

Sharing Traditions of Land Use and Ownership

*Considering the “Ground” for Coexistence and Conflict
in Pre-modern Cyprus*

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Cyprus is a paradigmatic post-conflict society in which “coexistence studies” abound, especially since the island’s division in 1974 into a Turkish North and a Greek South, an event that formed a tragic closure to two decades of unrest and quarrels between the communities. Peaceful coexistence of Muslims and Christians in Cyprus has been largely attributed to the dynamics of “neighborhood” (Jennings 1993, 1999; Asmussen 2001; Bryant 2004). Mixed neighborhoods, urban as well as rural, emerged during the Ottoman period (1571–1878) as a result of heterogeneous residence patterns, which at first did not follow any systematic pattern of spatial segregation.¹ By the end of the Ottoman period the majority of villages (346 according to the first official census) were ethnically mixed. Although the number of mixed villages dropped drastically during the course of the twentieth century, the experience of life in mixed settlements has come to form a central part of the collective consciousness of Cypriots. The research on these shared spaces describes the texture and quality of coexistence as determined by the face-to-face-society and the rhythm of agricultural seasons. Despite a low rate of intermarriage, Cypriots forged a variety of inter-communal relations: they entertained neighborhood relations, formed friendships and cooperated in agricultural production.

This chapter contributes to this panoptic of neighborhood through an examination of the particular relationships that emerged from local forms of land use and shared concepts of property. Property relations—whether forged through inheritance practices among kin or maintained

through agricultural cooperation among neighbors—were deeply woven into the fabric of neighborhood. Yet, unlike the clear-cut model of individual ownership common to contemporary Western societies, local property concepts in Ottoman Cyprus involved various degrees of ownership, rights of use, as well as an obligation for maintenance—an Ottoman distinction that in itself generated particular and highly sophisticated forms of neighborhood.

Coexistence was certainly not free of conflict. Consider the following example from the mid-twentieth century, describing a state of affairs that seemed to alienate the Cypriot modernizers of the time. The geographer and later state-appointed consolidation officer Demetrios Christodoulou writes in 1959:

Land in Cyprus is unenclosed and unfenced. This permits not only easy subdivision, but also leads to endless friction between farmer and shepherd since the latter can roam with his flocks over anybody's property; friction, constant and costly, often exists between owners of neighboring land. (Christodoulou 1959: 84)

It is thus important to keep conflict and societal unrest between groups well within the scope of analysis. Indeed, practices of land use gave ample reason for dispute: The “constant and costly friction” described above may well be an example of what Bryant describes as “everyday diplomacy,” a constant negotiation of boundaries that distinguishes neighborliness from plain hospitality (this volume, p. 21). Yet it is worth asking why conflicts over land and resources did not tend to coincide with ethnic distinctions, mobilize on the grounds of religious identities, or reiterate religious differences. What were the underlying structures that allowed for the management of communally accessed resources as well as the distribution of property in the absence of clear-cut boundaries? Did ethno-religious differences play a part in the distribution process?

This chapter casts neighborhood in socio-ecological terms and focuses on particular strategies of Cypriot ruralists pertaining to the island's key resources of land, forests, and water. Whether a cause for conflict or cooperation, the particular strategies are “sociogenic” (compare Lansing 1991: 128). They generate specific forms of sociality that in turn maintain the social relations necessary for the strategy to succeed. These social relations can extend far beyond the bounds of the immediate neighborhood, yet property remains a key factor. The Ottoman system of land tenure provided the island's peasantry, both Christian and Muslim alike, with a context in which they could acquire, share, and maintain their access to land and resources. Furthermore, property was also defined

by the particulars of the Mediterranean landscape. The socio-ecological perspective on Cypriot neighborhoods therefore also reflects the wider picture of the Mediterranean equation of landscape and people.

Local forms of daily coexistence did not cease with the end of Ottoman rule but survived well into the twentieth century. Nonetheless, the first half of the twentieth century witnessed a gradual dissolution of rural communities and traditional agricultural networks.² These developments unfold prior to and along with the rise and consolidation of opposing Greek and Turkish national ideologies, the anti-colonial struggles of Greek nationalists (1955–59), as well as the violent clashes between the communities during the early years of the Republic (1963–64). The time of British colonial rule (1878–1960) therefore represents a transitional period during which the foundations for Ottoman coexistence gradually eroded. The study of coexistence in Cyprus thus inadvertently formulates a critique of colonial hegemonic practices. While the British “divide and rule” strategy has been the focus of numerous valuable studies (Constantinou 2007; Dietzel and Makrides 2009), this chapter also addresses less overt, and possibly less intentional disruptions of Ottoman coexistence, namely the British involvement in the modernization of the agricultural sector and the consequences this bore for societal dynamics between the island’s communities.

Reflections on the Ottoman System of Land Tenure

Despite the official status of most arable land as property of the state, the Ottoman Mediterranean has been described as a “sea of land proprietors,” where state land had *de jure*, rather than *de facto* character (Hadjikyriacou 2011: 49). However, the Ottoman ways of administering land and property were inherently different from those of Europe. An obvious difference lies in the absence of feudal structures in the Ottoman realm and the concomitant lack of a propertied hereditary noble class that could impose servile obligations on the peasantry. Rather, it was the “signature” of the Ottoman Empire that state control drew its legitimacy of rule from its paternalist protection of the autonomy of the peasant population. It was the priority and ideal of the central state to act as guarantor for the independence of the peasantry and the peasants’ means of subsistence, to ensure the provision of the regional markets with agricultural goods, and to prohibit the excessive accumulation of land and resources by private individuals (İslamoğlu-İnan 1991: 58).

The empire administered land and resources in a “distributive-accommodative state environment” that was inclusive of local forms of

land management and that ensured the loyalty of local authorities in the provinces through the distribution of state land and tax revenues (İslamoğlu 2004: 292). The Ottoman *timar* state economy depended on a particular system of land distribution, whereby the state leased land to tenants for cultivation, who in turn were expected to pay a portion of their revenue as taxes. The beneficiaries of these taxes were various local rulers or pre-Ottoman ruling groups, such as the Orthodox Church, yet they exercised no jurisdiction over the peasant producers. Jurisdiction over the peasantry lay with the *kadı*,³ who represented Sultan law (*örf*) and *Shari'a*. The central state thus remained the sole source of legitimation for revenue collection (İslamoğlu-İnan 1991: 59).

The Ottoman agrarian landscape was thus fashioned by the cultivation patterns of small producers. Even under increased pressures of commercial expansion following the integration of the Ottoman realm into the world market during the seventeenth century, this pattern did not change in any significant way. While market pressures would encourage the formation of large-scale commercial agriculture and single-crop plantations elsewhere in Europe, small-scale production patterns remained predominant throughout the Ottoman realm (Keyder 1990).

In Cyprus, the Ottoman conquest of 1571 brought a change to the living conditions of the local peasantry that was akin to a socio-economic revolution. By granting the peasants—hitherto serfs on the plantations of Latin feudal lords—the right to resettle and bequeath their leases on state land to their children, Ottoman rulers encouraged the emergence of subsistence agriculture as the predominant form of land use. Another important shift affected the social stratification on the island. The complex social stratification that had characterized the Latin period was replaced by a basic division of society into two major classes: a ruling class (*askeri*) consisting of imperial administrators, nobility, military officials, and religious clergy, and a large, tax-paying peasant class (*reayah*).

The emergence of a large and religiously heterogeneous peasant class, as well as the autonomy of small-scale cultivators were important factors in the development of local forms of coexistence. Until the mid-nineteenth century, taxes and tithes were exacted from the villages as a whole—this, one might argue, necessitated a certain degree of internal village solidarity and thereby discouraged social or interethnic strife that could compromise the ability to meet tax requirements.⁴

The legal context of Ottoman land administration offered another flexible system that could accommodate a multitude of claims. Questions pertaining to the way in which the formal category of state property (*miri*) blended with existing patterns of land ownership have been little explored. The legal context that emerged, however, represents the

ability of the empire to respond to the cultural diversity throughout its provinces. The Ottoman Land Code reflects the complexity of the system: promulgated by Sultan Abdul Mecid in 1858 during the Ottoman reform period, the Land Code aimed at modernizing the system of land tenure, but accommodated much of the old system within it. It set down no less than five types of categorization of land:⁵ the large part of arable land was state property (*miri*) that could be rented to individuals for cultivation. The tenant would have to hold a title deed to prove his, or her,⁶ rights to cultivate a particular plot. The tenant could also bequeath the lease to his, or her, children. The land could revert back into exclusive state ownership if the tenant left it uncultivated over a period longer than three years. In the case of reversion, the tenant could still buy the rights back by payment of an equivalent sum. This provision, however, was rarely enforced.

A second category comprised all immovables that were full property, or freehold (*mülk*). Next to land and houses, also planted trees, such as orchards and vineyards, as well as water holdings would fall under this category. In the latter cases, the law envisioned a system of “multiple ownership.” A piece of land, for example, could be owned by the state and leased to a peasant, while the trees growing on this land, or the water that irrigated it could be owned by another.

The full property of religious organizations, however, was not subject to the Ottoman Land Code, but rather to *Shari'a* law. While religious institutions were exempt from taxes, the revenue of these lands and properties, subsumed under the term *evkaf*, would be dedicated to religious and charitable purposes. The category of *evkaf* also included state-owned land, on which the tenant paid taxes and tithes to a religious organization and not to the state.

This communal purpose further defined all land that was dedicated to the public (*metruk*), such as those tracts in the vicinity of settlements, which were assigned to the inhabitants of villages or towns as a whole. These lands could not be individually possessed, bought, sold, inherited, or used for any other purpose other than that for which they were distinctly assigned *ab antiquo*. The category comprised communal forests, village pasture lands, public roads, and places of worship.

Finally, the remaining waste or rough-land (*hali*) could function as state land, while permission had to be granted for its use. All rights to utilization were revoked after three years of non-cultivation.

All of the above categories were important factors in the administration of Ottoman provinces. For the fabric of neighborhood, however, the particular stipulation for forms of multiple ownership may have been especially significant, since it legally bound together several individu-

als as shareholders of one agricultural unit (such as irrigated orchards and multi-use fields). This kind of shareholding not only necessitated a certain level of cooperation, it also fused together the interests of shareholders in the functionality of the agricultural unit, thereby furthering a “sense of the commons”⁷ within the villages. To the quality of Ottoman neighborhoods, the system of land tenure added another realm of negotiation and diplomacy—perhaps analogously to the “constructive ambiguity of belonging” in Ottoman neighborhoods (this volume, p. 21ff), the Ottoman Land Code and its multiple forms of property reflect an equally constructive ambiguity of ownership.

Reflections on the Mediterranean Landscape of Production

While anthropologists have questioned the idea that an area with as much linguistic and religious diversity as the Mediterranean may represent a cultural unit (especially Herzfeld 1984; Pina-Cabral 1989), there seems to be more agreement on the Braudelian view of the Mediterranean as an ecological unit. Central works have identified the Mediterranean landscape as the fundament for a cultural distinction that nonetheless characterizes local traditions across the region (Braudel 1972; Horden and Purcell 2000; Tabak 2008). While all of these works acknowledge the landscape as a Mediterranean characteristic of *longue durée*, they vary in their estimation of the geo-deterministic element in Mediterranean history. Still, the history of Mediterranean localities, and with it Cypriot neighborhood, proceeds from the environmental strategies of local agriculturalists and pastoralists who have altered the Mediterranean landscape in a lasting fashion, rendering it essentially anthropogenic. Such reciprocity of environmental and human history is reflected in Horden and Purcell’s concept of “micro-region.” It includes “obvious microtopographical identifiers,” such as the location of valleys, plains, or the sides of islands, characterized by their particular hydrology, soil conditions, vegetation cover, and annual weather cycle. But it also encompasses the various human effects on the landscape, such as the intensity of labor, the number of animals, and the specific choices of productive strategies. Micro-regions are further determined by the locations they are functionally connected to, such as harbors or detached pastures (Horden and Purcell 2000: 302). Traditional agriculture in Cyprus revolved around these micro-regions and the multitude of micro-economic opportunities they afforded. It is therefore important to imagine Cypriot rural neighborhoods and the “labor of peace” they

entailed as taking place within these micro-regions, rather than as confined to the residential settlements of the village.

The landscapes of production in Ottoman Cyprus resembled the “agro-sylvo-pastoral system” typical for the Mediterranean region (Blondel 2010; Schnabel 2004; Delipetrou et al. 2008; Tabak 2008). The combination of cereals, tree-crops, and small livestock that made up the core of Cypriot small-scale production bore significant socio-ecological advantages, as it helped to optimize the use of microclimatic and edaphic variations on the island. Interestingly, this polycultural strategy was shared by all peasants, irrespective of their ethno-communal affiliations. In contrast to other cases of similar mosaic co-residence of ethnic communities, the Cypriot peasantry did not develop “niche-specific” agricultural practices (compare Barth 1956). Rather, both Muslim and Christian peasants used the environment in a similar fashion, while there was very little agricultural specialization in terms of ethno-typical preferences for either pastoralism or sedentary cultivation. Most households tended to exploit the full array of possibilities that polyculture could offer. In the semi-arid environment of the island these polycultural strategies as well as the agricultural mobility of Cypriots offered efficient ways to maximize the material basis for life even during periods of scarcity (Given 2000; Harris 2004). In terms of land use and ownership, polycultural strategies, and with it the experience of neighborhood, were fashioned by the basic features of land fragmentation, shifting cultivation, and a complex system of irrigation.

The phenomenon of land fragmentation has been a characteristic pattern of land use throughout Europe, especially in the Mediterranean. It is a result of local patterns of property distribution through inheritance systems, which in turn are subject to change according to demographic developments. While in many parts of Europe land fragmentation has been minimized through consolidation measures, it continues to be the central feature of the rural landscape in Cyprus. Typically, land fragmentation is seen as a problematic historic relic that is incompatible with modern means of agriculture and efficient production. While agrarian reformers of the mid-twentieth century lament the slow and insufficient implementation of consolidation measures (Shaw 1963; Lanitis 1992 [1944]; Christodoulou 1959), they misread or disregard the social and ecological dimensions of land fragmentation. More recent work suggests that under Mediterranean island conditions, land fragmentation holds significant advantages for the local population, by managing the risk of harvest loss, water shortages or pests (Bentley 1987). In socio-genic terms, the dispersal of land holdings is conducive to a very partic-

ular form of agricultural cooperation that establishes a property relation beyond the level of the village neighborhood. Land fragmentation also engenders what Horden and Purcell call “structural absenteeism,” a system that allows the cultivation of scattered fields with the help of other labor-providers who live closer to the particular piece of land (2000: 280). Sharecropping thus alleviates the problems arising from the geographical separation of holdings, forges micro-economic relations across remote villages and maintains the connection between dispersed micro-regions.

Fragmented holdings are thus more suited to a system of “shifting cultivation,” which is also known as “swidden” or “slash-and-burn-agriculture” (Horden and Purcell 2000: 264; Dove and Carpenter 2008: 26).⁸ Until the nineteenth century, the method of clearing vegetation within a cycle of cultivation was an integral part of local practices in Cyprus, especially for vine plantations. It also incorporated the grazing of goats as part of the land-use cycle and thus occasioned the cooperation of shepherds and farmers of one region. The strategy requires a profound knowledge of soil types and the ability to predict soil quality from vegetation cover. As Christodoulou notes for the Cypriot peasant, it was a highly empirical knowledge that was “inherited together with the land” (1959: 41); one might add that developing such expertise must have been a central subject of daily communication among neighbors.

Finally, strategies of irrigation require the highest amount of coordination and negotiation. In Ottoman Cyprus, the use of surface water for irrigation was predominant and depended on a complex system of regulation. In mountainous regions, especially on the southern slopes of the Troodos Mountains, water had to be used effectively to avoid water run-off to the sea. This was envisaged through an intricate distribution of rights to irrigation, i.e., shares or holdings, which could be subdivided according to the needs of the local population.⁹ Land and water sources were held separately and were subject to the stipulations of multiple ownership. Interestingly, rather than providing top-down regulations through a central irrigation scheme, the Ottoman government accommodated traditional systems of distribution that had proved successful over time, and formalized them as part of the legal system. This was set down in Article 6 of Ottoman Civil Law: “*Ab antiquo* is left in its *ab antiquo* state” (Christodoulou 1959: 90). Consequently, local ways of water management depended on constant negotiations among the many participants of local agricultural networks. The provision of the Ottoman government to give priority to long-established arrangements required the participants to give testimony based on memory, which resulted in frequent disputes (Ibid.). However, the use of water resources also formed a very practical focus of alliances across ethno-religious borders.

Frequently, the inhabitants of villages or entire regions took joint action to ensure the water routing in their favor. One example comes from the mixed village of Kolossi, whose inhabitants in 1900 took joint action against a Greek Cypriot outsider who attempted to own all water rights in the region, in order to lease them back to the peasants. Local farmers forged such ad hoc alliances not only within villages, but also regionally. Such was the case in the villages of Styllos, Limnia, and Gaidhouras, all of which competed over water with the village of Prastio, leading the Muslim and Christian villagers to sign a joint petition against the water routing (Asmussen 2001: 138). These are just two out of numerous examples of water negotiations in which the ethno-religious identities of the quarrelling parties were rarely of any significance.

Colonial Land Reforms and the Commodification of Property (1946–1974)

So far, the modernization of land use has received only cursory attention in the study of the Cyprus conflict (Scott 1998; Heinritz 1975). Rarely is the abandonment of traditional land use patterns understood as a loss. On the contrary, the modernization of the agricultural sector is overwhelmingly seen as an advantage for society, as it guarantees the food security of a growing population and ensures the competitiveness of the agricultural sector through rationalization and an increase in profitability. However, the social and cultural consequences that accompany these transformations are often underestimated in their complexity.

The Ottoman Land Code continued to be in effect until it was finally abolished during the Land Reform of 1946. Depending on national perspective, the persistence of the Ottoman system under British rule has received different evaluation. The Turkish Cypriot perspective emphasizes the idea of its efficacy and sophistication as reasons for its continuation. To the modernizing minds of urban Greek Cypriots, however, both the Ottoman Land Code and the prevalent system of inheritance were considered backward, inappropriate, and in dire need of reform. As Christodoulou puts it: “Ownership in Cyprus is diffuse, fragmented and complicated. It militates against smooth transactions and rational economic land use” (1959: 85).

It was this “rational economic land use” that formed the main purpose of the land reforms of 1946. The Immovable Property Law of 1946 reformed tenure, registration, and valuation of land. It simplified the complex Ottoman Land Code by subsuming the diverse types of land under the two categories of “state land” and “private property.” It also

made provisions that targeted the abolition of the system of multiple ownership. Buildings and trees on a piece of land, as well as the land itself represented one agricultural unit, and as such were now to be the property of one and the same owner. The bill also aimed at limiting further fragmentation of land holdings, prescribing one *dönüm*¹⁰ for arable land and one *dönüm* for vineyard, orchard, or irrigated land as the smallest acceptable size (Lanitis 1992: 4). In addition, the land reform foresaw the consolidation of land holdings, in part as a necessary measure for the construction of water dams.

The consolidation law, which went into planning in 1956, met with repeated and fierce opposition from landowners, and only passed in 1969 (Heinritz 1975: 33). From the reformers' perspective, the peasants' opposition to agricultural reforms was nothing more than tedious parochialism. "Government has failed to realize that the peasant-farmer is by nature, as suspicious, obstinate and unprogressive as any human being can be. The whole world to him is his land, his home and the village coffee-shop. He would never go to the nearest town or even write to obtain advice. In fact, he would often treat any friendly suggestion as to the crops he grows or the way he cultivates his land as one made against his proper interests" (Lanitis 1992 [1944]: 70). Yet, acts of opposition against land reforms also contained an ethno-political dimension. According to the Turkish Cypriot Minister of Defense, the land consolidation measures of the early 1960s constituted a kind of Greek "land-grabbing exercise" that violated the constitution (Örek 1971).

The agricultural reforms mark an important shift from traditional land use patterns to modern ones. Certainly, local patterns of land use were slow to change. The reforms not only met with repeated opposition of farmers but were also compromised by the inevitable inertia of a well-established system. However, legal foundations were laid down with the new law, while former practices of land use were marginalized as backward impediments to progress and prosperity. In ecological terms, the land reform entailed the discontinuation and eventual loss of environmental practices that were well-adapted to the Mediterranean environment of the island. The commodification of land and the institutionalization of individual property as the sole form of ownership, which was to change property relations and social dynamics within Cypriot society, permitted the rise of a dynamic real estate market. Clothed in the guise of modernization, the land reform of 1946 thus literally removed the "ground" for trans-societal environmental cooperation, and should be included as a key date in the chronology of the Cyprus conflict.

The first part of the twentieth century sees a gradual transformation of the traditional rural economy of Cyprus, furthered along by the

processes of urbanization and emigration. By the mid-century, most landowners no longer depended on agriculture as their sole source of income. According to the census of 1960, only about 50 percent of the privately owned arable land was being cultivated by the owner, while about 40 percent of agricultural land belonged to “non-farmers” (Heinritz 1975: 34). As a result, the system of management farming established itself as the dominant form of agricultural work, replacing other models of communal work, such as shareholding or cooperative farming (Heinritz 1975: 63).

In addition to this decoupling of land ownership from agricultural labor, the value of land was now determined within the context of a thriving real estate market. The prices for the different types of land were subject to high regional variability and reflected the priorities of urbanization and of newly emergent industries, above all the tourism sector.¹¹ Most lucrative were those pieces of land that were suitable for construction, such as the dry land in the plains of the urban outskirts of Nicosia, but also the coastal areas, which due to their sandy soil and salty ground water had not been useful for cultivation.

Despite the decline of the actively farming population, agricultural productivity increased steadily. This was mainly achieved on perennially irrigated fields (such as citrus plantations), which yielded more produce in comparison to dry farming in areas that depended on seasonal rainfall. The proliferation of this form of intensive agriculture was furthered by government-subsidized construction of the water infrastructure necessary for the transformation of dry land into irrigated land. The increasingly invasive ways of tapping ground water created an unsustainable industry that further contributed to the severe water shortages on the island (Heinritz 1975: 200). This problem was also exacerbated through market speculations. In many cases, the owner who had installed the infrastructure for irrigation on a piece of land did not intend to use it for agricultural purposes, but rather planned to resell it for a higher price. This form of “upgrading” dry land was conducted without regard for groundwater limitations, putting the entire form of irrigated farming at risk (*Ibid.*: 78).

The advances in agriculture and the profits of the real estate market did not benefit the farming population, but rather those who did not depend on agricultural income. “Non-farmers”—urban Cypriots (doctors, lawyers or government officials), British customers, or Cypriots living in Britain—were thus at ease to buy land solely to use it as asset for market speculation (Heinritz 1975: 92).¹²

The real estate market not only catalyzed the emergence of a new land-holding class; it also provided another setting in which the Cyprus

conflict unfolded, not least because it provided the possibility to accumulate the financial resources necessary for political campaigns. Between 1950 and 1970, the Orthodox Church sold large portions of its real estate, in part to further the activities of EOKA, the Greek national paramilitary organization that fought against British colonial rule and for the union of Cyprus with Greece (*Enosis*). The Orthodox Church also retained substantial assets, especially those in the non-agrarian sector (Heinritz 1975: 86). Moreover, it was within the context of the land market in which the inequalities between the ethnic groups were first manifest and where discrimination against the Turkish Cypriot minority took material form.

This is exemplified in the land transactions following the first violent clashes between the communities. In the course of the intercommunal fighting of 1963–64, a large part of the Turkish Cypriot population emigrated to enclaves under Turkish Cypriot administration. The relocation mainly affected Turkish Cypriots from mixed villages, as well as from smaller Turkish villages that were surrounded by predominantly Greek settlements. According to Turkish Cypriot sources, approximately 20,000 people (about 20 percent of the entire community) left their homes in order to move to the enclaves.¹³ Only a quarter of the total number of refugees returned to their homes in the following years. By 1970 about 15,000 members of the Turkish Cypriot community remained displaced (Heinritz 1975: 89).¹⁴

Maintaining a normal life and economy within the various enclaves that lay scattered over the island constituted a very complicated logistical act (Brey and Heinritz 1988). Given the mixed settlement patterns and the extension of traditional agricultural networks, Turkish Cypriots' land holdings, too, were dispersed and fragmented. Enclave conditions now made it difficult to cultivate or even access those Turkish Cypriot properties that were located too far from the enclave. Some of these holdings remained deserted, while others were used by Greek Cypriots who could be persuaded to pay a lease on them. The threat of planned and systematic acquisitions of Turkish Cypriot land by Greek Cypriots prompted the Turkish Cypriot leadership to issue a ruling that restricted all sales to intra-communal deeds or, if inter-communal, to exchanges with Greek Cypriot property of equal value. However, this ruling was often circumvented by exchanging the land in question with Greek Cypriot property of lesser value, while the difference was paid out covertly (Heinritz 1975: 90).

In retrospect, the shared spaces of Ottoman Cyprus appear a far-removed reality. Certainly, ethnic boundaries did not dissolve within the peasant context, yet they often remained secondary in the face of a common peasant lifestyle that was based on shared agricultural practices

and environmental strategies. The relative lack of social stratification in Ottoman society, the mosaic co-residence of Christians and Muslims as well the predominance of cooperative strategies of polyculture facilitated the dissemination of what might be called a “common concept of nature” across ethnic divides. In other words, neighbors shared similar sets of botanical, zoological, and edaphic knowledge of their region, exchanged in day-to-day communication and encoded in many local religious customs and folklore practices.¹⁵

From Land Dispute to Property Issue: Reconsidering the “Ground” of Coexistence and Conflict

Under Ottoman conditions of coexistence, land disputes appear as common forms of conflict between the particular interests of local resource user groups. These conflicts rarely produced ethnic discord; rather they provided reasons for inter-ethnic solidarity. In that way, property disputes of the Ottoman and early British period differ substantially from those conflicts that make up the current “property issue,” or the dispute over properties that has emerged since the island’s division in 1974. The latter arises from the discrepancies between Turkish and Greek Cypriot estimations of the actual land holdings of their communities, the treatment of the property left behind by the displaced population, as well as the conflicting claims for restitution versus remission of property. Its history is a recent one. To the Turkish Cypriot community, it also echoes the losses of land through colonial intervention, such as the distribution of *Evkaf* (plural of *vakıf*, or religious foundation) properties to Orthodox peasants during the early part of British rule; Turkish Cypriot accusations of “land grabbing” during the agricultural reform period; or the sales of Turkish Cypriot properties to Greek Cypriots following the first wave of displacement after 1963. While these modern land disputes seem to have lost the particularity of local neighborhood interests, they convey the impression of uniform ethnic communities with essentially opposing interests in the matter. Since the 1990s, the issue has gained an international dimension through several legal cases against Turkey brought to the European Court of Human Rights by Greek Cypriot individuals, who decided to take measures against their expropriation following their displacement in 1974 (for a discussion of the “property issue,” see Scott 1998; Gürel and Özersay 2006; Kyriacou 2009; Trimikliniotis and Sojka 2012).

Still, it is helpful to conceive of the current “property issue” as just a recent facet of the long history of inter-ethnic property relations in

Cyprus. The issue has lost nothing of its historical complexity and represents the one aspect of the conflict that proves the hardest to solve. There is one feature common to all attempts at restitution, remission, and compensation of property: in order to allow for a smooth transaction, the value of land has to be redefined in terms of its monetary, or market, value. While the commodification of land and houses may seem a practical step toward a solution of individual disputes, the historical, biographical, and deeply emotional baggage associated with these contested properties is not easily eradicated. On both sides of the border, Cypriots continue to “assert a model of property as embodying particular places, social relationships and personal histories in which ... the ‘other side’ and the idea of the island ‘as a whole’ play a part” (Scott 1998: 158). The current “property issue” thus reverberates a long history of deep involvement of people with their physical environment, a history that is enmeshed in the fabric of mixed settlements and agricultural networks. Its Mediterranean characteristics as well as the complexity of the Ottoman system of land tenure were central parameters for local configurations of coexistence. The history of Cypriot property relations should therefore be explored for its potential for future solutions rather than seen as an old-fashioned relic of the past.

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Notes

1. This applied primarily to the properties that were subject to agricultural use, like fields, gardens, or grazing grounds. Residential patterns, however, displayed a number of ethnic differences in terms of spatial organization. Muslim villages, as well as Muslim family homesteads in mixed villages, were characterized by a larger inner domestic sphere, given the religious reasons for the spatial segregation of women. In contrast, neighborhood relations in Greek villages tended to be maintained in the open (Charalambous 1998). The rural context also differed from the urban settings of the island’s towns and villages. Here, spatial segregation of ethnic communities was more prevalent, probably due to the occupational specialization of ethnic communities in distinct crafts and trades (Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou 2009: 234).

2. In 1960, the proportion of urban to rural population was 38.1 percent to 61.9 percent (of a total population of 573,500). In 1973, 42.2 percent of Cypriots lived in urban areas, while the rural population amounted to 57.8 percent (of a population of 631,800) (Brey and Heinritz 1988: 12).
3. A state-appointed judge who rules according to Islamic Law.
4. The fact that internal solidarity of local communities and the tax-paying ability of their villages were closely linked is also emphasized by Hadjikyriacou. The levy of a “lump sum” (*maktu*) from entire villages thus necessitated a certain level of cooperation, which was in peril when the economic situation was dire (2011: 277).
5. The summary of the Ottoman Land Code is adapted from the works of Harris (2007: 176ff) and Christodoulou (1959: 72ff).
6. See Jennings (1999) on the established property rights of women in the Ottoman legal system.
7. The “commons” are defined here as those natural resources that are accessible to all members of a local community. It has been the subject of a lengthy debate whether all human societies are bound to deplete the commons through actions of unconstrained individual self-interest (Hardin 1968), or whether traditional or indigenous societies have developed mechanisms to protect and maintain them.
8. Colonialists have usually portrayed the phenomenon of shifting cultivation with negative connotations—a fact that reflects a limited understanding of this form of agriculture. French colonialists termed this method “nomadisme agricole,” Dutch colonialists called it “roofbouw” (robber agriculture) (Dove and Carpenter 2008: 26). In Cyprus, the British colonialists called this method “fitful cultivation” (Harris 2007: 138).
9. Christodoulou gives the following example: “A holding [of water] here refers to each owner’s aggregate holding that is made up of a number of registered rights to irrigation on various occasions in a number of localities within the village area with water from the various divisions of the Kythrea Spring. Such rights are more often held in undivided shares, the co-owners being at times numerous. The largest aggregate holding, amounting to 183 hours every fortnight, is that of a parish church; the least does not exceed 12 seconds in the fortnight. About one-quarter of the owners of water possess neither land nor trees” (Christodoulou 1959: 90).
10. The *dönüm* is an aerial measurement used widely throughout the Ottoman Empire. In Cyprus it came to denote an area of approximately one thousand square meters. The *dönüm* was introduced in the mid-nineteenth century in an effort to standardize, replacing the *çift* as measuring unit for arable land, which defined an area that could be ploughed by a pair of oxen in a day. The *çift* varied throughout the empire according to the climatic and topographical conditions of the locality (İslamoğlu 2004: 297).
11. The tourism industry grew substantially in the years 1966–67, once the upheavals of the conflict of 1963–64 had ebbed. At that time the number of foreign arrivals to Cyprus increased yearly by 25 percent. The northern coast of the island experienced the fastest growth rates of touristic devel-

- opment. By 1974, the district of Kyrenia had recorded the most land sales (Heinritz 1975: 80).
12. In most cases, the construction of hotels followed after the plot of land had changed its proprietor. The first sales of dry land affected the group of “full-time farmers”—Cypriot peasants who depended entirely on agricultural work for income. While the land was purchased for its agricultural value, it was resold following a re-estimation of its value for the building and tourist sectors, often at several times the original price (Heinritz 1975: 81–85).
 13. The number of Turkish villages left deserted was 112, while Turkish Cypriots left 59 of the 146 mixed villages (Heinritz 1975: 89).
 14. Alternative sources cite an even higher number of displaced Turkish Cypriots, estimating a total of 25,000 displaced persons, while only about 2,000 were able to return by 1970 (www.prio-cyprus-displacement.net).
 15. In Ottoman Cyprus, local religious practices tended to blur, rather than accentuate differences of ethno-religious belonging. As in other Mediterranean settings, the peasant context of Cyprus holds numerous examples of shared practices of devotion, common places of worship and even entire syncretic communities. For an involved discussion, see Dietzel (2014).

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