

THE EUROPEAN DILEMMA: INSTITUTIONAL PATTERNS AND THE POLITICS OF ‘RACIAL’ DISCRIMINATION

Work Package 2: Discriminated Voices - Cyprus Report

By Nicos Trimikliniotis¹

¹ The research conducted by Nicos Trimikliniotis, Eleftheria Vouti and Panayiotis Pantelides. The Report was written by Nicos Trimikliniotis. I would like to thank the research team, especially to Eleftheria for her efforts, as well as Kyproula Kyprianou for the transcribing. I would like to give a special thank you to Corina Demetriou for her critical proof reading.

1. Introduction

Since 1974 with the de facto division of Cyprus,² the prime recipients of racial abuse violence and discrimination, in other words the victims of racism are what can be referred to as ‘subaltern migrants’ (i.e. migrant workers from south east Asia, the middle east and eastern Europe). Discrimination is also faced by the few hundred Greek-Cypriot in the Turkish army occupied territories in the north, as well as Turkish-Cypriots residing in the Republic-controlled region, which is Greek-Cypriot dominated (see Kyle 1997, ECRI 2001). The Cyprus context, which has seen a long drawn ‘ethnic/national conflict’ continuing since the 1950s, has meant that the issue of racial discrimination remained under-researched. It is self-evident that underlying the historical so-called ‘ethnic conflict’ lies a politics of ethno-racial segregation and it is experienced in the ‘everyday life’ individuals of the two communities. Manifestations of racial discrimination vary and have been experienced by groups in society in the different shapes and forms it takes.

Labour migration to Cyprus is a relatively recent phenomenon since the policy decision for granting temporary work permits was initiated in the early 1990s. Migrant workers during the last decade so that the estimated total of about 70,000 represents 9.1% of the total population and 15.6% of the potential working population. The main areas of employment of migrant workers are: domestic workers, service industry (tourism, trade), manufacturing industry, agriculture and construction. A significant proportion of the total number of migrant workers, 10,000-15,000 are undocumented.

The policy assumption for the employment of migrant workers formulated in 1990s was that their stay was to be short-term, temporary and restricted to specific sectors, the developments of the past decade changed this scenario. Therefore a number of institutional devices have been designed with these goals in mind have resulted, by default or otherwise, in the following: (a) work permits takes place are granted on the condition that migrant workers be attached to specific employer without the freedom to change jobs unless the original employer gives consent. (b) Work permits are granted on an annual basis and with a maximum ceiling of six years in order to exclude the possibility of granting citizenship to migrant workers, structurally producing and reproducing a framework of precariousness and exclusion. (c) Evidence of non-compliance by employers is abundant, whilst few initiatives have taken place to unionise migrant workers.

The process of accession to the EU has allegedly made Cyprus an attractive destination for migrants and asylum-seekers and the response of policy-makers was keenly to transform themselves to ‘border-guards of Europe’³. Cyprus is a prime instance of a southern European country which “functions as the ‘entrance hall to the EU, and often serve as a ‘waiting room’ for many migrants who have the Northern European countries as a destination” (Anthias and Lazaridis 1999: 3). New migration has

² Following a coup by the Athens junta and the fascistic EOKA-B, which closely followed the Turkish invasion and occupation of some 34% of the Republic territory.

³ During his address to the EU summit in Thessalonica, the President of Cyprus referred to the experience of Cyprus dealing with migrants and asylum-seekers and offered to share ‘expertise’ with the Community.

the conditions for the ‘racialisation of migrant workers’ (Trimikliniotis 1999) and the patterns of discrimination and ill treatment, particularly of migrants is well documented. The executive summary of the second ECRI report (2001) is illuminating:

Problems of racism, xenophobia and discrimination persist, however, and immigrants appear to be in a particularly vulnerable position in this respect. The rights of immigrant workers, notably domestic employees, are often not respected and the remedies available in these cases are not always effective.

Discrimination occurs in the labour market, education, housing, media, it is an everyday experience for most migrant workers, as well other marginalized/discriminated groups⁴. The process of Europeanisation is crucial as Cyprus laws are harmonized and attitudes appear to be ‘Europeanised’ accordingly⁵, paving the way for a pan-European debate on migration, racism, discrimination and xenophobia. The immigration model itself, which is primarily based the employment of migrant workers on a short-term, temporary and restricted-to-specific-sectors basis, is likely to remain essentially in place. The changes planned in harmonization with the EU aquis communautaire are to open up immigration and employment to European citizens; the restrictive approach is likely to continue when it comes to (non-European) ‘third country nationals’⁶. Therefore, we could safely assume that the structural and institutional aspects as to the status of the bulk of migrant workers are likely to remain ‘third country nationals’.

The accession process has set in motion wider transformation processes to both state and society, and have generated the emergence of a new climate in macro- as well as micro-politics. Together with accession there has been a parallel UN initiative to coincide with the Copenhagen summit in the form of a comprehensive plan for the resolution of the Cyprus problem, on the basis of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation which has so far not led to a settlement due to its outright rejection by the Turkish-Cypriot side⁷. In spite of the stalemate following the collapse of that initiative the Annan plan remains on the negotiating table and it has generated some results by exerting pressure on the Turkish-Cypriot authorities to allow Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots to cross over the divide and meet.⁸ Nevertheless, the recent climate of optimism, and the new potential for lasting peace, security and reconciliation between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, instead of having a positive effect on attitudes towards migrants, it has reinforced the insecurity felt by migrant workers

⁴ Various forms of discrimination are prevalent in spite of the international conventions and legislations available (see Trimikliniotis 2003)

⁵ For a discussion on this contradictory process see Trimikliniotis (1999 and 2001c).

⁶ See Nicos Trimikliniotis and Panayiotis Pantelides *Mapping the Discriminatory Landscapes of Cyprus: Ethnic Discrimination in the Labour Market and Education* (Work package 1) for more details on the employment and immigration model of Cyprus and how this *racialises* migrant workers.

⁷ Held on the 12-13 December 2002. The plan contains a new constitution that, if implemented, will dramatically transform the current structure of government and constitutional provisions.

⁸ Moreover, the decision of the authorities of the unrecognised regime, in northern Cyprus, to partially lift the ban on freedom of movement, allowing masses of Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots to cross over, irrespective of the motives of the regime, has given an additional impetus to the impression that that the de facto division of the island may soon be over, even though the current state of limbo is certainly not a solution to the problem, it does open up possibilities for joint action by Cypriots, Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriots that can demolish the myth that wants peaceful coexistence an impossibility (see Trimikliniotis 2003, forthcoming).

with the vague suggestion that they may no longer be required as they can be replaced by Turkish-Cypriots.⁹

The lifting of some of the restrictions on movement by the Turkish-Cypriot authorities, which resulted in thousands of Turkish-Cypriots crossing over into the territory controlled by the Republic, may have symbolically improved the situation for the Turkish-Cypriots residing in the Republic-controlled area. The police authorities may no longer be able or interested in monitoring so closely the lives of Turkish Cypriots living in the south. In spite of the high-level decision makers' commitment to improving the position of all Turkish-Cypriots¹⁰, mistrust, discrimination and unfriendly treatment by the authorities at least at local level has not altered dramatically, if at all¹¹. In spite of this change in the mood¹², there is a resilience of the irredentism, nationalism and racism and xenophobia, which have now mutated into new shapes and forms. Traditional irredentism has mutated into fragmented new forms, such as a kind of 'versace nationalism' or an "irredentism lite", to borrow a term (Constantinou 2003) to be added along the old traditionally dominant versions of majoritarian nationalisms, 'enosist'¹³ and *partitionist*¹⁴ irredentisms, all mixed, stirred and shaken with a new all-encompassing Euro-ideology (see Argyrou 1993, Trimikliniotis 2001, Constantinou 2003). Racism and xenophobia also seem to be Europeanised. At the level of ideology, the situation remains fluid, nonetheless the hard core of racism and discrimination against migrant workers remains in tact.

2. The Research Process

The research for this work package involved six focus groups and ten interviews from three towns in the south, the Republic-controlled area (see Appendix for the schedule of focus groups and interviews). Four out of the six focus groups were conducted in Nicosia (or Lefkosia), which is the capital and the largest town of the island. Group 1 ('Non-European' Highly Educated), Group 2 ('Non-European' Less Highly Educated), Group 3 ('European' Less Highly Educated) and Group 4 (Youth groups). The largest concentration of immigrants is within the inner or old Nicosia, inside

⁹ Statement by the then Labour Minister Mr. Moushoutas.

¹⁰ The new Centre-Left coalition Government, elected last January is keen to promote a new image and approach towards Turkish-Cypriots. Also, a number of measures have been proposed to assist Turkish-Cypriots in the north.

¹¹ This was overwhelmingly the case from what the Turkish-Cypriots in the focus group reported. A mere visit at the district court is sufficiently convincing to sense the predominant attitudes: During a visit by the researcher to the Nicosia court, which has been since the partial lifting on movement restrictions by the regime now busy with Turkish-Cypriot applications and affidavits to obtain Cypriot passports, the civil servant, ignoring all the Turkish-Cypriots in front of her sighed: "at last a Greek I can talk to..." One local government employee has reported to the researcher that at the lowest level there is strong resistance to any change of attitudes towards Turkish-Cypriots for instance Greek-Cypriot public servants objected to Turkish-Cypriots using the toilets.

¹² One can easily sense the change of mood and attitude when the traditional nationalistic Right has now officially adopted rapprochement with the Turkish-Cypriots, competing with the Left and centre on which party is best suited to treat the Turkish-Cypriots.

¹³ 'Enosis' means union with Greece, which was the dominant Greek-Cypriot nationalistic project prior to independence. Enosis was pursued even after independence, but was gradually abandoned by the Greek-Cypriot leadership, and there was a definite rupture in pursuing enosis in 1967, when the junta came to power in Athens.

¹⁴ Partition, or *taksim* in Turkish, was the dominant Turkish-Cypriot nationalistic project aiming to divide Cyprus between Greece and Turkey.

Venetian walls of the historical centre, around the school and church of *Faneromeni*. However, other migrant communities are also scattered around the city and there are other ‘pockets’ of high migrant communities. Every Sunday and during the evenings, many migrants ‘hang-out’ in the central Eleftheria Square and the central pedestrianised streets, as well as the municipal park next to the central hospital, something that has caused ‘annoyance’ to some Cypriots, who find migrants to be ‘too visible’ and therefore uncomfortable with “creating yet another minority in free Cyprus, totally alien from religious and cultural traditions”¹⁵, a prospect dreaded by the then education minister.

Focus Group 5 was conducted in the small town of Paphos, located some 200 km from the capital, which has a high concentration of migrants, particularly Pontians in two areas of Kato Paphos and Mouttalos. Recently Paphos has attracted media attention due to small-scale riots and some racial violence incidents involving Pontian and Cypriot youths with local Police. The high concentration of migrants in poorer inner city sections is depicted as ghettos in Paphos causing resentment among the locals. Pontians in particular are regularly blamed in the media, for the rise of crime rate and for not “respecting” the local customs and ethos¹⁶. Paphos town is the capital of a large mountainous region, traditionally with an important agricultural sector and recently a rapid tourist development. Among Cypriots it is considered to be ‘less developed’ and ‘less cultured’ with many jokes emerging about Paphians, typically depicted as ‘backward’¹⁷, stupid, naïve and untrustworthy¹⁸ and are subjected to regional/social prejudice Paphos is stereotyped as the epitome of ‘backwardness’¹⁹. Despite prejudices against Paphos and Paphians, it is often the case that in a region distant from the centre or capital that the local administration, police and local attitudes towards migrants may differ from those in the centre.

One focus group (Group 6) took place in Limassol (also known as Lemesos), which is the second largest town and the second most important financial and economic centre

¹⁵ These remarks are quoted in a small book titled “Cyprus and Aliens/Foreigners” (Κύπρος και Αλλοδαποί), which is a publication of a conference proceedings that took place in 1995, published as introductory letter by the then Minister of Education and Culture, Mrs Kleri Angelidou, congratulating the organisers for their conference.

¹⁶ See newspaper reports and featured articles in the most serious and popular newspaper *Phileleftheros* 16.1.2001, under the title “A boiling pot”, with the subtitle “the situation with the Pontians in Paphos” («Καζάνι που βράζει στην Πάφο») which is an expression describing an explosive situation out of control, a loose canon. A featured article by Akis Ethelontis, titled “Social Unrest”, describes the “social unrest caused from time to time by Pontians in Paphos” («Κοινωνική Αναταραχή»), *Phileleftheros* 16/1/2001. On another occasion, a leading commentary in the newspaper, by a well-known columnist and ex-MP, Mr. Katsambas, was titled: “The Greek-Pontians have to respect Cyprus” («Οι Ελληνοπόντιοι να σέβονται την Κύπρο») *Phileleftheros* 23.6.2001. the other newspapers follow a similar pattern; the more right-wing the more anti-migrant they become (see Trimiikliniotis 1999, 2001).

¹⁷ Argyrou (1993: 8) refers to the Cypriot saying «Παφίτην αναγιώνεις, κατσόχοιρο μερώνεις» meaning “raising a Paphian is [like trying] to domesticate a hedgehog” to Paphos and Paphians perceive as ‘backward’ and traditional by many Cypriots.

¹⁸ Legend has it that St. Paul was flogged there and he is said to have remarked «Ανήρ Πάφιος ουκ εστίν αγαθός. Ανήρ αγαθός ουκ εστίν Πάφιος» (“a Paphian cannot be good man ; good man cannot be a Paphian”).

¹⁹ One joke has the Paphian region depicted as a different country from the rest of Cyprus that it is possible to buy duty free goods upon entry, whilst another refers to a political movement in Paphos for union (ένωση) with ... the rest of Cyprus. For an anthropological approach to these perceptions and attitudes see the splendid book by Argyrou (1993).

in the island. Group 6, which is an open focus groups, consisted of Turkish-Cypriots and Rroma (Kurbet) persons, residing in the old Turkish quarter of Limassol, who are Cypriot in terms of citizenship and belongingness. Since the 1974 coup²⁰ and Turkish invasion that resulted in the de facto partition and separation of the Greek-Cypriots from the Turkish-Cypriot population²¹ the Rroma community are languely residing in the Greek Cypriot controlled south. We chose Limassol for this research because it is an important town, it has a number of migrants scattered around the town, concentrated in the central Limassol, near the Public Library²², the municipal garden (zoo) and the old Turkish quarter and it is the only town that retains a concentration of Turkish-Cypriots and Rroma population since 1974²³. Limassol with the legacy of being the town of leisure and fun has recently seen a rise of crime, and in particular organized crime. Limassolians are typically depicted as ‘criminals’, ‘rough’, ‘crafty’ and ‘cunning’, whilst women from Limassol are depicted as ‘easy’ and ‘loose’. Nicosians on the other hand are typically depicted as ‘softies’ and ‘mummy’s boys’ [what joke]. This attitude is relevant to the perceptions of migrants in Limassol who are resented for ‘ruining’ or ‘destroying’ the traditional life of Limassol. However, this is not new. A similar resentment was first directed against displaced Greek Cypriots from the north who sought refuge in the south following the Turkish invasion. Then there was resentment against the wealthy Arab community which resided in Limassol in the mid 1980s, – hence the violent rioting against them in 1987. Violence, in the form of (racial) rioting has ocured on a number of occasions. In 1998, local people together with police started beating up African asylum-seekers outside Pefkos Hotel in Limassol when they protested against their conditions of detention that received media coverage and condemnation by Amnesty International. Then in 2000, when few hundred Cypriot Rromas²⁴ or Gypsies (*Kourbet*) crossed the divide from the north to the south, there was a massive public outcry against their settlement anywhere in the south.

The particular group was chosen in order to investigate the extent to which the basis of discrimination is due to citizenship/nationality or whether ethnic background is an important factor and to find out if apparent patterns of discrimination²⁵ are similar or related in any way to those faced by migrants. The hypothesis here is that the ‘other’ or the ‘outsider’ or ‘marginalized group’ may well be part of the so-called ‘indigenous’ people due to historical, ideological, structural or ethnical differentiate from the rest of the population, these groups are discriminated against and despite the

²⁰ The coup was organised and performed by the Greek junta and the local para-fascist group EOKA-B (see Markides 1977; Attalides 1978; Hitchens 1984,).

²¹ For some more background information see Work package 1.

²² In 2002 some violent incidents occurred in Limassol involving Pontian and Cypriot youths with local Police near the public library with some youths being stabbed and rushed to hospitals. It is important to note that Limassol has the ‘legacy’ of having the first mass riots and violence against Arab migrants in the mid to early 1980s, when Lebanese and other better-off Arabs moved to Limassol following the invasion of Beirut by Israeli troops. It is generally acknowledged that the presence of this wealthy community in Limassol has largely contributed to the city’s rapid economic development rendering it the most important trade centre of Cyprus.

²³ Estimated between 250 to 300 persons.

²⁴ The Rroma population of Cyprus, which is said to have been over a thousand, have chosen in 1960 to be part of Turkish-Cypriot community due to their Muslim faith (Williams 2000; Kyrris 1969, 1985).

²⁵ Reports show that Turkish-Cypriots residing in the south are discriminated against (see Kyle 1997, Second ECRI Report 2001, Trimikliniotis 2003) and Greek-Cypriots living in the occupied north are denied by the occupation authorities the right guaranteed by the Third Vienna agreement.

legal prohibitions of such discrimination²⁶. The focus group in Limassol consisted entirely of men, although women had also been invited. It was aimed at bringing together men and women from the Turkish Cypriot quarter of Limassol who are either Turkish-Cypriots or Rroma so that we could compare the treatment of persons of the Turkish Cypriot community and Rroma community to that of Greek-Cypriots and migrants.

Methodologically, there was gender balance in the Nicosia focus groups; however this was not possible in the case of the focus groups in Limassol and Paphos. Due to the difficulty arranging for women to attend focus groups 5 and 6, in spite of repeated efforts, it was decided to supplement these with in depth interview by a female researcher with women in their house at their convenience²⁷. Similar problems were encountered with Turkish-Cypriot and Rroma women as with Pontian women in Paphos, with additional problems of language, educational and cultural barriers as most Rroma women are illiterate and are very reluctant to speak to strangers. The problem was similarly addressed by supplementing the focus groups information with relevant in depth interviews. In any case there were many Pontian and other migrant women in other focus groups, therefore the absence of women in the two workshops was not a major obstacle and does not leave a gap on gender issues, since these are addressed in a separate section.

A methodological issue that requires clarification is that of attempting to classify persons as 'Europeans' and 'non-Europeans' given the ambiguous and contested boundaries of Europe, an issue that manifests itself in the focus groups, even before the focus groups begin with the selection of participants in specific focus groups (see Appendix with Focus Group Schedule). The difficulty encountered was with the migrants from the former USSR, who are of Pontian-Greek origin. Some of them now have Hellenic Republic passports (i.e. EU passports) and hence qualify as 'European Union citizens'. However, many arrived with USSR (or constituent Republic) passports. They are in essence a genuine *diasporic* group that evades or transcends the categories European versus non-European; a similar observation can be made about the Kurds, whose history is that of oppression, fragmentation and scattering around and beyond Europe, situated somewhere in between or right on the border of Europe and Asia²⁸. One may notice the transient nature of their points of reference, argumentations, articulation and experiences. On some occasions when approaching people to participate in the focus groups they just told us their name and that they are from Georgia for instance. However, it turned out that they were of Pontian-Greek descent. However, we are of the view that the focus group 'core' does not change at all. A similar problem exists with Kurds who may have Syrian or Turkish roots: they may have lived in other European countries and in their discourse, structure and characteristic argumentation there is more in common with Europeans than with Latin

²⁶ The same syllogism may be extended to other grounds of discrimination such as gender, age, religion, sexual orientation etc, as recognised by the recent EU Directive 2000/78. In fact the Cyprus constitution itself prohibits any discrimination, as Art. 28 (2) prohibits "any direct or indirect discrimination against any person on the grounds of his community, race, religion, language, sex, political or other convictions, national or social descent, birth, colour, wealth, social class, or any ground whatsoever".

²⁷ On four occasions many Pontian women promised to attend the focus groups but then either cancelled it or failed to attend. The reason given was that it was impossible to attend due to their domestic duties, whilst it was easier for men.

²⁸ Rom peoples also fall in the category of *diasporic* peoples (see Fraser 1995).

Americans of instance. Similarly we would defend the selection and the process with the focus groups as the ‘core’ remained intact, even if there were some ‘non-European’ elements – a term thoroughly distasteful and exclusive – within the ‘European focus group’

3. Perceptions of the Host Country

It would be mistaken to pretend that we start with no knowledge of the situation and of how many Cypriots feel about migrant workers²⁹. As one highly educated person from focus group 1 noted from the outset:

It depends on which country you come from, your skin’s colour, your religion. These are some very important factors, which affect the way you are treated. [FG1, M1]

The more educated persons tended to speak out right from the beginning of the discussion in the focus group; similarly the youth group was frank from the outset. However, the other groups were initially reluctant to speak about discrimination and racism. Typical replies were those provided by some Turkish-Cypriots:

The same they treat us very well. We don’t have any problem. [FG 6, M1]

However, the same speaker would subsequently add:

The only problem we face is housing. We don’t have a place to stay and even if we do it is in an appalling condition. [FG6, M2]

A Romanian woman who lives for over a decade in Cyprus appears initially similarly happy in Cyprus:

From the very first moment, ever since I got off the plane I felt that I belonged here. I came here with my family and the whole environment was very friendly, I personally think that after being here for 14 years it will be very difficult for me to choose another place to live (.) [FG3, F1].

Typical initial positive responses later on. Domestic workers were equivocal in the beginning by saying “some people are really friendly but there is too much racism in Cyprus”. Soon afterwards the migrants would change tune; at some point, probably, when the migrants realised that the environment was safe enough and soon as they heard the experience of others that they could relate to.

We are foreigners here. We work a lot but we don’t get paid well. Cypriots waste time at work and get more money than we do. We have no rights...[FG 3, M2]

The situation is described by one Pontian-Greek from Paphos who spoke about the way Cypriots would befriend migrants when they are alone with them, but would quickly ‘gang up’ with other Cypriots to start blaming and victimizing migrant workers:

²⁹ As the ECRI Report notes: “...while sentiments of rejection and hostility vis-à-vis immigrants and foreigners cannot be said to be generalised in Cypriot society as a whole, there appears to be a growing tendency towards the perception of the immigrant and the foreigner as a potential threat to the Cypriot standard of living...”

They are a bit racist. When there is a Cypriot and Pontian, the Cypriot will say, “you are one of us, you are good, you are this and the other”. If two Cypriots meet they will start blaming the Pontian. Cypriots form friendships only with themselves and have solidarity between them. [FG5, M5]

Racism and the colour black

In the case of Cyprus colour is an important signifier of racism, although not exclusively or necessarily. It seems from the focus groups conducted and from other evidence that the darker people are more *likely* to be the target of racism.

That’s very common. You walk alone on the street and they would shout “mavrou”. I was in the street one day and there was a lot of traffic. Someone turned and said ‘malakismeni³⁰ mavri’ as if it was my fault [I1].

One Pakintani youth is convinced that “the darker a person is, the more he is discriminated” (FG4, M1); but to be called *mavro* seems a routine matter as darker skinned migrants state:

They call me “mavros” (.) many times (.) When I’m walking down the street, in the coffee shop (.) in their language they call me names. [FG 4, M3]

Even in more ‘multicultural’ or supposedly enlightened institutions, such as the refectories and coffee shops of colleges the term *mavro* is routine:

There is a Cypriot and an Indian guy where I work and the Cypriot calls him “re mavre” in a friendly way and the other one laughs (.) and I tell him why do you call him mavre? Why don’t you call him by his name? You call me by my name, so call him by his name; his name is Sabouh (.) And he goes to me “he’s laughing what’s your problem?” and I say to him “this is not right and he laughs cause he can do nothing about it”. [FG 4, F1]

What is also distressing, one may say more distressing, is the fact that even officials are discriminatory, as the second ECRI Report notes. This type of treatment is more upsetting for migrants:

I don’t mind if you call me ‘mavrou’ because I’m one but when you see a group of people walking and you chose me to search only because I’m *mavrou* I could be a criminal, and that’s what I don’t like about it. [I.1]

It is well-known that darker Cypriots are looked down upon, while being white, blond and blue-eyed is considered a virtue; even Cypriots who are black are treated differently:

There are many black Cypriots historically but they don’t have experience. (...) The problem here is that they are black and it is difficult for typical Cypriots to understand that someone can be Cypriot and black. I think the problem here is the colour. For being Cypriot and being Greek is not only the language and the religion. To them it also has to do with skin colour and also the hair type. It is easy

³⁰ A term of abuse widely used that literally means a person stupefied due to masturbation.

for a Cypriot to just look and say by the way his hair is that he is not Cypriot. You have to be the way they look to accept you as a Cypriot. It's not just religion and language, it's the skin colour, the hair. [I.1]

Migrant workers from south-east Asia and Africa, but also Kurdish persons who are not even darker skinned than Cypriots, in the focus groups conducted have repeated, time after time, that colour is crucial in racial abuse. "They call us mavri (μαύρη) because of our colour", complained an Indian domestic worker, at times telling them that no such word exists:

She shouted at me in Greek so that I cannot understand. Then I would say something and she said "mavri". But I don't know what that means. I asked her and she said there is no such word in Greek. I kept it in my mind and the next day I asked the teachers at the school "what's the meaning of mavri?" They said mavri means black. I didn't ask my madam because she [had] said there is no such word in Greek. [FG 2, F3]

Another domestic worker justifiably seemed very upset about the treatment she received:

Some employers don't give time to rest. They call us mavro, mavro, mavro. They forget that in 1974 Indians came to Cyprus to help them. [FG 2, F4]

Apparently, even light-skinned migrant workers such as Kurds and Greek-Pontians are told, "hey, you black" («εσύ ρε μαύρε») [FG3, F1]

It seems that migrants perceive racism in Cyprus in different ways: at times what comes out the migrant narratives resembles a kind of helplessness as Cypriot society seems impenetrable, as if they hit on a brick wall, 'Cypriots are racist'.

...You get into the bus you sit down and everybody gets up and moves to the front. And you suddenly realize that you are just alone where you are. [FG 1, F1]

To conclude that,

It's pure racism. The thing is that maybe we are trying to narrow down the definition of the word. I think it's broad. It's more broad than colour differences. [FG 1, F1]³¹

The second, rather exceptional approach, I would say, is that there is no racism or that they have never faced any racism or discrimination. One of the very few Sri Lankans who happens to be executive said he has never faced any discrimination; however, when he was challenged about whether he socialises with anyone at work he said never [FG1, M4]. Also, a young secretary of Pontian origin who had gone to Greek school was adamant,

I feel Cypriot. When I was at school they treated me very nice I was never discriminated. I have never faced any problems at school. [FG3, F5]

The dominant discourse amongst migrants is that there may be racism in Cyprus but 'Cypriots are (generally) good'; reflecting a kind of *ambivalence* or even a pathology,

³¹ This was part of interesting exchange between the African female migrant and the Pontians in the focus group, who questioned whether the reaction of others to move away from where she is sitting is racist. She was simply dismayed.

like a schizophrenia that cuts across what it means to be Cypriot: the debates over identity which have generated dichotomies such Greek versus Cypriot (and Turkish versus Cypriot take on a new spin vis-à-vis migrant workers. Some narratives attempt to rationalise, or even quantify this: “80% of Cypriots are good and 20% bad people” [FG 2, F3]. Similarly an Indian youth’s account is quantified:

I think it’s 50-50. I’m from India. There are some people that say “very nice we like Indians” it’s ok. There are those who react differently, they usually say ‘ade re mavre’ (enough of you, you blacky). [FG4, M4].

During the debate of this focus group a Pontian worker sought to interfere and he was reminded, “But your skin is white”, his reaction was to also identify as the ‘other’:

My skin is white but I’m still a foreigner here. You came from Sri Lanka I came from Russia. I haven’t experienced racism, though, to be honest.³²

The other objection of the domestic workers towards the statement by the Pontian worker was that he is a man and that he speaks Greek, both elements made his experience significantly different, if not better.

The perception of the domestic worker as a stupid servant is widespread. One Indian female domestic worker described how a Cypriot family she was working called her ‘Pombos’ (*Πόμπος*), a well-known stupid joke character, and a ridiculous character people laugh at. She was not even allowed to ask what it means as the children were instructed by their mother,

“don’t go there, they are mavri” [FG2, F1].

When asked by a female domestic worker if he had even faced racism in Cyprus his reply was rather stoic:

Racism is everywhere. I just don’t argue with him, I keep quiet and stay with my family. I know a teacher from Keryneia who studied in Russia; even today they call him a foreigner (*ζένο*). If they call him this why should I bother when they call me foreigner? [FG2, M1]

However, any attempt at *relativisation* and comparison of racial exclusion to regional or other prejudice cannot be taken too far; there are degrees and there are qualitative differences between the various manifestations of racism. The focus group made up of Turkish-Cypriots from Limassol was vehement about the discriminatory treatment they receive; however, when asked to compare their experience with that of migrant workers they said that migrant workers had a worse deal than what they had: “they treat us a bit better” one Turkish-Cypriot said. However, another Turkish Cypriot complained that the reason they don’t find regular work is due Arab construction workers who would take the jobs for less pay.

Religious Discrimination as Racism

Contrary to legal provisions that prohibit religious discrimination, religious discrimination was raised by migrants of Muslim descent. Even if they look Cypriot or ‘behave as Cypriots do’ they tend to be seen with suspicion. One migrant told of the incident where he told a colleague from work that he was a Muslim and noticed

³² Interestingly, later on in the discussion he describes how he is in fact perceived as ‘criminal’ and untrustworthy due to the stereotype of the Pontian male.

“not only was he shocked” but “almost horrified” [I.2]. Some opt to change their religion, but even that does not suffice to shelter them from religious discrimination:

If you are Muslim they call you *Turk*; if you come from an Arabic country they call you Arab. (...) I am baptised Christian, I was christened when I came here. Nobody ask. As soon as you say that you are from Syria you are immediately a Muslim, you are a Turk. [I.6].

A Pontian migrant complained about the fact that employers deny them even the opportunity to communicate in their own language. In a construction site employing almost exclusively Pontians, who speak a Turkic-based dialect, were instructed by their employer to “stop speaking Turkish during their break”, The Pontian migrant was quick to correct the impression of the employer that the particular dialect is not Turkish, but a Creole-type of mixed language, obviously desiring to distance Pontians from any Turkish connection. The migrant wondered:

You cannot deny to a 50 year old the right to speak his language during the break; tomorrow, when Turkish-Cypriots will be employed in our village, who do not speak Greek, how will they speak to each other?” [I.3]

This is a form of discrimination at work, and not only, it is a denial of the right to speak the language of your liking which links different types of discrimination into one as the religious, cultural and language dimension are intertwined.

If migrant workers who are not Turks are treated the way they are because it is assumed that they have ‘commonalities’, such as religious, cultural and linguistic, with the Turks then important questions are raised about the Turkish-Cypriots and Turkish-speaking Rom themselves. It must be noted that these groups do not appear to be generally ‘worse off’, when compared to migrant workers. During the Limassol focus group the issue of religious discrimination did not feature directly. The issue of respect to religious freedom was indirectly raised when the Turkish-Cypriot and Rroma participants complained about the fact that they had nowhere to have their weddings and religious festivities³³ resorting even to cemeteries due to the high cost of places. They are certainly discriminated against in multiple ways and are regularly harassed by the Police; nonetheless, due to specific reasons their plight may be tolerable, when compared to that of migrant workers³⁴.

Linguistic and cultural barriers

The issue of linguistic and cultural barriers is a point brought up repeatedly. Most migrants who have been in Cyprus for many years and are now fluent speakers, have

³³ The only place they give us for weddings used to be a cemetery (.) and we go there and have our wedding [M3, Group 6].

³⁴ Firstly, they are Cypriots and this does mean something, even if it is not the same to all, it means something to Greek-Cypriots, who sharply distinguish Turkish-Cypriots from Turks descending from Turkey. Secondly, there is sympathy and historic ties of the Turkish Cypriots with the Greek-Cypriot Left (AKEL), the trade union (PEO) and local organisations allied to AKEL (see Attalides 1979). Thirdly, the treatment of Turkish-Cypriots in the Republic-controlled area is politically speaking highly sensitive, as it may reflect badly internationally, in the context of reaching a settlement, which means that the authorities feel that they have to be cautious and careful. It can therefore be argued that Muslim migrant workers may face a form of *transferred* discrimination due to the fact that they are seen to be related somehow to the Turks.

referred to the appalling treatment they had received when they first arrived and could not speak the language³⁵. The language issue was brought up by the south east Asian domestic workers, who only speak English and are even denied the right to learn Greek in some occasions as a distinguishing point between them and the two construction workers, who are fluent Greek speakers. Their reply was that they could not speak the language either when they first arrived in Cyprus and it was tough. As one interviewee put it,

The Greek language is definitely a barrier. (...) if you don't speak Greek if you are not an Orthodox.. You cannot be Greek if you are not born Greek. You cannot be American through religion. But to be a Greek is to speak the language to be an orthodox and to be a Greek descendent. [I.2].

It would be misleading to assume that all Muslims are treated in the same manner. There are subcategories as there are tensions within the various so-called 'communities'³⁶. Many Turkish-Cypriots in Limassol, like their Greek-Cypriot counterparts, seem to resent the fact that Turkish-speaking Rroma are arriving in their neighbourhood and 'causing trouble'. As one Turkish-Cypriot interviewee put it:

These are not Turkish-Cypriots, they are gypsies. And on occasions they do thing later reported in the media as done by 'Turkish Cypriots' and we Turkish-Cypriots get into trouble. Sometimes people hear stories [of bad things done] and they say immediately that Turkish-Cypriots [are to blame]. They should first investigate before drawing conclusions. Their attitudes are different from us. [I.7].

Not surprisingly, the Turkish-Cypriot interviewee wanted to distance himself from the Rroma. When asked whether he feels 'closer' to the Rroma, he replied that he 'prefers' Cypriots as if the Cypriot Rroma were not also Cypriots,

"I understand them and they understand me; we match".

Nonetheless, he pointed out that Turkish Cypriots in Limassol faced similar housing problems as the Rroma.

Identity Struggles: What's in a Name?

The habit of 'name calling' and 'nick-names' is the primary means of designating stereotyping³⁷ traits to persons and is intrinsically tied to prejudices³⁸ and their reproduction, amplification even (Wodak and Reisgl 1999).

Us Pontians we face many problems; firstly the word 'Pontios' [i.e. Greek for Pontian]. When people say the word 'Pontios' they say it

³⁵ For example Group 1: M2, Group 2: M1, M2, Group 3: M2, M4, Group 5: M2, as well as in the interviews.

³⁶ This paper is highly critical of the notion of homogenous and 'essential' communities (see Anthias and Yuval-Davies 1992).

³⁷ The term "stereotype" is defined as "the verbal expression of a certain conviction or belief directed towards a social group or an individual as a member of that social group" and is "typically an element of common knowledge, shared to a high degree in a particular culture" (Wodak and Reisgl (1999) quoting Quasthoff, 1987:786; Quasthoff, 1978).

³⁸ Wodak and Reisgl (1999) define 'prejudices' "as mental states that define (normally) as negative attitudes".

ironically. If you say anything counter they tell you to go back to your country.³⁹ [FG5, M1]

Prejudices about what it means to be a Pontian are connected to long-held convictions⁴⁰ about how they ought to be treated. Being called a Pontian is seen by some Cypriots as being “amusing” in order to make fun at Pontians⁴¹. Most Pontians actually object to be called “Rossopontios”, which means “Russian Pontian”:

They call me Pontian but it doesn't bother me. I am from Russia. When they call me Rossopontio (i.e. Russian-Pontian) it bothers me. I tell them that it is better to be a Rossopontios than a Cypriot. I tell them this because they are worse than us. I had no problem; I came here in 1992 and from that moment I felt that I was foreign. [FG5, M2]

The shifting of attitudes about groups and identities is remarkably apparent in the narratives of Pontians when they describe how they have been perceived differently as the socio-political context altered or as they moved from the former USSR, first to Greece, then to Cyprus:

“In the USSR we were Greek. This is what we thought. This is what they called us. In Greece things were very bad for us in the beginning. They blamed us for everything... “Here come the Pontians again, watch out” they would say. But when the Albanians came they started blaming them – we somehow just became Greeks again ... In Cyprus we are Pontians...Rosso-Pontians (*Ρωσσοπόντιος*)... I get so angry when they call me that”. [FG 5, M1]

To be called a ‘Russian-Pontian’ (*Ρωσσοπόντιος*) seems particularly distressing to Pontians themselves as they feel that their ethnic origin is being questioned. One participant wonders why one should distinguish between Pontians from wherever they are coming from and not just call them ‘Greek’. In fact this concern is not unfounded as there have been many media reports where the identity of Pontians has been questioned by the media, even school teachers insist on calling them ‘Russian-Pontians’ precisely because they question their ethnic origin, i.e. whether they are ‘genuinely Greek’⁴². This questioning of their origin and Greekness is no peripheral matter, as it is then easier to make scapegoats out of them about rising crime rate and other ‘social evils’, of the type “it is all these strangers who are responsible for the rise in the crime rate”.

³⁹ The Greek text reads as follows: «σαν εμείς οι Πόντιοι αντιμετωπίζουμε πολλά προβλήματα πρώτα-πρώτα με τη λέξη Πόντιος. Όταν λένε τη λέξη Πόντιος τη λένε ειρωνικά. Κι όταν τους αντιμιλήσεις σου λένε να φύγεις από εδώ να πας στη χώρα σου, γιατί ήρθατε εδώ;»

⁴⁰ Wodak and Reisgl (1999) define ‘convictions’ as “ascribe qualities to others and often provide rationalizations for negative attitudes (e.g. that ‘black smell bad’)”.

⁴¹ A Pontian-Greek from Paphos adds: “...Some people just say to me: “Hello, you are a Pontian” and they grin. And I say what is wrong with that – they just smile and say “I just said it – I didn’t mean anything bad. I was joking”. I usually say to them that we are all Greek – but some will just say “no, I am a Cypriot”. I will explain to them that you are from somewhere: you are Greek – look at your language, your culture, and your tradition. The more educated will say “yes, you are right I am a Greek-Cypriot”. But some others would say “No, I am a Cypriot. This is my land and I can throw you out if I like.” They never understand ... They are so full of hate... [FG5, M1]

⁴² See Trimikliniotis 2001a: 22-24.

In 1974 in Limassol they used to scare their children to eat their food by saying “eat your food before the refugee takes it from you”, now they say “eat quickly before the Pontian takes it from you”... Even if get citizenship I will always be a foreigner here. [FG2, M1]

The issue of how migrants themselves rationalise what is actually happening and why, is interesting:

Each country has its own stereotypes. Cypriots have a lot of stereotypes, we think that Cypriots are that way, we classify people from England, I mean Greeks coming from England. I say that because I come from England and I’ve been stereotyped, they give us, they call us names. Everyone knows us by, eeee, you know (laughs) they call us ‘Charlies’ because they have this name in England. When I speak Greek I have this accent and they can understand that I came from England and people make jokes about it but it doesn’t affect me. [FG 4, F1]

Greek-Cypriots who come from abroad, such as British born Cypriots are called ‘Charley’ or ‘Billy’ if they come from Australia or the UK. The implication of being a ‘Charlie’ or ‘Charlouna’, for females, is that these persons, whose Cypriot parents have emigrated abroad, particularly to the UK, have been Anglosised having lost their Greekness/Cypriotness, they have been ‘*de-Hellenised*’ (from the perspective of the Greek-Cypriot nationalists) or ‘*de-Cypriotised*’ (from the perspective of Cypriotists), or have retained a backward peasant/ villager’s Greekness/Cypriotness and have thus become *complete* ‘Charley’ (τέλεια⁴³ Τσιάρλης), or worse they have been totally ‘corrupted’ having abandoned or lost their national characteristics to ‘qualify’ to be called the term of abuse for the *rowdy* and *yobbish* Englishmen, *complete* or ‘*total Billy*’ (τέλεια Μπίλλης). The British born Cypriot in the youth group was adamant:

It is a form of racism. I’ve seen in England the way they react to Indian people or Pakistan people. There is a lot of prejudice in England; foreign people. I’ve seen that a lot. [FG4, F1]

4. Institutional Discrimination and Work

Discrimination at work is a highly complex issue requiring a multi-dimensional analysis. From the narratives of migrants in Cyprus a highly problematic situation emerges with very little, if any effective redress. Discrimination of different kinds at the workplace appears routine. Experiences of discriminatory practices are shared in *all* the focus groups, but the intensity, quality and type of these practices vary according to the particular context. The specific setting, the actors involved and the institutional framework regarding the employment of these migrants produce different *type of related experiences*. We can deduce with certainty that the focus groups and the interviews depict a gloomy picture about the treatment of migrant workers and a painful lot for migrant communities, as well as other marginalized groups in society who are also subjected to discrimination.

The vast majority of migrants in Cyprus are employed in sectors of the economy where there are labour shortages – primarily in jobs that Cypriots no longer want to

⁴³ This is the Cypriot dialect of the term ‘total’ or ‘complete’, which in demotic Greek is *εντελώς*.

do – in an institutional framework *actually designed* to sustain migrant workers in specific posts and control immigration flows in such a way that the characteristics of the system remain intact: it is a short-term, temporary, sector-based and employer-tied system. It is notable that these people are denied even the label ‘*migrants*’ or ‘*immigrants*’ and are referred to as mere ‘alien workers’ or ‘foreign workers’⁴⁴, despite the fact that the Cyprus Republic has ratified the ‘Migrant Workers and their Families Convention’⁴⁵. At the heart of this institution is a rigid, hierarchical and heavy-handed system that is designed to prevent human development, career change and alternative opportunities and re-training for the vast majority of migrant workers, given that their presence in this country is temporary and directed only towards carrying out the unwanted jobs, until they return to their countries. They generally enjoy low status and low pay, but these are apparently better than what they would get in their country of origin. With the exceptions of those (non-Europeans) who are married to Cypriots and have the right to abode, and the highly educated and skilled migrants, other ‘third country nationals’ are granted work permit to do for a *specific job*, for a *specific employer*, for a *specified time*. There is no room for change or career development upwards in the labour market hierarchy. The Pontians form a special category as the vast majority of them have Greek passports (i.e. they are European citizens) but are generally occupied in manual or low status jobs.

The narratives in this work package show the depth of discriminatory practices in the labour market and work place. Many domestic workers are denied basic rights – holiday money, overtime, rest time and are often subjected to all sorts of abuses. Domestic workers have perhaps the worse deal (together with agricultural workers and women working in the sex industry). They work at irregular times and are often forced to work overtime without extra pay. They often suffer psychological (and physical) abuse and the threat of expulsion is commonly employed as a disciplining device, a matter well documented elsewhere (Kadir 2001).

Non-Europeans who are highly educated are also subjected to discriminatory practices at different levels and on a variety of grounds. As explained in other sections, some migrant workers are denied the opportunity to practice their profession.

I wanted to work but I couldn’t work. I am a nurse, a paediatric nurse.

The Ministry told me that we don’t have paediatric nurses here. My diploma was accepted in Bulgaria.” [FG3, F2]

The routine violation of basic rights, the differential pay and the terms of employment of migrant workers, when compared to Cypriots, seem to occur irrespective of the migrants’ educational level.

I am a civil engineer and now I work as a foreman at a construction site. I get paid CYP650. My employer is paying me properly but my previous employers still owe me money. If my probation period is satisfactory I will get a rise in six months [FG1, M6].

Of course discrimination is not better or worse if directed against highly educated persons: discrimination is objectionable wherever it happens. However perpetrators are most ‘confident’ and bold and there is no social pressure on them to ‘retreat’ to more ‘subtle’ forms of discrimination and this absence of fear of the social or legal

⁴⁴ In Greek called Αλλοδαποί ή ξένοι εργατες.

⁴⁵ As well as a number of other conventions protecting the rights of migrant workers (see the official National Report on Anti-Discrimination in Cyprus and Trimikliniotis 2003).

consequences is both distressing and alarming. In fact discrimination appears to be so routinely practiced that it seems non-consequential, despite the constitutional and legislative instruments available⁴⁶. So serious is the problem that one highly educated migrant considered that only if the government took measures the situation would improve.

Along with the ‘raw’ forms of direct discrimination, a number of subtle ways have also emerged. For example in higher education institutes, such as private colleges, the chances of promotion, if you are non-Cypriot, are significantly smaller. Scholarly works, particularly of the non-British and non-American tradition, are often looked down upon, something that results in discrimination against highly educated migrant scholars, as one college lecturer involved with the lecturers’ union pointed out [I. 2]. Also there are reports of tenure being denied by the educational establishment to its foreign professors using the provisions of law on aliens as an excuse, which excuse is totally unfounded [FG1, M1]. Furthermore, due to job insecurity, on many occasions higher educational establishments pay lower salaries to their employees or do not fully comply with the contractual or collective agreement and college policies. [I. 2] [FG1, M1].

Non-Europeans who are less educated are also victims of discrimination – they are paid less and their employers do not always pay their share of social insurance required by the law:

We are foreigners here. We work a lot, but we don’t get paid well. Cypriots don’t work and get more money than we do. I work at the constructions and my employer doesn’t pay my social insurance. We are foreigners. We always do the hard work in the constructions, in the farms, in the fields. I have a cousin working in a chicken farm that works from 5 o’clock in the morning until 9 in the evening. Neither the Ministry of Labour nor the trade unions have ever gone there to check on him.” (FG3, M2)

Discrimination at work against Pontians has already been discussed. As for Turkish-Cypriots in Limassol, they seem to be ghettoised and many of them cannot find work owing, according to them, to prejudice and racism against them:

They don’ t pay our social insurance; our wages are low. Greek Cypriots work for CYP50, Turkish Cypriots work for CYP30. Moreover, I had to do all the heavy jobs because I am a Turkish Cypriot, I had to do all the jobs Greek Cypriots refused to do. [FG6, M3]

Regularly migrant workers, even second generation migrants, who have been working in Cyprus for years are discriminated against because they are of foreign origin [I.4], or of other religion [I.2], or due to the colour of their skin [I.1] or due to the fact that their Cypriot employer has no confidence in their abilities because of their origin [FG5, M4]. A black applicant, who attended a job interview, reported having overheard her interviewer saying apologetically to his colleagues “She is good...but I

⁴⁶ See Trimikliniotis 2003.

don't think that a black person would be acceptable to the other members of staff" [I.1]⁴⁷.

5. Institutional Discrimination and Education

The focus groups and interviews confirm the picture painted in work package 1 recording discriminatory practice at an interpersonal, ideological and institutional level. Moreover, the discriminatory practices suffered by Turkish Cypriots in Limassol are in fact similar to those faced by migrant workers. It has to be noted however that 'intercultural education has been introduced recently – at local level where it is 'required' (Trimikliniotis 2001; Work package 1) which has improved matters.

There is a serious issue about the education of Turkish-Cypriots and Turkish speaking Rroma who face a problem of access to education. There are accounts of a nine-year-old and a seven-year-old at a Greek-Cypriot school that don't understand a word of what is happening in the classroom and the teacher ignores them [FG 6]. The result is that children, whose attendance at primary school is mandatory, are no longer attending school. For several years the Ministry of Education had announced that a Turkish school would operate in Limassol⁴⁸. The Turkish-Cypriots in Limassol said that they had no one to talk to about their educational problems. The account pounded by one Turkish-Cypriot is particularly distressing:

I had my children attending a Greek school. Everyday they came home crying. They were beaten either by the teachers or by other students. They were constantly sworn at: "you are a Turk, you are different". [I.7]

Migrant children who attend Greek-Cypriot schools face similar problems. A Kurdish woman described an incident when she was still at school where a teacher gave her the lowest mark in the class, even though another classmate had written exactly the same answer. The teacher was openly racist with her:

"...you are in our country and you even want to step over us" [I.6]

She describes how awful she felt by the abuse she received but was ashamed to repeat the insults, which people used against her.

In primary schools matters can be particularly against migrants. The 10-year-old daughter of a Pontian interviewee, when asked how she got on with her classmates, she said that she had many friends – some Pontians and some Cypriots. But she complained that "some" Cypriot boys usually called her "Pontian" and told her that 'Pontians are bad!' When asked how she reacted she said that

"when they call me a Pontian and they laugh at me, I tell them Cypriots are Turks...they leave me alone!" [I.5]

This reaction at a very basic level reflects the kind of *identity struggles* that are taking place in wider society, not merely as naming, stereotyping, labelling and excluding, which is certainly part of it, but it goes much deeper than that (see Castells 1997). It is

⁴⁷ The EU directives on discrimination 43/2000 and 78/2000 which Cyprus is obliged to transpose within its domestic legislation, specifically prohibit just justification; this direct discrimination according to the directive.

⁴⁸ The new Government has only taken officially in February 2003 but it is committed to open the school for September.

a fluid and heavily contested practice about ‘who *we* are’ and what sort of society and ‘with *what* sort of values *we* want to live in’. Migrant parents consider that what they and particularly their children face in schools is related to the way the media constructs the migrants in Cyprus, who stereotype them in particular ways⁴⁹. In fact the portrayal of migrants on television and radio was repeatedly raised in the focus groups and interviews, as it is an issue of concern, bitterness even, amongst migrant workers themselves. They appear to consider that they play an important role in shaping views, convictions and stereotypes about migrants⁵⁰ [Interview with Pontian Worker]. The Pontian Greeks are particularly vivid on this issue.

“On television there is never anything positive about us. We are all bad, thieves, and evil people! I know there are bad people in my community, but isn’t there a single nice person? Isn’t there one, just one positive example? Never – we never see such a person on TV. This is why people see us as they do.” [I.5]

At the level of vocational training or educational opportunities for adults, there are no courses available to migrant workers either to train, retrain or even to learn the language unless they attain Cyprus citizenship. Migrant workers are not even allowed *by law* to attend part-time courses at colleges, something which certainly hinders their career development. Domestic workers in particular tend to receive the worst treatment of all migrants in this department, as the domestic workers in the focus groups illustrate. There are additional studies that show routine violations of their contractual rights (Kadir 1999).

One Bulgarian migrant worker, who was a trained nurse, was very distressed at not being allowed to retrain so that she can practice her profession and was confined to being a mere cleaner [FG 3, F2]. Similarly, a trained economist migrant worked as a brick-layer in Paphos [FG 5, M2]. The worse situation however is that of Pontian doctor who was only allowed to work as a nurse, not even at a sister’s rank [FG 1, F1]

From the testimonies of migrants themselves, racial or ethnic discrimination in education against migrants and non-hegemonic groups manifest itself in multiple ways: from the more ‘raw’ and blatant direct discrimination and abuse, to more subtle indirect and institutional discrimination.

6. Racism and the Extreme Right

When asked about experience with violence by extremist groups, none of the persons interviewed had anything to say about racial violence from far right political groups. This is not surprising given that Cyprus has no significant organised neofascist groups.

There is a legacy of political violence in Cyprus that took place between 1958-67 and in 1974-75. Since then, there have been some sporadic incidents of political violence but of no significant scale, mainly due to the collapse of the Greek-Cypriot para-

⁴⁹ For an excellent typology of stereotypes of migrants in Cyprus, see Chrysanthou 2000.

⁵⁰ This is what a Pontian migrant worker said: «Πιστεύω ότι πρέπει να δουλεντεί από πολύ ψηλά με πολύ μεγάλα προγράμματα που να ακουστούν. Το Ράδιο και τηλεόραση παίζει πολύ μεγάλο ρόλο».

fascistic group EOKA-B⁵¹ and since the leader of TMT (a Turkish-Cypriot paramilitary organization) now happens to be the ‘President’ of the ‘TRNC’ (the unrecognized “state” of northern Cyprus). The key characteristic of such outbursts of violence is that it has been directed exclusively against Greek Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots. As a rule, EOKA-B would kill Greek-Cypriots alleging that they were ‘traitors’, ‘communists’ and ‘un-hellenic’ (*ανθέλληνας*), whilst TMT concentrated on killing Turkish-Cypriots dissidents. There is an incident of two trade unionists, a Greek-Cypriot and a Turkish-Cypriot⁵² who were murdered in 1965 by TMT when riding in the car together on their way to a political gathering, hailed today by both the Greek-Cypriot and the Turkish-Cypriot left as heroes and symbols of Greco-Turkish friendship. Additional violent incidents took place in the summer of 1996, in the course of the anti-occupation demonstrations by Greek-Cypriot right-wing motorists on the buffer zone, during which two Greek-Cypriot demonstrators were assassinated by the Turkish police. Interestingly enough, following these incidents, some Bangladeshi students were violently beaten up by Greek-Cypriot youths, because “they were Muslims, just like the Turks”.

The response to this question by the persons in the focus groups casts light upon our insight into the kind of physical or psychological violence or the fear of violence which migrant workers and marginalized groups face in their daily lives. In Paphos the memory of the Pontian workers goes to the riots in 1998 when a group of Cypriots apparently attacked the Pontians youths, following a fight between a Pontian and a Cypriot

About 50-60 organised persons holding bats came. And we were sitting on a bench and they came with glasses, iron bars, with no reason, we don’t even know who they are and asked us ‘are you Pontians?’ and we said ‘yes so what?’ [FG 5, M6]

Others referred to more recent events involving knifings which took place during 2001, 2002 and 2003. The other another Pontian participant in the group stated that, in his view, many petty incidents occurred that do not take an inter-racial or inter-ethnic dimension.

Younger Pontians in Paphos referred to police violence⁵³:

They stop us for no reason (...) they can stop us 5-6 times per day without reason searching us for little things, so as to claim that we have done something wrong. These things are not right. Especially on the Pontians. [FG 5, M4].

Police violence was additionally referred to by the youth group, who also talked about violent incidents or rioting that took place in Paphos and Limassol.

The Police, when they speak to a Pontian, they think that they are talking to a criminal⁵⁴. [FG 5, M6].

⁵¹ This was a paramilitary Greek-Cypriot organisation led by General Grivas, who had been a Nazi collaborator in Greece and later was involved in the Cyprus EOKA campaign under the political leadership of archbishop Makarios (see Drousiotis 2003)

⁵² Costas Mishaoulis and Dervis Ali Kavazoglou.

⁵³ Police violence against migrant workers is a matter the second ECRI Report is particularly critical in the executive summary of the Report (2001).

⁵⁴ The Greek text reads: “η αστυνομία νομίζει ότι όταν μιλάει με ένα Πόντιο μιλάει με ένα εγκληματία.”

The Turkish-Cypriot again referred to the treatment Turkish-Cypriots receive by the police, mentioning the case of the murder of a Turkish-Cypriot living in the south who was murdered but his assassin remains on the loose – implying that the police was implicated.

They called a friend of mine a spy and killed him; in 1997 [FG6, M2].

Also he referred to the incidents in year 2000:

There was an incident 3-4 years ago. It was the time Rom came here for the first time and there was this woman on Sigma TV saying, “These people came and took our houses over there (occupied areas) and now they took our houses over here, where shall we go, let them go to hell. When we are face-to-face they say nothing but they express their true feelings with the first chance. [FG 6, M3].

The migrant workers of Arab origin spoke about the late 1980s violent attacks / riots against them by a Greek-Cypriot angry mob in Limassol. [FG2, M2].

The Indian, Filipino and Srilankan domestic workers spoke about the sexual advances and the intense pressure they are under by Greek-Cypriot men - particularly older men, who take for granted that they are available for sex, at the ‘right’ price, which is usually the equivalent of 18 – 20 Euro.

There was this man passing by in his car and told me “hey beautiful, where are you going? If you come with me I will give 20 pounds”. Another time there was this old man he couldn’t even walk and told me “you look very sexy are you coming with me?”. And Cypriots, not all of them, think that if they give you 20-30 pounds you will sleep with them. [FG 2, F3]

Another typical response to violence by the participants was to underestimate racial abuse and dismiss it as mere acts of “just young people” undervaluing the danger which (racial) rioting by youth can have on the lives of people.

Last but not least, another form of violence, which, although alarmingly common and frequent, rarely receives media coverage: that of physical violence of employers against migrant workers. Although none of the participants made reference to having such an experience, the researchers are aware from accounts of other migrants who were unwilling to come forward with their stories, that such type of violence is widespread, particularly against “illegal” migrant workers who, facing the risk of deportation, will seek no resort to justice⁵⁵.

For Cyprus then in all but name the picture painted by the report is particularly gloomy: excessive violence by the police; abuse and violence by employers; immigration offices abusing their discretion; remarks by public figures that lead to a xenophobic climate, all of which add up to the ‘vulnerable position of migrants’. It is

⁵⁵ One such case was reported in an article in “Politis”, a daily newspaper with the second circulation, on 26/7/2001. Citing the letter sent to the paper by a Syrian worker, the paper wrote: “...I spoke to my employer about the money he owes me. I spoke to him before many times and also spoke to his wife and his secretary about my unpaid salaries. This time he got angry, he grabbed me by the throat and hit my head on the wall three times. This was witnessed by three Cypriots [named] and his wife ... who was petrified and was screaming to him to let me go and not to beat me to death ...”

hardly surprising that the ECRI report (2001) on Cyprus is critical of the maltreatment of migrants and calls on the Government to take immediate action.

7. Coping with Racism

The question of *coping* with racism is by definition a complex matter. The response we received by migrant workers is diverse and at times contradictory, simply because it refers to daily choices about how to handle very different manifestations of racial discrimination in multiply contexts. It is essentially a multiple strategy and requires considerable effort in manoeuvring and tactical decisions depending on the situation. A common first reaction by migrants was “it’s difficult” followed by a pause. An African female, who spoke about her daily ordeal, said that “she smiles”, [perhaps this an ironic smile] and she goes running twice a day to survive:

Well I do a lot of exercise; I do it every day when I’m alone. I do that because it calms me down. Secondly I have a doctrine; I smile a lot, I smile all the time, even if I get so angry I still smile. Now, I smile a lot, but those very racist people don’t like to see happy foreigners, they don’t like to see happy foreigners. That’s how I cope with it, I smile, and I do a lot of exercise, I sing a lot, I try to keep my mind alert, I read a lot. I just try to keep my mind off it. Some people think that I must face it, I can’t face it.

The response was that she survives “by working” – again response that contains a stoicism and irony [FG1, F1]. Another participant in the same group explained straight away:

It is to an extent the fear the Cypriot has and is not tolerant to new things, new ideas, there even if you are right they will not tell you, you are right, well done. They want to do what they know. You are a foreigner, you have no right to say your own (opinion). [FG 1, M2]

So far we discussed more ‘passive’ approaches to merely surviving the daily ordeal of racism and prejudice. However there are also more ‘active approaches’. One Pontian said that when he first arrived the mind repeating as many times as possible who he is, what he stands for, his values and ideas in order to convince ‘narrow-minded’ Cypriots. However, he is no longer interested as much to explain [I.3]. Another Pontian in Paphos was totally resigned – he thought that it was useless:

... I am just tired of these people. I have just given up because I am fed up with them. I don’t even get angry any more. I have given up, as they have given up. I just get on with my life. [I.5]

Highly educated Pontians appeared more open about what they demand, even if they were willing to forgive what they had suffered. One Pontian suggested that what was required was an organisation made up by all migrants, so they can speak with a collective voice – he was particularly vociferous on this issue [FG1, M5]. He then put forward a Christian religious agenda, apologising to non-Christians,⁵⁶ but expressed his dismay about the fact that his commitment to Greek orthodox traditions does not render him any respect, despite being more religious than ordinary [Greek] Cypriots⁵⁷.

⁵⁶ He reassured then that all religions have a similar stance. He referred to existence of ‘12 Plates’, presumably the plates of Moses, which contain ‘the truth’ and must be followed.

⁵⁷ He apparently did cross more regularly and went to church more regularly than the Cypriots

There were only four, out of a total of forty-one migrants in this research package, who were unequivocal about being *happy* and ‘successful’ in Cyprus. One was a Philippino domestic worker who had passed through terrible experiences with their previous employers, but who now worked for a foreign embassy and hopes to get citizenship [FG2, F1]. The other two were Pontian women who did not say anything other than repeat that they were happy and had never faced any discrimination [FG3, F4, F5]

A significant issue raised by all migrants is the difficulty in coping, dealing and communicating with the authorities – immigration, Police, local administrations, civil servants etc. Migrants are just ignored, whilst Turkish-Cypriots complained that they no listen to them, particularly the person in charge of Turkish-Cypriot affairs in Cyprus. They had to put all their claims by a Turkish-Cypriot person, who was not elected or legally authorised but was ‘chosen’ by the local administration and the Police as ‘trust worthy’ to act as the ‘representative’ of Turkish-Cypriots. Almost all the Turkish-Cypriots interviewed were particularly resentful of this practice and were preparing a petition to expose the matter. Also, a local committee has been formed by Turkish-Cypriots to put forward demands about schooling, housing and discriminations in spite of similar initiatives having collapsed in the past.⁵⁸

There is a general sense of helplessness to do anything to change the situation amongst both Turkish-Cypriots and migrant workers. However, the plight of migrant workers is made worse by the fact that very few are actually aware of the rights, who to approach and how to deal with problems, if indeed the possession of a theoretical way is any ways meaningful if it is routinely violated.

8. Possibilities for Multicultural Citizenship

The question of citizenship is intrinsically connected to both a notion of ‘belonging’ and some sort of legal identity, in other word some connection to the state (see Marshal 1953, Turner 1996). Migrants approach the question of ‘belonging’ in different ways depending on their ‘strategy’, if we could use such a term that implies considerable planning. From migrants and marginalized groups narratives, the kind of ‘calculating’ and ‘well-thought out’ schemes are not evident at all.

Turkish-Cypriots, who are citizens of the Republic and reside in the south strongly claim their citizenship in both the legal and the social sense when he was denied the right to a hunting licence:

We are Cypriots here. I have Cyprus passport. I am Cypriot. I have Cyprus identity I am Cypriot. I have Cyprus driving license. Why they didn't give me a hunter's license when I asked them? I have a Cyprus passport I have an identity. Why this discrimination on me? So we do have a difference. [FG6, M4]

The explanation provided is sought in the past turbulent times: “They still think about the past what happened in Cyprus”. [FG6, M1] There is a claim at nostalgia of the

⁵⁸ Some Turkish-Cypriot participants were involved in another local initiative that consisted both of Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots that fizzled out in the 90s, “the Committee for the Rights of Turkish-Cypriots in the south”.

pre-1974 situation, when the population of Cyprus was mixed [FG6, M4]⁵⁹. There are however strong claims to equal citizenship in the modern sense of equal rights

We are a part of Cyprus' people. We must have the same rights as the others. [FG6, M1]

Others however, recognizing the fact that there are few Turkish-Cypriots in the south appeared to be holding back:

We cannot say what we must do. There aren't many of us. It's not up to us. We can't do many things. [FG6, M3]

There appears to be a near unanimity about specific rights such the right to have a school for their children to learn their language, improvement of working conditions and that "employers must not be so violent/ vicious (αγριότητα)"; "Turkish-Cypriots mustn't beg for a job. The trade unions must help us". Moreover, they demand,

The crucial political right. The basic rights [FG6, M3].

Points of Reference and Strategies of Resistance

Different strategies are adopted by different groups depending on individual character, ethnic, religious, social background, age, education and context. One ought to be cautious in attempting to provide ideal types so as to avoid creating or reinforcing stereotypes – which is itself reproduction of racist discourses, ideologies and myths. Furthermore, the methodology employed (focus groups and interviews) is a qualitative method that certainly provides us with in depth knowledge and opportunity for discourse analysis, but not necessarily "representation" for at least accurate representation but a degree of representation is certainly provided in that the selection of persons interviewed was such that some representation is provided.

The strategy adopted by almost is to find connections of belongingness, a kind of strategy of belonging to Cyprus. However, different approaches are taken, depending on what they can more easily identify as the central cultural or social trait that they feel they can try to identify with or at least adopt. The first strategy takes the form of an adoption of *assimilationist versions* of different degrees. This refers to an assimilationist discourse of belonging whereby minority groups or migrants, stress the fact that they are in fact no different from Cypriots, they are or have become 'Cypriots', it is a claim to a *new* 'Cypriotness', presuming that this broad base is a vehicle of belongingness that is open and acceptable, or at least open to a re-interpretation of their own. The assumption here is that Cypriotness can become a 'melting-pot' for accepting new members into society.

Turkish-Cypriots and Rromas (Kurbet) of Cyprus stress the fact that they are Cypriots, like the Greek-Cypriots and they have passport. This is connected to claim to citizenship, since they are citizens and extremely upset by the fact that they are treated differently from other Cypriots. However, there are another at least two types of narratives that are essentially claims to Cypriotness, as a cultural norm that necessitates citizenship: firstly, the narratives of younger members of migrants who have lived for many years in Cyprus, such as younger Pontian in Pafos or the young Kurd in Pafos; secondly, adults who have lived in Cyprus for many years and have contributed to economy and society via their work and through their love for the

⁵⁹ Between 1963-67 there was a fierce inter-communal strife and Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, following the withdrawal of the Turkish-Cypriots from the Cyprus administration after the Greek-Cypriot President Makarios proposed to amend the constitution (see Attalides 1979).

country. Another *assimilationist* strategy takes the form of attempting to find belongingness via being baptised and learning Greek, although this has not been a very successful strategy, as migrant workers themselves and Turkish-Cypriots who converted to Christianity suggest.

From some of the adult Pontian narratives, it is apparent that their claim belonging to Cyprus passes via their claim to Greekness, unites Greek-Cypriots and Greeks, in a similar manner a mainland Greek would. There is also a religious variant of this that claims Greek-orthodox traditions as the key universal category. It has to be noted that the migrant Pontians in this research seem to consider these traits as essential elements of their *own* identity, which are then presumed to be *shared elements* with Greek-Cypriot culture/tradition. Disappointment is then expressed when they discover that many Greek-Cypriots only superficially adopt them [FG1, M5]. Migrant claims to Cypriotness tend to be marginally more successful than the equivalent claim to Greekness. Of course, migrants can only claim what they identify with. Pontians, for example would find it easier to appeal via their Greekness⁶⁰, as a quasi-universal (i.e. open) cultural commonality to identify with Greek-Cypriots. However, younger Pontians easily adopt Cypriotness, rather than Greekness, in the way a younger Kurd, Bulgarian or other migrant do. Simplistic cultural versions fail to properly appreciate the complexity of Greek-Cypriot identity cannot be reduced to binary understanding; it is highly fluid, contested, contextual and transient. It also has class, gender and regional dimensions that are complex and interestingly these are picked up quite successfully by migrants in Cyprus, whereas the complexity of the identity is something that very few, if any can actually appreciate, never mind find a successful strategy that works in most occasions in socialising with Greek-Cypriots.

Some migrants tie their hopes for a more tolerant society and multicultural citizenship with the changes accession will apparently bring:

...We live with the hope for 2004 that it (Cyprus) will be a normal European country where foreigners coming here will have to be accepted [I.6]

The same migrant referred to the need that all foreigners who stay long enough in Cyprus have the same rights at work, at school, at hospitals, at the government and government offices.

Those migrants who have stayed for years in Cyprus want to become citizens,
I don't want to be foreign anymore, because I feel that Cyprus is my country. My children are here; my grandchild is here [FG3, F2].

Those who do not have citizenship, as a legal status, despite having lived in Cyprus for decades, some of them are very distressed and find the experience of going through the immigration bureau extremely painful. A South American, who has lived

⁶⁰ One Pontian compared Greeks to Cypriots, suggesting that the latter: "In spite of how badly we are treated by some Cypriots, I think that they are much 'better' than the *Kalamarades*. There are more good people here...deep down the Cypriots are good. In Greece we have nothing – I know that things are better now but they don't have anywhere to go, no one to protect them. Here, I personally feel secure: We have strong unions and there are good laws that protect us – those who are members. As long as there are unions who fight for workers there is something for us. But they have to organise those are not unionised, for example my wife who works at Zorbas (bakery) There, there is nothing to protect them. They are at the mercy of their boss. He just tells them: If you don't like it, just go, whereas I can always claim my rights because I have a union behind me. I feel secure."

in Cyprus for over 23 years, with children and a good job, is told by the immigration every year when he applies to renew his visa,

Why are you still here? Why don't you go back to your country?

[FG1, M2]

No illusions are sustained about the difference between 'legal'/formal citizenship and genuinely social citizenship, in the sense of belonging, acceptance and recognition in the words of a Bulgarian migrant

I feel Cypriot, but Cypriots don't feel the same about me [FG3, M1].

Or as a Pontian woman, who is about to get Cypriot citizenship said, that she may be getting citizenship "but I will be a foreigner" [Focus Group 3, F..]. Nevertheless, if they don't even have basic citizenship, they feel that they have nothing:

I want them to give me citizenship (nationality), a passport to live better, to have a voice. I am a person who wants to have freedom, to have a voice [FG, M3].

This is because migrants feel that they are ignored, particularly when they go to Government bureaucracies. Another migrant who has citizenship having agreed that having a voice is important, whether Cypriot or foreign suggested that having the legal documents (i.e. nationality) has nothing to do with "how society deals with you",

The paper says nothing; it simply gives you the opportunity to move easier. You don't need procedures, immigrations etc. The issue is how you are accepted by society. When they see you in your neighbourhood and say there's the Rumanian or the Bulgarian...It is important to have a voice and to learn to support you. This does not depend on ordinary people; it starts from high up [FG3, F1].

A Bulgarian woman was upset when she was apparently advised by a lawyer that it is easier for her to divorce her Bulgarian husband and marry a Cypriot to get nationality despite having lived in Cyprus for 10 years. [FG3, F2]

9. Analysis and conclusion.

A number of analytical issues may be raised that relate to the very term discrimination as translated into Greek. The term *discrimination* (in Greek *διάκριση*) happens to be the same as *distinction*, but it is an altogether different concept, loaded with a completely different meaning. The origins of *distinction*, as an aristocratic, elitist concept *distinguishing* the aristocracy from the plebs, describe a type of discrimination. However, in modern English, at least at a level of popular discourse, the term "discrimination" carries negative connotations, whereas "to distinguish" is a more neutral term, at times a positive thing. Therefore to '*distinguish*' on the basis of colour is to *adversely discriminate* which is unlawful and unacceptable, but to be a '*distinguished*' person due to achievement is generally acceptable and indeed desirable. In Greek the same word *διάκριση* - unless one uses the adjective '*adverse*' in front of it - it generally means to *distinguish*, to *differentiate* and not to *discriminate*. The negative connotations which the term discrimination has in western, English-speaking traditions, reflects the historical struggles for gender equality, the women struggles and black liberation struggles; in Cyprus these struggles were only a distant ghost, being historically overshadowed by the burning 'national issue'. The

absence of a genuine feminist movement as such and the weakness of the anti-racist movement, if one can call the initiatives of a few individuals as such, is reflected in the absence of a popular anti-racist discourse in Cyprus.

To contextualising racial discrimination and prejudice today requires an appreciation of these phenomena as part of social relations, within complex processes of the transformation of Cypriot society. The social scene of Cyprus, including Nicosia and Paphos⁶¹, has seen a dramatic change over the years. Not only tourism has grown immensely, but also inner city areas, such as Faneromeni⁶² and Kato Paphos, which were once hang-outs for Cypriots have now become almost exclusively immigrant area. They have become new cities resembling inner European cities, on a smaller scale of course and with their own specificities.

The inherent difficulty in analysing racism and racial discrimination is that one must connect disparate fragments of everyday life to form a jigsaw in order to connect structures, social institutions to discourses, ideologies and praxis. Piecing together the migrants' voices means reconstructing complex ideological processes to lived experiences and then associating them with existing knowledge. In this work package we analyse discourses of migrants themselves, as migrant voices, "to realize that racism, as a social practice and as an ideology, manifests itself discursively" but also to examine how "racist opinions and beliefs are produced and reproduced by means of discourse and through discourse, discriminatory exclusionary practices are prepared, promulgated, and legitimated" within the voices of migrants, but to explore the potential of anti-racist strategies within the very migrant voices (Wodak and Reisigl 1999). In other words, subaltern migrant voices can serve as important sources that would challenge, criticize, de-legitimate, and undermine racist opinions and practices.

Signifiers of Racism in Cyprus

Southern Asians, Arabs and darker skinned persons are routinely just called 'black' (in Greek μαύρος) as a term of abuse, sometimes with additional abusive words⁶³. These instances are so common that many darker skinned migrant workers are just referred to as the "black" ("ο μαύρος), as if they have no name. Some Greek common expressions, regularly used before the wave of new migration, also carry racist connotations: the expression "*I work like a 'black [person]*", used when someone works hard with little or no reward (a reference to the black slaves); or the expression *the fig-tree of the black [person]* («η συκιά του μαύρου»), which basically refers to a situation where the person is just picked upon by all, as if he is a nobody (a 'mere black'). However, the use of these terms has been invigorated, as they no longer refer to some distant events (slavery of the past centuries or apartheid); they are brought home now. In popular discourse such terms are found in casual talk among Cypriots. They are used as generic term of abuse against migrant workers.

Discrimination does not stop there: Even the state authorities have regularly been found to be discriminatory on the ground of colour.

⁶¹ which is brilliantly described by Argyrou (1993), who conducted his fieldwork 1991-92, just after the policy change that allowed the introduction of 'foreign' labour into Cyprus

⁶² The rightwing newspaper Simerini (21.3.03) carried the headline "Old Nicosia is a ghetto", quoting a Police chief who expresses 'concern' about the concentration of migrants in the area but expresses his assurances that the Police is 'prepared to take drastic measures'.

⁶³ Such as *shit-black* («σκατό-μαύρος»), or even worse *fucking/puff-black* («πουστό-μαύρος»).

Immigration authorities, local state bureaucracies and civil servants routinely treat black people differently from whites⁶⁴.

The other important signifier that seemed to stand out is religion. Of course there are historic reasons that have rendered religion a symbol of ethnicity and nationalism, given the conflict in Cyprus between the Greek-Cypriots, who are orthodox Christians and the Turkish-Cypriot, who are Muslims. However, this is only a partial explanation. Recently we have all become witnesses to increased harassment and stereotyping of Arabs and other Muslims as a result of the September 11th events and the US so-called ‘war against terror’.

(En)gendering Servitude: Domestic Politics of Shame

A Pontian male from Paphos explained that

“it is much harder for women migrants than it is for men as they also face discrimination because they are women and because they have the more responsibilities at home and are many times treated badly from their husbands”. (I.6)

The memory or at least a kind of collective resentment of what was degrading experience shared by many Cypriot women, forced by poverty to work as a *dhoulá* (δοῦλα) – a Greek word literally translated as ‘slave’ but in fact meaning a ‘domestic worker’ for another⁶⁵. Even at this day and age there is shame associated with a woman working at another’s house, having worked as a *dhoulá*⁶⁶. From the 1920s-30s women who were placed as domestic servants in houses were subjected to all sorts of abuses. “They were regularly overworked, starved, sexually assaulted or beaten (Argyrou 1994:32), whilst those who were seduced or raped by the employers would never return to their village – ended up in brothels⁶⁷ (Surrige 1930: 27).

What remains from this memory of shame is the legacy that developed into a modern institutional arrangement with domestic workers from Southeast Asia. Even younger persons would jokingly call their domestic worker the ‘*dhoulá*’ (slave); what is worse is that this transferred shame has *reproduced* and *modernised*, en masse, a new history of abuse based on the combination of race, class, gender and migrant legal status. The explanation provided by one domestic worker, who related the treatment domestic workers get with Cypriot family angst, problems and pressures maybe apt:

I think people are good here. But they maybe have some personal problems they can’t remove to their family so they throw it on us, that anger, because we are foreigners. [FG2, F4].

Pathology or not, the plight of south East Asian domestic workers, who by catering for “elementary coercive needs”, which are “necessary for the mere conservation of

⁶⁴ The second ECRI Report state: “Concern is also expressed at reports of discriminatory checks on the part of immigration officers of non-whites coming to Cyprus. Again, ECRI feels that further training aimed at preventing the occurrence of discrimination and discriminatory attitudes should be provided to immigration officers.”

⁶⁵ . Other words used are ‘para-douletra’ (παραδουλέτρα), μισταρκοί/ος.

⁶⁶ In Argyrou (1993:32) a 68-year-old woman for instance is quoted saying “ I don’t want my husband to know anything about this. He doesn’t even know that I was a *dhoulá*”.

⁶⁷ On scholar considered the high number of prostitutes in the Cypriot brothels in the 1920s-1940s was due to the fact that poverty sent many village girls to work in rich masters’ home, who took advantage of them “sending them to the gutter” (Lefkis 1984: 44).

life”, to use Arendt’s words ⁶⁸, make it possible for Cypriots to taste what ‘Olympian gods’ enjoyed, is likely to carry on as the ‘curse’ of this type of labour is their job and society is unwilling to change.

The ambivalence in migrant narratives: Are Cypriots racists?

Migrant narratives present a picture of ‘ambivalence’ about Cypriots who are typically presented as ‘*good really*’ or ‘*good at heart*’ on the one hand, but ‘*racist*’ or ‘*abusive*’ on the other. This may well be a surviving tactic of migrants who feel insecure in the presence of Cypriot researchers. An element of insecurity has indeed been observed, that pushes migrants to tactically attempt to appear ‘even-handed’: ‘*Cypriots are god, but...*’. Then, there is a shift as the debate continues when they start by saying they are *happy* or that ‘*Cypriots are good*’ and only when they feel secure enough, usually after others have spoken about their experience of racism, would speak out. But this may be only a fragment of the truth

Another explanation that supplements the above is that there is ambivalence within Cypriotness: a contested Cypriotness, a *mixed* and *hybrid* experience that contains both *solidarity-based, more open* and *universalistic almost* set of values, in a contradictory and transient symbiosis with *exclusivist, narrow-minded* and blatantly *xenophobic* and *racist* elements. It is the former elements that reach out, as a kind of solidarity that migrants identify as ‘*basic goodness*’. Gramsci’s approach to ‘*common sense*’, which has a duality of ‘*good sense*’ and ‘*bad sense*’, good sense being the positive, open and humane aspect of people and bad sense connected to prejudice and superstition of popular, wisdom applies here (Gramsci 1978). Migrant workers seem to identify with what they perceive as ‘*basic goodness*’ of ordinary Cypriots, which may be explained as a dimension of a collective trait that generously reaches out as a sociability, collective generosity and hospitality of *philoxenia* (*φιλοξενία*). It may well be a manifestation of survival of a collective memory of a community of a historically oppressed and discriminated *subalternity*, or it may genuinely be a kind of good nature’, an ethics of a common humanity. On the other hand, there exists a class-ridden shame, that many Cypriots would much rather forget: the fact that not many decades ago a lot of Cypriot women were forced to work as domestic workers in wealthy houses, hence the contradictory attitude towards domestic workers- a total *dependence* to do the ‘*mothering*’-and-cleaning entangled with a resentment and rejection of their descent, role and position in society. This is where Cypriotness turns into *xenophobia* and racism.

Interesting comparisons can be drawn between the experiences of migrant workers and Turkish-Cypriots and Cypriot Roma. Turkish-Cypriots, who constitutionally enjoy a privileged position as a *community* in the *sui generis* consociational state⁶⁹, however, due to a combination of historical, structural and ideological reasons in fact

⁶⁸ Hannah Arendt’s words are compelling: “(...)As the elementary activity, necessary for the mere conservation of life, labor had always been thought as a curse, in the sense that it made life hard, preventing it from ever becoming easy and thereby distinguishing it from the lives of the Olympian gods. ...People, who do nothing but cater to these elementary coercive needs, were traditionally deemed un-free by definition – that is, they were considered unready to exercise the functions of free citizens. Therefore those who did this work for others in order to free them from fulfilling the necessities of life themselves were known as slaves”.

⁶⁹ See Trimikliniotis 2000 for more on the nature and constitution of the Cyprus state. For an analysis connecting the current Europeanisation process with a sociology of the socio-constitutional and ideological developments see Constantinou 2002, 2003.

face *similar* discrimination in the form of an adversely different treatment when compared to the Greek-Cypriots as a matter of routine in their daily lives. From the discourses of Turkish-Cypriots and Turkish speaking Cypriot Roma (Kurbet) it is apparent that they are conscious of the different treatment and are very unhappy about the situation; nonetheless they are very careful not to appear to be blaming ‘ordinary’ Greek-Cypriots for this mal-treatment: ‘*the people are like us*’ («οι απλοί άνθρωποι εν σαν τζαι μας») or ‘*we are not complaining about the people*’ («εν έχουμε παράπονο που τον κόσμο») are common expressions among them; their quarrel is with the State, with the way the authorities treat them, be these local authorities or Police, or ministries and courts. The narratives of Turkish-Cypriots and Roma identify major structural problems such as bad housing, often in derelict state, disregard or inconsideration from the local welfare office, irregular work and unemployment. This last point contradicts the way they sharply distinguish *state* from *society*; but more sophisticated accounts by Turkish-Cypriots and migrants are quick to connect the *state* to *employers* or *capitalism*. However, it is apparent that most migrant workers face discrimination from their co-workers, which is attributed to a racist ideology, alienated from the ‘universal’ or ‘internationalist spirit of workers solidarity’. Matters are of course much more complicated and racism is not only a structure that may bypass class, gender, ideological and discursive barriers; various mutations and manifestations appear, not to mention the historical failure of trade unions, political parties, social institutions and citizens’ initiatives to properly protect migrant workers and marginalized groups⁷⁰.

Racial discrimination is connected to a wider endemic in society, that of social inequality and antagonistic relations between groups and individuals in society.

10. Summary

The analysis of the situation shows that racial discrimination, in its multifaceted manifestations, is abundant in Cypriot society, requiring a multiple strategy to make multi-cultural citizenship meaningful. The following are the key points that came out of the focus groups and interviews:

- The perception of the Cypriot society towards migrants and marginalized groups is ambivalent: Racism, discriminatory practices, stereotypes and abuse are regular, at the same time almost all migrants involved considered that ‘*Cypriots are good*’. Turkish-Cypriots and Cypriot Roms are also discriminated, despite being Cypriot, so are citizens of foreign extraction. Signifiers of racism are colour, religion, language, culture, nationality and ethnic descent. Simultaneously, the process is highly gendered and class-ridden.
- In the labour market there is a strong hierarchical structure. The vast majority of migrant workers are concentrated at the lowest echelons of the labour hierarchy, employed in jobs undesirable for Cypriots. There is institutional discrimination *by design* as the framework for the employment of migrant workers is such that prevents career development, training and promotion; furthermore there is institutional discrimination *by default* in the the policies are systematically failing to properly address violation of contractual terms,

⁷⁰ For an analysis of the Cypriot context see the section on employers and trade unions in Trimikliniotis 1999.

collective agreements and causing an ethnic fragmentation of the labour market. Despite the tri-partite agreement that migrant workers would enjoy the same terms and conditions of employment as Cypriots, there are routine violations by employers. At the various levels of the labour hierarchy there are different discriminatory practices against migrants:

- (a) Highly educated non-Europeans face direct, but primarily indirect and subtler forms of discrimination, as their chances of promotion and success is lower than that of Cypriots. Their qualifications, achievements and skills are not duly recognised
 - (b) Less highly educated Europeans from eastern Europe are often paid less than Greek-Cypriots and social insurance is not always paid. Many are qualified to perform higher occupations but are forced to work as manual labourers.
 - (c) Less highly educated non-Europeans, primarily domestic workers from south east Asia, work irregular hours, are often forced to work overtime without extra pay and suffer psychological (and physical) abuse. Construction workers from Arabic countries are routinely paid less than Cypriots, often their employers deny them social security contributions and any are not unionised (unlike their Greek-Cypriot counterparts who are unionised).
 - (d) Migrant youths are often not recognised for the skills they have and are often forced to take badly paid part-time jobs, especially if their permits do not allow them to work.
 - (e) Turkish-Cypriot workers living in the south face similar discrimination at work; they seem ghettoised and many cannot find regular work owing to prejudice and racism against them.
 - (f) Pontians are stereotyped as criminals, unreliable and thieves and their education and skills are not duly recognised and valued. They are often paid less, their promotion chances are slimmer and are not allowed the same breaks as Cypriots.
- As far as education is concerned the migrant narratives describe widespread discriminatory practices at an interpersonal, ideological and institutional level. The few hundreds of Turkish Cypriots in Limassol face similar types of discriminatory practices, despite their supposedly privileged constitutional position. In fact their position on this issue may be worse than that of migrant workers, as the Greek-Cypriot authorities have seen Turkish-Cypriot claims to the right to separate education with suspicion, since the collapse of the relations between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, particularly since the 1974 Turkish invasion. Cypriot Roma are seen with suspicion by both Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots alike.
 - None of the migrant workers or the Turkish-Cypriots had any experience with violence by extremist groups or far right political groups. However, all of the persons interviewed had something to say about violence and abuse they fear or have faced, as they had all experienced or know about a person who has suffered from 'violence', be they unwanted sexual advances by their male employer (domestic workers) or the Police if they were Pontian or other youths or Turkish-Cypriots. The 'vulnerable position of migrants' is confirmed.
 - Migrants referred to the difficulty in coping with racism on a daily basis. People adopt different approaches depending on the context, the actors

involved and their mood: from merely ignoring racism, to doing physical exercises as an outlet, or working hard, or even trying to explain those whom are bigoted; or merely hanging out with other migrants. There were very few exceptions that had no experiences of discrimination. Nonetheless there was a significant number who considered themselves 'successful' and 'happy'.

- Different strategies have been articulated as claims to citizenship, which reflects different traditions, ethnic and social backgrounds and lived experiences. Claims to citizenship came via different routes: other via some Europeanised or other version of Cypriotness, or via a diasporic Greekness and religion, or by appealing to common humanity. However, they felt they will always be foreigners in Cyprus, even if they felt Cypriot.

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APPENDIX: Focus Groups and Interview Schedule

Focus Groups

- (FG1) Group 1: ‘Non-European’ Highly Educated - Nicosia, 13.7.03, 6.00 pm
(FG2) Group 2: ‘Non-European’ Less Highly Educated - Nicosia, 6.7.03 3.00 pm
(FG3) Group 3: ‘European’ Less Highly Educated - Nicosia, 13.7.03 3.00 pm
Group 4: Youth group (FG4) -Nicosia, 10th July 2003, 2:45 μμ
(FG5) Group 5: Pontians from Pafos - Pafos, Saturday, 11.7.03, 11.00 am
(FG6) Group 6⁷¹: Turkish Cypriots & Rroma in Limassol - Limassol, 5.7.03, 6.00

Interviews

- (I.1) Interview with Highly Educated Cameroonian female -Nicosia, 6.7.03,
(I.2) Interview with Highly Educated Iranian Male -Nicosia, 6.7.03
(I.3) Interview with Milan - Pontian Male Paphos, 4.7.03,
(I.4) Interview with Alexandros - Pontian Male -Paphos, 4.7.03,
(I.5) Interview with Democritos - Pontian Male -Paphos, 8.7.03,
(I.6) Interview with Stella – Kurdish Female -Paphos, 18.7.03,
(I.7) Interview with Mihalis– Turkish-Cypriot Male -Limassol, 19.7.03,
(I.8) Interview with Shenai – Rroma Female -Limassol, 4.7.03,
(I.9) Interview with Anna – Bulgarian Female -Nicosia, 10.7.03

⁷¹ Group 5 and 6: Open (groups that are of particular relevance to your research or perhaps specific to your country). These groups could have the same constitution as some of the earlier groups.

The Focus Groups analytically

Group 1: 'Non-European' Highly Educated

Nicosia, Sunday, 13.7.03, 6.00 pm [teaching posts, professional posts or are practicing skilled manual jobs in spite of their education and professional training.]

F1: Mayia, 6 years in Cyprus, Georgia
F2: Berryl, 3 years in Cyprus, Cameroon
M1: Farid, 5 years in Cyprus, Iran
M2: Gonzalo, 23 years in Cyprus, Colombia
M3: Carlos, 10 years in Cyprus, Cuba
M4: Din, 1 year in Cyprus, Sri Lanka
M5: Elias, 11 years in Cyprus, Georgia(Pontian)
M6: Giorgos, 11 years in Cyprus, Georgia (Pontian)

Group 2: 'Non-European' Less Highly Educated

Nicosia, Sunday, 6.7.03 3.00 pm, [Domestic workers, construction workers, English speaking]

F1: Remi, Philippines
F2: Melanie, 2 years in Cyprus, Philippines
F3: Appoleene, 9 months in Cyprus, India
F4: Lilly, 1 year in Cyprus, Srilanka
M1: Stefanos, Russia, 11 yr in Cyprus
M2: Abdul, Egypt 20 yr in Cyprus

Group 3: 'European' Less Highly Educated

Nicosia, Sunday, 13.7.03 3.00 pm [Pontian, Bulgarian and other east European workers]

F1: Antuanetta, Romanian, Years in Cyprus: 14
M1: Aggelos, Bulgarian, Years in Cyprus: 11
F2: Violetta, Bulgarian, Years in Cyprus: 10
M2: Marios, Syria (Kurd), Years in Cyprus: 8
M3: Etta, Syria (Kurd), Years in Cyprus: 7
F3: Vera, Georgian (Pontian), Years in Cyprus: 3
F4: Ellada Georgian (Pontian), Years in Cyprus: 9
F5: Maria Georgian (Pontian), Years in Cyprus: 9

Group 4: Youth group

Nicosia, Thursday 10th July 2003, 2:45 μμ
F1: Francesca, British-Cypriot, 20 years old
F2: Ma, China, 18 years old
M1: Adnam, Pakistan, 18 years old
M2: Khein, Egypt, 19 years old
M3: Edgar, Kenya, 17 years old
M4: Amid, India, 18 years old
M5: Wang, China, 19 years old

Focus Group 5: Pontians from Paphos

Paphos, 08.07.03

M1: Dimocritos, 32 year-old, factory worker; Greek citizen, years in Cyprus: 7

M2: Dionisis, 25 year-old, trained economist but works as construction worker, Greek citizen, years in Cyprus: 5

M3: Nicos, 40 year-old, trained civil engineer but works as construction worker; Greek citizen, years in Cyprus: 6

M4: Milan, 27 year-old, trade unionist; Greek citizen, years in Cyprus: 6

M5: Petros, 20 year-old, waiter; years in Cyprus: 8

M6: Andreas, 24 year-old, chef; Greek citizen, years in Cyprus: 5

Focus Group s: Turkish-Cypriots and Rrom frrom Limassol

Limassol, 5.7.03, 6.00

M1: Salih

M2: Tasher

M3: Salih

M4: Salih

M5: Hussein

M6: Imbrahim