek Cypriots often sell them in boxes with the sexier name *Aphrodite Delights*, featuring the naked form of Aphrodite on the outside. The box hints towards other kinds of sensual pleasures in this island marketed for tourists as ‘Cyprus, the island of Aphrodite, Goddess of Beauty and Love’. Calling them *Aphrodite Delights* in English has the added advantage for Greek Cypriots that their English name now sounds more Greek than Turkish. Boxes of *Turkish Delight* imported from Turkey and sold in northern Cyprus draw from different traditions, though they, too, utilise the female form just as suggestively. One box features a scene from a harem with belly dancers surrounding the Sultan, under the name *Sultan’s Secret Life*. Another box of *Harem’s Secret–Turkish Delight* features a half-naked white woman in the foreground, while a black man sits in the background and looks furtively towards her.

The Greek Cypriot boxes of *Aphrodite Delights* often attempt to enhance their exotic appeal for western tourists (many of whom may have arrived in Cyprus having travelled on *Aphrodite Class* with Cyprus Airways) by advertising them in flavours such as chocolate, coconut, pineapple, passion fruit and other exotic fruits, all far from being ‘a traditional taste of Cyprus’ as the box claims. Yet nowadays Cypriots of both sides rarely consume these sweets. They are mostly found in souvenir shops for European tourists who are their real consumers and the target of the boxes’ messages. The standard trays on which these are often served to tourists also have certain subtle differences. On the Greek Cypriot side, the tray presents an image of the map

of Cyprus with the heading ‘Cyprus, The Island of Aphrodite’. On the Turkish Cypriot side, an almost identical tray is used without the heading, while the name Aphrodite is avoided, and Venus is used instead.

The delightful figure of Aphrodite has long been established as the symbol of Cyprus, albeit one put to diverse uses. In fact, the standard representation of Aphrodite in an alluring female form in itself constitutes a choice that excludes a multiplicity of other possibilities, thus simplifying the complexity of her multiple historical meanings and personas. The ideological uses to which the form of Aphrodite has been subjected provide a focal point, from which to explore the multiple forms that denials of the socio-political complexities of Cyprus have assumed during its modern history. The symbolic uses of Aphrodite by British colonialism, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots alike offer revealing insights into the island’s politics, as they encompass issues of colonialism, nationalism, historiography, gender and migration. Aphrodite, like Cyprus, is, and has been, a point of tension and contention. This article’s opening quote by British travel writer Colin Thurborn provides an illustration of this tension. Striving to present complexity, he reproduces essentialism in binary oppositions between Asia and Europe, the former associated with instinct, the latter with order.

Through *Aphrodite Delights* Cyprus has staked a claim to world fame: an entry in the *Guinness Book of Records*. I return to the sweet *Delight* at the end to illustrate how this claim too is bitterly contested—how indeed Cyprus’s other claims to fame in the *Guinness Book of Records*, for the largest doner kebab, are fraught with tensions like those surrounding the persona of Aphrodite.

Aphrodite and Astarte

Several thousand years ago a lady called Aphrodite landed in Cyprus, and the island has never quite recovered. The people of Cyprus make a luxury of discontent and always pretend they do not like being ruled, and yet, like the lady I have mentioned as a prototype, they expect to be ruled, and, in fact, prefer it.²

This remark was made by Sir Richard Palmer, the British colonial governor of Cyprus in 1939, during a meeting of the Royal Central Asian Society in London, the forum signifying the placement of Cyprus within the geopolitical context of Asia. As Given argues, this specific claim, beyond providing the standard male justification for rape, was made in a context where Aphrodite was often invoked in order to justify imperialist colonial ideology. An 1878 drawing in the British magazine *Punch* depicted the arrival of British colonialism in Cyprus as a charming encounter. Cyprus was portrayed as a graceful maiden-Venus draped with a British flag, offering her hand to be kissed by the first colonial governor dressed in army uniform, holding a bouquet of flowers, with a long sword suggestively hanging by his side.³

The British colonial period following three centuries of Ottoman rule witnessed the rise of opposed ethnic nationalisms, with Greeks of Cyprus (at

around 80 per cent of the population) demanding *enosis* (union with Greece) and the Turks subsequently calling for *taksim* (partition). During this period the British often used another persona of the goddess, namely Astarte, in order to counter the political demands of the Greeks that were articulated from early in the twentieth century. Astarte, it was claimed, was an oriental goddess whose abominable influence on the island had rendered the people of Cyprus an oriental, degenerate and corrupt race in need of benevolent civilised rule. In an island where according to Greek mythology the goddess was born, the Greeks of Cyprus saw in Aphrodite proof of the island's primordial Greekness. Like Aphrodite, Cyprus has been Greek since the dawn of history. But the British, too, were not averse to employing Aphrodite, since the mythology of Aphrodite, beyond its obvious gender implications, was linked to prostitution and orgiastic rituals that could be easily manipulated in the interests of colonial ideology. Greeks of Cyprus pointed to continuities in customs and rituals linked to Aphrodite from ancient to contemporary times. These claims were in line with other voluminous research conducted by folklorists identifying ancient Greek 'survivals' into modern times as proof of indissoluble continuity of their Greekness. British colonialists would turn such arguments on their head, pointing out that what they in fact demonstrated was evidence of cultural stagnation, conservatism, and the continuation of a primitive mentality.⁴

Interestingly, British imperialists together with Greek nationalists in Cyprus used mythology in a literal historic manner, as they each made Aphrodite speak in support of their opposed political ideologies. In this case, the distinction between myth (as the superstitious illusion of primitive Others) and history (as the scientific privilege of the civilised West) was harder to sustain given that both drew symbolic ammunition from the same stock of prestigious Greek mythology. If history has often been mythologised for political considerations, this was an instance where mythology was instead historicised.

As Given has further argued, the political conflict between colonialism and Greek calls for union led to an ideological dispute over the island's history and the moral(s) said to derive from its narrative. While the former presented the narrative of Cyprus as proof of 'a pedigree of subjection', the latter presented an alternative narrative that imbued Cyprus with 'a pedigree of resistance'. The rule of Cyprus throughout history by various powers and empires, British commentators sympathetic to colonialism suggested, had turned Cyprus into a place 'remarkable for its propensity not merely to suffer conquest but positively to require it'.⁵ Greek nationalists in Cyprus reacted with the argument that the subjection of Cyprus to foreign oppressive rulers throughout history had never dampened the Hellenic fervour of its inhabitants which culminated in the contemporary demands for union with Greece.

Faced with persistent demands for union from the island's majority group, articulated in the name of their historic Greek identity, the British reacted by constructing an alternative identity: the Cypriot *mélange*.⁶ The colonial view of Cypriots as comprising an amorphous mixture, with implications of

miscegenation, was in effect a denial of (any) identity, that is, of the very existence of a definable political community that could voice any political demand. The British later also expressed scepticism towards the emergent voices within the Muslim minority which, after the creation of the state of Turkey, came to identify themselves as Turks, spearheading the rise of Turkish nationalism on the island. The British attempts to deny them identity were vehemently resisted by both ethnic groups. In countering the notion of an amorphous *mixture*, the two communities asserted their identities as *pure* Greeks and *pure* Turks. Under conditions of colonial denial exacerbated by divide-and-rule policies and the opposed political goals of the two communities, Greek and Turkish nationalisms in Cyprus assumed more extremist forms, leading to a ‘dialectic of intolerance’ between the two communities.⁷

The names of Aphrodite’s birthplace—according to legend a large coastal rock near the city of Paphos—provide an illustration of the prevailing dialectic of intolerance, with its mixture of mythology, legend and history. The Greeks of Cyprus also called this rock the ‘Rock of the Romios’ (*Petra tou Romiou*), due to its legendary association with the figure of Digenis Akritas, one of the heroic guardians of the borders of Byzantium against ‘infidel attacks’. It is worth noting that while Digenis means ‘born of two races’, his mixed Byzantine–Arab ancestry has been conveniently silenced in Greek historiography. The two legendary figures, Aphrodite and Digenis, were thus joined into a single place name, just as the dominant expression of Greek identity combined ancient Greece and Byzantium within an indissoluble union known as the ‘Hellenic-Christian ideals’. Turks of Cyprus by contrast pejoratively named the same rock the ‘Rock of the Infidel’ (*gavur tashi*).

The rock signifying the birthplace of Aphrodite has featured prominently in the tourist leaflets of the (Greek Cypriot) Cyprus Tourism Organisation (CTO). Even the organisation’s web-page employs the outline of Aphrodite as background. This website gives a different twist to the tortured history of Cyprus, narrated as a story of foreign invasions:

Just as many goddesses vied for Aphrodite’s golden apple, countless conquerors coveted her island home at the crossroads of the Mediterranean [. . .] Art and archaeology in Cyprus bear witness to a long and textured past. The perfect location is still a big draw, but modern road warriors no longer need to fight to savour what it has to offer . . .⁸

Goddess of Love and Goddess of War

Now barbed wire was going up. Guard towers were being erected. Cyprus was being cut in half like Berlin, like Korea, like all other places in the world that were no longer one thing or the other.⁹

The notion of categorical ambiguity pervades the acclaimed novel *Middlesex* by Greek-American author Jeffrey Eugenides, whose protagonist muses that

'I may become the most famous hermaphrodite in history.'¹⁰ Categorical ambiguity has been abundantly employed for descriptions of Cyprus, including local representations of Cyprus as having been subjected to historical violations that turned it into a 'hermaphrodite'. The 'now' that the novel speaks of is 1974. The view of history presented by the author, though common among Greek and Greek Cypriot commentators, is but part of the story. Barbed wire and guard towers emerged in Cyprus well before 1974, as early as 1964 when the Green Line currently dividing the island was first drawn. The contested historical narratives of Cyprus that emerged after 1960, when the island became an independent state, are examined in this section. Their comparison reveals silences and denials, as one side proposes a history of symbiosis and love while the other one of conflict and war, in a space marked by categorical ambiguities.

'The fact that Cyprus has been a mixed society since 1571, and subject to long periods of colonial subjection under a number of rulers, leaves its final conceptual status as indefinite as its constitutional', wrote Peter Loizos, a social anthropologist, thirty years ago in the light of the 1974 division of the island.¹¹ Ten years earlier, another observer of Cyprus writing from a different perspective, the famous humorist-cum-travel writer, George Mikes, expressed an equally acute sense of wonder: 'First of all you have to find the answer to a few basic questions: *Who* are these people, the *dramatis personae* involved in it all? Then: *Where* are you? And: *What* is it all about?'¹²

Mikes was writing in the context of the partial division of Cyprus due to interethnic violence that erupted in December 1963 and led to the establishment of the Green Line dividing the two sides. The arrival of a UN force to guard this line soon followed. The line currently dividing Cyprus in 2006 is still known as the Green Line and the UN have never left. These two commentators were writing in different phases of the Cyprus Problem, one of the longest-running political conflicts on the UN agenda. The Cyprus Problem in effect became synonymous with the island, rendering Cyprus notorious as an intractable conflict. Mikes expressed this, as early as 1965, in his own style: 'The Cypriots know they cannot become a World Power; but they have succeeded in becoming a World Nuisance, which is almost as good.'¹³

Mikes's first question '*Who?*' was about identity and agency. (Are the people Greeks and Turks, or Cypriots, or also rather British in fact?) His second question '*Where?*' was about location and placement. (Is Cyprus in Europe, in the Middle East or in its own league?) His third question '*What?*' referred to politics. (Is it simply impossible for the people there to live together, or is it all the fault of foreign powers?) Loizos's remark, as well as the questions posed by Mikes, indicates a strong sense of categorical ambiguity. 'They [the Cypriots] know they are neither fish nor fowl', added Mikes,¹⁴ a phrase that would nowadays remind one of Mary Douglas's groundbreaking discussion on liminality's association with danger.¹⁵ This was clearly reflected in the island's notorious reputation as *A Place of Arms*, to use the title of a well-known book on Cyprus.¹⁶ What about the *place* of Cyprus on the anthropological and IR agenda? One observer has suggested

that Cyprus's position was clearly marginal, 'because it cannot easily be fitted into the regional categories (Europe, Near/Middle East) of anthropology and international relations alike'.¹⁷

Both Loizos and Mikes were moved to write about the violence of enforced displacement. The 1974 displacement of the Greek Cypriots with whom Loizos had earlier conducted his fieldwork moved him to write his evocative monograph on the experience of becoming a refugee, vividly describing the sense of loss, upheaval and destitution it entailed.¹⁸ Mikes, who was writing around 1964, observed the recently displaced Turkish Cypriots living in tents and was moved by their misery, an experience that haunted him through the eyes of an impoverished Turkish Cypriot boy.

Mikes wrote a few years after the 1960 Independence of Cyprus. Yet independent Cyprus emerged as a *Reluctant Republic*,¹⁹ according to a fitting title of a book on that period, as this compromise outcome satisfied neither community's goal. Consequently, the two communities soon reverted to their goals of union and partition. Mikes visited Cyprus after the events of Christmas 1963 when interethnic violence broke out, Turkish Cypriots moved into armed enclaves and the UN first arrived on the island. This is how Mikes describes what he saw:

... and they all live in tents in indescribable filth, without proper sanitation, without proper food ... The Turks can actually see their former dwellings from here but the Greeks will not let them go back to their looted and half-destroyed villages ...²⁰

Beyond the interethnic conflict, the 1960s was a period of intraethnic violence leading to the 1974 coup. This was a struggle within the Greek Cypriot community, between those who gradually came to support the island's independence and a smaller group of extremists who insisted that this amounted to a betrayal of the 'sacred cause of Union with Greece'. One of the arguments employed by the extreme right-wing nationalists supporting union was that they were seeking to rectify the 'hermaphrodite' state of affairs brought about by the independent, jointly administered state of 1960. In their view, this unnatural state of affairs distorted the island's Hellenic history whose natural conclusion could only be union with Greece.²¹ The Turkish military offensive following the 1974 coup, and the subsequent displacements, divided the island into two ethnically homogeneous zones. Greek Cypriots now suffered most in terms of casualties, social upheaval and dislocation, and were placed in a situation identical to that described by Mikes in 1965. But this time, it was Greek Cypriots who could see their looted homes across the Green Line, unable to return.

The upheavals of 1974 left the conceptual and constitutional status of Cyprus once again open. The Republic of Cyprus, totally controlled by Greek Cypriots, stood as the island's only internationally recognised state, while the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) did not gain international recognition. The failure of the jointly negotiated, UN-brokered plan for a federal solution known as the Annan Plan, which was accepted by Turkish Cypriots but rejected by Greek Cypriots during 2004, led to

accession to the EU of the Republic of Cyprus alone, meaning only the southern Greek Cypriot side, with Turkish Cypriots remaining outside.

The long-lasting division across the landscape of Cyprus resulted in divided official narratives of its past. The presence of a 'Dead Zone', as the Green Line is also known, disallowed the possibility of any official common ground, physical, political or historical. After 1974, a new school of historiography emerged among Greek Cypriots, proposing a narrative of 'peaceful coexistence' whereby the two major communities were said to have coexisted harmoniously for centuries until foreign interferences, and, in particular, 'the 1974 barbaric invasion of Attila' (as the Turkish military offensive has been called in official and popular Greek Cypriot discourse), brought this to an end. By contrast, the Turkish Cypriot official view of history was one of 'suffering and animosity', focusing particularly on the period between 1963 and 1974. This narrative proposed that the past was characterised by systematic inhuman persecution of Turkish Cypriots, and a 'Museum of Barbarism' (situated in northern Nicosia) was created to exemplify this. This narrative entailed an erasure of periods when the two communities lived together without violent conflict. The Turkish military offensive of July 1974 was officially presented by Turkish Cypriots as the 'Happy Peace Operation', a term that erased the traumatic Greek Cypriot experience of 1974. The Greek Cypriot narrative necessitated a different kind of erasure. For the narrative of past 'peaceful coexistence' to be persuasive, the social forgetting of periods of intense conflict, especially the tumultuous 1960s, was necessary. The starkest example of this forgetting and denial is the reported statement by Tassos Papadopoulos, the current (Greek Cypriot) President, made during a newspaper interview: 'From 1963 to 1974 how many Turkish Cypriots were killed? The answer is none.'²²

Both history and memory, when analysed in this manner, reveal more about the future than the past. The Turkish Cypriot official narrative legitimated the aim of division, by claiming that the past (of 'suffering and animosity') *proves* that the two communities cannot live together and should remain apart. Similarly, the Greek Cypriot official narrative legitimated the aim of reunification, since a past of 'peaceful coexistence' *proves* that the two communities can live together in a joint future state.²³

The CTO website, in keeping with the Greek Cypriot statist narrative, asserts: 'As you travel around Cyprus you will see how it is touched by the spirit of Aphrodite—a spirit of gentleness, beauty and love.'²⁴ Understandably for a tourism organisation, its rhetoric is keen to evade any mention of political conflict or the presence of a formidable ceasefire line guarded by five armies (Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot, Greek, Turkish and UN). But Aphrodite, even if nowadays commonly remembered as the Goddess of Beauty and Love, was married to the ugliest of gods (Hephaestus), while the God of War (Ares) was one of her lovers. Aphrodite's birth is presented as follows by the CTO: 'Aphrodite, Goddess of Beauty and Love emerged from the gentle jade-coloured sea foam at Petra tou Romiou . . .'²⁵ This omits the earlier part of this version of the myth which described the seminal act of violence her birth entailed, as Greek Cypriots

also omit from the historical record the occurrence of interethnic violence. According to Hesiod's *Theogony*, she was born of the castration of Uranus by his son Cronus, and when the father's genitals fell into the sea they fertilised it thus creating Aphrodite. The CTO's account of Aphrodite's birth also ignores other versions, such as the Homeric one in the *Iliad*, according to which she was born of Zeus and Dione, as well as other mythological birthplaces of Aphrodite such as Kythera.²⁶

Aphrodite was never just the Goddess of Love, even if this view nowadays predominates in the Greek and western imaginary. She was also revered as a fierce Goddess of War, known for example as *Enoplos* (Arms-bearing). This was a characteristic shared among the personas of the goddess and manifested in their earlier Middle Eastern variants of Astarte.²⁷ From this more complex perspective, she can indeed represent both the opposed narratives officially constructed by the two sides in Cyprus, one based on animosity, the other on harmonious coexistence. The children she bore by Ares could also symbolise these two narratives: *Phobos* (Fear) and *Deimos* (Panic) could stand for the Turkish Cypriot variant, and *Harmonia* (Harmony) for the Greek Cypriot version. Nor was she always a *female* goddess as she is nowadays remembered. Her statue as Bearded Aphrodite is one, among others, of her hermaphrodite representations.²⁸

Turkish Cypriots have been more circumspect in their use of Aphrodite, as it could provide support to the view that Cyprus is a Greek island. They have preferred a different personification of the goddess by presenting Cyprus on their tourism posters and souvenir trays as 'The Island of Venus'. This has the advantage of imbuing Cyprus with a prestigious western heritage, but with a Roman name that avoids Greek associations. The only Turkish Cypriot website I have found currently featuring Aphrodite presents the myth of her violent birth in full. It features a more anthropological discussion regarding fertility rituals, goddesses and the functions of myth. Aphrodite, it is explained, was a transformation of Astarte, an eastern goddess carried over to Cyprus from the Phoenicians as Herodotus attested,²⁹ in contrast to the Greek Cypriot imaginary which regards Aphrodite as coming to Cyprus with the Greeks from the West.

The myth of Aphrodite emerging from the sunny blue Mediterranean sea along the coast of Paphos, as used by Greek Cypriots, evokes the three 'S's that have become the mantra of tourism marketing: Sun, Sand and Sea. As the CTO's web-page recounts: 'Aphrodite herself was a child of the waves, gracefully emerging from the swirling sea foam so long ago. Today there is swimming, sailing, scuba-diving, cruising and of course the ever-popular sport of seaside sun worshipping.'³⁰ Aphrodite appears on the CTO's web-page in a sexier version of the *Aphrodite Soloi* statue on which the CTO's image is based, with pronounced breasts and hips. Her 'seductive qualities' as the Goddess of Love add a touch of romance, as it teases northern European fantasies of the Mediterranean as the land of 'Latin Lovers', and of holidays as opportunities for sex or romance which the global tourism industry capitalises upon. After all, as everyone knows, the secret fourth 'S' in tourism marketing is Sex.

Goddess of Love and Goddess of Sex

'[You broke] Aphrodite, the Goddess of Sex!' shouts the distraught pimp, upon seeing the pieces of the statuette of Aphrodite outside his cabaret entrance, in a scene from the Greek Cypriot film *Kalabush*, the first film to address migration and prostitution in Cyprus.³¹ 'Cabarets' on both sides of Cyprus are fronts for its flourishing prostitution industry, where semi-naked '*artistes*' dance for the benefit of the customer to choose from. Miro, the Bulgarian male illegal worker, is thrown out of the cabaret after he tries to carry away Tatiana, the Russian '*artiste*' whom he loves, unable to bear the way she is treated. After being beaten up and thrown out by the pimp and his bullies, he manages to stand up and angrily smashes the statuette of Aphrodite decorating the cabaret's entrance. In screenings of the film, the cry of the distraught rough pimp sparked much audience mirth due to his naughty association of Aphrodite with sex, for as *everyone* knows she is really the Goddess of Love. This scene, however, works on two levels, and the joke here is more on the audience by the film-makers, since the rough pimp could in fact be more in the know than the audience imagines.

The currently widespread image of Aphrodite as the Goddess of Love is a retrospective domestication of her ancient representations, whether as a fearful symbol of untamed sexuality that could wreak social havoc (as exemplified in her role in the Iliad by igniting a long war), or as the patron of (sacred) prostitution.³² In antiquity, Cyprus's reputation for prostitution was noted by many writers, a reputation that it lately seems to be regaining, despite fervent denials. Whether talking of Cyprus as the island of Venus or of Aphrodite, both sides are joined in silent collusion over forms of exploitation linked to gender. As the Cyprus Problem has monopolised attention, a host of other social problems have been brushed aside, deemed unworthy of attention next to the paramount National Issue.

Both sides constantly accuse each other of numerous violations of *their* own human rights related to the Cyprus Problem, while discussion of human rights abuses within each side are avoided, lest they themselves be accused of violating human rights. On the Greek Cypriot side, a vibrant prostitution industry has attracted large numbers of women from Thailand and the Philippines, officially—rather euphemistically—classified as *artistes* working in the cabarets. Women from the Philippines continue to arrive in Cyprus for work now in the domestic sphere as 'domestic helpers' (*oikiakes voithoi*)—a further euphemism which denies their status as workers who might demand proper workers' rights. *Philippineza* (Filipina) has turned into a generic name for 'domestic helper', even if such groups include women from other countries, such as Sri Lanka and India. During the 1990s, with the influx of women from the ex-Soviet Union and Eastern Europe for work in the cabaret industry, replacing the Filipina and Thai women, *Rossida* (Russian woman) became a generic name for prostitute.³³ On the Turkish Cypriot side, the numbers are smaller, due to less affluence, but the degree of exploitation and abuse is as serious. There they are known as *Natashas* (as they also came

to be called in other countries), with the euphemism *danseuse* employed in their case.³⁴

Despite the extent of human rights abuses of such women, highlighted in a well-documented report by the (Greek Cypriot) Ombudswoman among others,³⁵ the issue has not received adequate attention. When pressed, the (Greek Cypriot) Minister of Justice, Doros Theodorou, claimed that in the countries of Eastern Europe ‘the dream of 45 per cent of the women is to become prostitutes’.³⁶ A book on the sex industry of Cyprus, Greece and Turkey includes the following except from an interview with a Greek Cypriot immigration police officer:

It is a change of product. It is a change of commodity. It is a change in people’s desires. The women from the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries possess bodily skills: long legs, they are tall and beautiful and can work in top cabarets. Of course the prices vary too! If you arrive from Africa or Asia your price is much lower than if you are from Central Europe or Eastern Europe. The women from Asia are like small monkeys with flat faces.³⁷

That such remarks are casually made by officials is indicative of a public space where discussion of social issues such as prostitution, migration, gender and racism has been virtually absent due to the dominance of the Cyprus Problem in both sides’ public domains.³⁸ Interestingly, the accusation of illicit sex was levied upon bi-communal peace activists by the then leader of Turkish Cypriots, Rauf Denktash, advocating the partition of Cyprus. When prompted by a journalist to explain his clampdown on bi-communal meetings where people striving for reunification sought to create an alternative social space to discuss the Cyprus Problem, outside the rigidly divided antagonistic official channels, his reason for prohibiting such meetings was: ‘I’ve heard the only thing people seem to do at these meetings is have sex.’³⁹ Commentators in favour of political reunification have as casually used a discourse of genetics to support the view that Cyprus should be reunified. Michalakis Zampelas, the Greek Cypriot mayor of Nicosia, in a comment later echoed by a Turkish Cypriot commentator also supporting reunification, claimed that Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots are of the same genetic stock, different from Greeks and Turks, according to DNA research.⁴⁰

The dilemma faced by a group of bi-communal women peace activists, of whether to only focus on the Cyprus Problem or include other problems related to gender, like those of women working in the domestic sphere and the prostitution industry, is vividly described in Cynthia Cockburn’s book *The Line: Women, Partition and the Gender Order in Cyprus*. The author also discusses the lives of migrant women employed in the domestic sphere and the sex industry, noting how the 2003 border opening provided an opportunity for some Greek Cypriot men to take advantage of the cheaper cabarets on the other side.⁴¹ Amberin Zaman, who explored this further, recounts:

Lured by lower prices and the privacy of the North, some have become regulars at bordellos fronting as nightclubs on the outskirts of Nicosia. ‘They are dying for Turkish girls’ said Ali ‘Crazy’ Kemal, who runs the Crazy Girl. ‘The Greek

Cypriots are generous and perfect gentleman', added Lisa, a Russian, her hair dyed black to make her look Turkish.⁴²

A liminal goddess

One line of argument regarding Aphrodite suggests that there never was just one but several versions of the goddess, with complexity always a primary feature of her persona(s).⁴³ Another argument presents Aphrodite as the most liminal goddess, mediating between day and night, male and female, love and war, East and West.⁴⁴ This could be an apt description of the geopolitical predicaments of Cyprus, variously treated as uncomfortably situated between Greece and Turkey, Asia and Europe, Christianity and Islam, neither of one nor the other, instead problematising any such binary oppositions. It has been argued, for example, that Asia could derive its name from Alasia, one of the ancient names of Cyprus, and that archaeologists of the twentieth century keen to clearly demarcate West from East regarded Cyprus as a buffer in between.⁴⁵ Today, Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus divided by the UN Buffer Zone, remains part inside and part outside the European Union, preventing the EU from precisely delimiting its easternmost border.

Federation has long been regarded as the only realistic solution to the Cyprus Problem—a constitutional arrangement that allows for both unity and separation. Federation has been proposed as an alternative political arrangement to the centralised 'nation-state' whose drawbacks in terms of majoritarian oppression of minorities have long been recognised. The notion 'nation-state' is in itself a dangerous fiction since no state comprises just one nation. Positing a deeply problematic association of one state with one nation, it implies ethnic homogeneity, signifying the exclusion of long-established ethnic minorities and current migrant populations alike.

The conjoinment 'nation-state' is problematic in another sense. 'Nation-state' is one side of the association of a nation with certain cultural attributes, the other being the notion that nations (just like individuals) own or possess certain unique cultural attributes. The latter notion, based on the western concept of possessive individualism,⁴⁶ gives rise to intense debates such as 'is the coffee Greek or Turkish?' The *Delight* often served with the coffee has been as disputed within this ideology of the ownership of culture and the culture of ownership, with transnational migration flows adding another ironic twist. The world record that Greek Cypriots have been trying to break with their *Cyprus Delight* was previously held by a Turk.⁴⁷ So was the previous record for the largest doner kebab, as was revealed during the attempt made on the Greek Cypriot side to break the record. The word *doner* derives from Turkish, and the previous record was held by a migrant Turk who accomplished this in Zurich.⁴⁸ The current Turkish Delight record-holder too is a migrant from Turkey (living in Australia), whose company is, pre-emptively perhaps, called 'Real Turkish Delight (Australia)'.⁴⁹ Similarly, the man who broke the doner kebab record on the Greek Cypriot side is a migrant from Lebanon now settled in Cyprus.

A sign in Nicosia provided another illustration of the problem arising from the (national) ownership of culture, and the difficulties retrospectively created by nationalism in a socio-historic space where cultural syncretism was common. Until recently, the sign stood outside the *hammam* (bath), situated on the Greek Cypriot side of Nicosia. It was written in English and Greek as ‘Turkish Bath—*Elliniko Loutro* (Greek Bath)’.

‘History and hedonism are comfortably intertwined’ in Cyprus, where food mixes ‘Western ingredients with Eastern zest’, boasts the CTO’s web-page.⁵⁰ Orientalism, it appears, can now demand its financial payback from the tourism industry of Cyprus. The traditional Cyprus trays (made in China from bamboo; and on which tourists often get their coffee/delight served) are sold to the predominantly western tourists in souvenir shops that also sell traditional lace (imported from China), framed papyri (imported from Egypt) and replicas of ancient amphorae (imported from Greece).

‘Don’t ever order “Turkish coffee”. After the gory fraternal strife there is only Greek coffee in the South (“kaffé ellinikó”’), a contemporary German tourist guide to Cyprus solemnly warns its readers.⁵¹ In Germany, where many immigrants from Greece and Turkey live, the coffee issue was profitably resolved by a local businessman who sold the same coffee in two different packages, one presenting it as Greek coffee the other as Turkish.⁵² The short film *Espresso*,⁵³ directed by two Greek Cypriots, gently pokes fun at the Turkish/Greek coffee issue in a globalising world. Angelos (the young Greek Cypriot male protagonist) and Ferrah (a young Turkish Cypriot woman) meet in the Dead Zone during a bi-communal event (before the 2003 border opening). They furtively make it to the south to spend some free time together. Having arrived in a café they can finally enjoy each other’s company yet their fragile friendship risks coming to an abrupt end as soon as they try to order coffee. Tension builds as they debate whether to call it Greek or Turkish coffee. Finally they compromise on two ‘Cyprus coffees’. Angelos orders in Greek but the waitress does not understand Greek (she is a migrant from Eastern Europe), so he has to repeat his order for two Cyprus coffees in English. ‘I am sorry, we serve only espresso and cappuccino’, she replies.

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Notes

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² Quoted in Michael Given, ‘Corrupting Aphrodite: Colonialist Interpretations of the Cyprian Goddess’, in Diane Bolger and Nancy Serwint (eds), *Engendering Aphrodite: Women and Society in Ancient Cyprus*, Boston, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research 7, 2002, p 423.

³ Given, ‘Corrupting Aphrodite’, p 422.

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- ⁵ Given, 'Symbols', p 6.
- ⁶ Michael Given, 'Star of the Parthenon, Cypriot Melange: Education and Representation in Colonial Cyprus', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 7(1), 1997, pp 59–82.
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- ¹⁰ Eugenides, *Middlesex*, p 19.
- ¹¹ Peter Loizos, 'Notes on Future Anthropological Research in Cyprus', in Marion Dimen and Ernestine Friedl (eds), *Regional Variation in Modern Greece and Cyprus: Towards a Perspective on the Ethnography of Greece*, New York: Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences 268, 1976, p 360.
- ¹² George Mikes, *Eureka! Rummaging in Greece*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1965, p 100.
- ¹³ Mikes, *Rummaging*, p 107.
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- ¹⁵ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concept of Pollution and Taboo*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.
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- ¹⁸ Peter Loizos, *The Heart Grown Bitter: A Chronicle of Cypriot War Refugees*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- ¹⁹ Stephen Xydis, *Cyprus: Reluctant Republic*, Hague: Mouton, 1973.
- ²⁰ Mikes, *Rummaging*, pp 117–118.
- ²¹ Zenon Stavrinides, *The Cyprus Conflict: National Identity and Statehood*, Nicosia: no publisher, 1975, p 67.
- ²² Reported in 'Exclusive Interview: We Said No Because We Felt Insecure', *Khaleej Times*, 4 September 2004, <http://www.khaleejtimes.com/Displayarticle.asp?section=exclusiveinterview&xfile=data/exclusiveinterview/2004/september/exclusiveinterview_september2.xml> (last accessed 25 November 2005). The most detailed account of interethnic killings during the 1960s, reporting the numbers of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots killed, is Richard Patrick, *Political Geography and the Cyprus Conflict: 1963–1971*, Department of Geography Publications Series No. 4, Ontario: University of Waterloo, 1976.
- ²³ On memory, forgetting and historiography in the two sides of Cyprus see Yiannis Papadakis, *Echoes from the Dead Zone: Across the Cyprus Divide*, London: I B Tauris, 2005.
- ²⁴ <<http://www.visitcyprus.org.cy/ctoweb/ctowebwebsite.nsf/Aphrodite/03CAA61F3ECF671BC2256A380044113D>> (last accessed 25 November 2005).
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- ²⁷ Tripp, *Dictionary*, p 60.
- ²⁸ Bonnie Maclachlan, 'The Ungendering of Aphrodite', in Bolger and Serwint, *Engendering Aphrodite*, pp 365–378; Demetrios Michaelides, 'A Decorated Mirror from Nea Paphos', in Bolger and Serwint, *Engendering Aphrodite*, pp 351–363.
- ²⁹ <<http://www.cypusive.com/default.asp?CID=213>> (last accessed 25 November 2005).
- ³⁰ <<http://www.visitcyprus.org.cy/ctoweb/ctowebwebsite.nsf/dc305e48e829c1d8c2256a5e0040f144/230fd5beafecdfa4c2256ab00034321b>> (last accessed 25 November 2005).
- ³¹ *Kalabush* (Camera Stylo Recording Arts Productions and Hyperion Productions), 2003, directed by Adonis Florides and Theodoros Nicolaides, script by Adonis Florides.
- ³² Stephanie Lynn Budin, 'Creating a Goddess of Sex', in Bolger and Serwint, *Engendering Aphrodite*, pp 315–324. A reference to prostitution in ancient Cyprus citing Herodotus is also made on the CTO's web-page <<http://www.visitcyprus.org.cy/ctoweb/ctowebwebsite.nsf/Aphrodite/03CAA61F3ECF671BC-2256A380044113D>> (last accessed 25 November 2005).
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- ³⁷ Agathangelou, *The Global Political Economy of Sex*, p 63
- ³⁸ Cynthia Cockburn, *The Line: Women, Partition and the Gender Order in Cyprus*, London and New York: Zed Books, 2004, p 104.
- ³⁹ Helena Smith, 'Northern Cypriots Turn Against Turkey', *Guardian* (London), 25 September 2001, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4263719,00.html>> (last accessed 25 November 2005).
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- ⁴¹ Cockburn, *The Line*, p 137.
- ⁴² Amberin Zaman, 'Cypriots are Reunited over the Card Table', *Telegraph*, 26 February 2005, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/02/26/wcyprus26.xml>> (last accessed 25 November 2005).
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- ⁴⁶ Richard Handler, *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988, pp 40–43.
- ⁴⁷ Stefanos Evripidou, 'Giant Loukoumi Beats the World Record', *Cyprus Mail* (Nicosia), 19 October 2004, p 3.
- ⁴⁸ Noah Haglund, 'Don't Chicken Out: Go See the Giant Kebab', *Sunday Mail* (Nicosia), 10–16 June 2001, p 8 (7 days section).
- ⁴⁹ <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/local/content_pages/eng_record.asp?recordid=49112> (last accessed 25 November 2005).
- ⁵⁰ <<http://www.visitcyprus.org.cy/ctoweb/ctoweb.nsf/WhyCyprus/9F78BFC3FC3E0A38C2256A-2B003245C0>> (last accessed 25 November 2005).
- ⁵¹ Ralph-Raymond Braun, *Zypern*, 2nd edn, Erlangen: Michael Mueller Verlag, 2005, p 100f. I thank Ramona Lenz for bringing this to my attention.
- ⁵² I would like to thank Adonis Florides for bringing this to my attention and showing me the two coffee packets.
- ⁵³ *Espresso* (Camera Stylo Recording Arts Productions, 1998) was written and directed by Theodoros Nicolaides and Adonis Florides.