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Contested citizenship in the liminal spaces of a divided Cyprus

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ABSTRACT

This article combines the critical citizenship literature with geographical conceptions of spatial politics to analyse contentions in Cyprus, a context where the basic notions of national community are embroiled in a frozen conflict. It looks at people who are not paradigmatic citizens and juxtaposes the legal dimensions and the lived realities of their citizenship. More specifically, we focus on three communities who are not part of the primary body politic: 1) Greek Cypriots who live in the 'Turkish' North; 2) Turkish Cypriots who live in the 'Greek' South; and 3) asylum-seekers who get stuck in the buffer zone between the two. The article draws on both legal scholarship and fieldwork methods. It makes a case for understanding legal realities through the interplay of law, political conflict dynamics, and people's everyday practices. This interplay generates disparate consequences for different kinds of citizens and non-citizens in Cyprus. On the one hand, being 'out of place' generates precarities. The people concerned experience major rights violations and aspects of de facto statelessness. On the other hand, this same constellation generates political significance in the broader conflict landscape. This raises the political stakes and therefore the ability to attract state attention.

1. Introduction

This article explores the configurations of citizenship in Cyprus, a context where the basic notions of a national community are ensnared in a protracted stand-off over the nature of sovereignty. It does so by looking at people who are not paradigmatic citizens, because they are supposedly 'out of place'. It juxtaposes the legal dimensions and the lived realities of their citizenship. We conceptualise the convoluted realities in Cyprus by drawing on both the critical citizenship literature (Isin 2008; McNevin 2013; Nyers 2006) and interventions in political geography (Green 2018; Klem and Kelegama 2020; Krishna 1994; Yiftachel 2023). By combining these fields of scholarship and applying them to a context where the foundations of sovereign authority are contested and territorially fractured, we add conceptual nuance to debates on citizenship, which – despite their radical critiques – often treat the existence of the state itself as a given. Yet, we know that

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there are many places where the demarcations and the foundations of the state are contested, e.g. embattled borderlands (Ferdoush 2020), contentious settler states (Yiftachel 2023), and de facto states (Ganohariti 2023; Sosnowski and Klem 2023).

Cyprus is split between the rump of its post-colonial state in the South (the Republic of Cyprus, RoC) and a self-declared, Turkish-supported de facto state in the North (the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, TRNC), separated by a UN-controlled buffer zone that has an ambiguous legal status. In complementing the existing scholarship on Cyprus (Bryant and Hatay 2020; Constantinou 2007, 2008; Demetriou 2018; Navaro-Yashin 2012; Trimikliniotis 2019), we focus on people with a citizenship constellation that is anomalous vis-a-vis the prevalent legal and political logic of that landscape: Greek Cypriots who live in the 'Turkish' North, Turkish Cypriots who live in the 'Greek' South, and 'non-Cypriot' migrants and refugees who get stuck in between.[1] We focus our analysis on these groups, because they are the most visible examples of 'anomalous citizenship' in Cyprus, but there are others.[2]

The frozen conflict in Cyprus has arguably created political imperatives *not* to resolve ambivalences and contradictions, to uphold exceptions, to keep outliers in place. This results in an interplay between legal assertions, political scheming and lived realities 'on the ground'. This interplay generates disparate consequences for Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriots and asylum-seekers. Greek Cypriots who live in the North of the island are technically citizens of the TRNC but are simultaneously othered and face major restrictions of their citizenship rights. Turkish Cypriots who live in the South are citizens of the RoC but their constitutional rights have been truncated, both in law and practice. Yet, both groups have also managed to make strategic use of their peculiar position to benefit from the welfare systems of both the RoC and TRNC. Finally, asylum-seekers who get stuck in the buffer zone suffer major violations due to the contradictions and omissions of the legal landscape in Cyprus, but through their protest they stage themselves as right-bearing subjects.

This yields the following paradox. On the one hand, being 'out of place' generates precarities. Each of these three communities experiences major rights violations and sometimes aspects of de facto statelessness. On the other hand, their exceptional position can become a foil for projecting grievances and claiming entitlements. The citizenship constellation of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots represents a major political imperative within the conflict over Cypriot sovereignty. This is not the case for (non-Cypriot) migrants and refugees. The experiences of the three groups thus offer complementary illustrations of the complications around citizenship in a divided Cyprus, but they evidently differ in terms of the issues at hand and the severity of their rights violations. There are legal ambivalences and subaltern acts of citizenship across the convoluted legal-political landscape of Cyprus, but the political space to project rights claims and their political receptiveness depends strongly on one's position in that landscape.

This article has emerged from collaborative work between a legal scholar (Nasia Hadjigeorgiou) and a field-research-oriented social scientist with a background in geography (Bart Klem). Legal outcomes are not simply derivatives of law in our approach but an interplay of diverse force fields. Jurisprudence is vitally important, but it must be analysed in conjunction with political contentions, and the implications of legally ambiguous entities (like the TRNC) and interstitial spaces (like the buffer zone). For our legal research, we relied on RoC and TRNC legal texts, namely the respective

constitutions, case law from domestic and international courts, as well as discussions with legal experts. The social science dimensions of the article relied on life history interviews, observations and in-country life experiences. In total, 42 long interviews were conducted in 2022–2024 with Cypriots on both sides of the divide as well as asylum seekers in the north of Cyprus and the buffer zone. The insights shared in this article also benefited from the lived experiences of the first author, who is a Cypriot citizen permanently based on the island.

2. The ambivalences of citizenship in the context contested sovereignty

Citizenship, Janoski and Brian (2002, 13) summarize, comprises the 'passive and active membership of individuals in a nation-state with universalistic rights and obligations at a specified level of equality'. This basic definition remains useful as an aspiration, but the critical literature highlights that citizenship is also a site of struggle. A community of citizens has rough edges and implied hierarchies, which are then challenged. Rather than merely a matter of determining individual status, claiming one's rights and applying the law, the real-life manifestations of citizenship may be subject to political scheming and countervailing practices. We orient our work around three conceptual interventions, on respectively the notions of accidental citizenship (Nyers 2006), legal ambivalence (McNevin 2013), and acts of citizenship (Isin 2008).

The term 'accidental citizenship' refers to a dubious political move where the status of an 'undesirable' citizen is negated by framing the procedure through which that person was given citizenship as a legal accident. The administrative procedure was followed, but – it is implied – the laws were clearly not meant for this kind of people, e.g. people who are branded as enemies of the state. Nyers (2006) applies this term to controversy over the case of Yaser Esam Hamdi, a Taliban fighter who was captured and imprisoned in Guantanamo as an 'enemy combatant'. He was a US citizen by virtue of being born in the USA, but in view of his combined Islamic extremism and Saudi parents, Hamdi was branded an 'accidental citizen'. He was detained without charge, a severe breach of his citizenship rights. To escape from this perpetual legal no man's land, he was required to renounce his citizenship. Nyers contrasts the notion of accidental citizens with the term 'essential citizens', thus directing us to the troublesome terrain of an implied identitarian core of the national community, which underpins (and if need be: overrides) citizenship laws. Civic citizenship never completely escapes the political forces of ethno-racial inclusion and exclusion.

McNevin (2013) highlights how migrant rights activists in Berlin (some with an insecure temporary status that is endlessly renewed) engage with citizenship norms and rights talk. Human rights norms harbour ambivalences, and these create precarity but also space to act for migrants as 'citizens-in-the-making'. The ambivalence inherent to citizenship norms can thus be made into a political resource. Tensions and contradictions in the administrative system leave scope for individuals to navigate the identity categories to their benefit – a point to which we will return below – but this is not where the emphasis of McNevin's argument lies. She highlights more principled engagement, where migrants draw on the language of citizenship and humanity to push the boundaries of what is administratively possible, what is thinkable. As such, her work draws closely on Isin's notion of 'acts of citizenship'.

The ability to act is central to Isin's (2008) conceptual work on citizenship. Rather than treating citizenship as a straight-forward legal status, he approaches it as an ability to claim rights based not only on one's documented status but also on a transgressive capacity to act. Using poignant historical examples (the Montgomery Bus Boycott; an imprisoned British suffragette pursuing a hunger strike), Isin argues that even people who are not accredited citizens can enact themselves as claimants of citizenship rights. Rather than citizens who claim their legal rights, we thus see people that come to resemble the legal personality of a citizen through their acts of resistance. Considering citizenship as an enactment rather than a status has three implications, he concludes. It means recognizing that acts of citizenship: 1) become manifest 'through their grounds and consequences'; 2) produce actors that are 'answerable to justice'; yet 3) 'do not need to be founded in law or enacted in the name of the law' (Isin 2008, 38–39).

We draw on these three interventions, but the context to which we apply them adds an important dimension. After all, the critical points above are broadly premised on the implied presence of a stable canvas of national states. The workings of law and the delineations of legal rights are under scrutiny, but the sovereign foundations of law are not in doubt. There are questions about stripping Hamdi's citizenship rights (Nyers 2006), but the validity of US law is not in question. There are ambivalences in German immigration law (McNevin 2013), but they do not challenge the legislative authority of the German state per se. The discriminated groups that Isin (2008) describes engage in acts of citizenship to gain foothold in the legal order, often with an ambition to transform that order, but not to altogether supplant and re-demarcate it. This is different in societies that experience conflict over the very fundamentals of the state, where competing claimants to sovereignty project divergent forms of law, state authority and citizenship, which then yields a variegated legal landscape. Examples of such contexts include incompletely recognised states like Kosovo (Krasniqi 2019), Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria (Ganohariti 2023), contested entities in Syria and elsewhere (Sosnowski and Klem 2023), states with Apartheid-resembling citizenship stratifications like Israel and occupied Palestine (Yiftachel 2023) and borderland constellations like the Bangladeshi-Indian border enclaves (Ferdoush 2020; Shewly 2015).

Not surprisingly, several of the above authors are geographers. The workings of state authority and citizenship regimes in these contexts are typically subject to spatial variegation and territorial struggle. We thus need to spatialize the 'accidents', 'ambivalences' and 'acts' of the critical citizenship literature. Geographical scholarship highlights the importance of both spatial imaginaries and territorial configurations as they exist on the ground. Both of these affect questions of citizenship, and the two of course interact.

First, spatial imaginaries are integral to modern state sovereignty and they create diverse subjectivities. In the context of state formation or contestation, such imaginaries often embody national aspirations (e.g. an expansive frontier) and/or precarities (e.g. 'cartographic anxiety', Krishna 1994). These imaginaries yield differentiated citizenship regimes. Some communities are seen as a geographical threat (despite being national citizens) and thus subject to surveillance and control. Other communities are seen to secure politically strategic territories. While protecting state interests in the periphery, these modern frontiersmen may ironically become 'guardian prisoners': they guard the

nation, but their own marginality is reproduced because the state needs them to stay in place (De Koninck 1996; Klem and Kelegama 2020).

Second, the material realities of such contested geographies may engender settlement politics, besieged enclaves and borderlands. These spatial configurations embody highly variegated citizenship configurations in terms of property, mobility and legal personhood. Examples include the deeply securitised landscape of Israel/Palestine (Yiftachel 2023), and the enclave-scape with associated patterns of 'proxy citizens' and 'de facto statelessness' in the Bangladesh-India borderland (Shewly 2015), though some of these anomalies are now being redressed (Ferdoush 2020). Contexts with competing claimants to state sovereignty and enduring forms of temporariness often generate legally ambiguous buffer zones, liminal spaces (Shewly 2015; Yiftachel 2023) and 'one-sided borders', where adjacent territories harbour conflicting interpretations of the line that divides them (Green 2018).

All of these spatial dynamics rear their head in Cyprus. People with characteristics that contravene the logics of the conflict landscape – e.g. because they live on the 'wrong' side of the divide – assume heightened political importance because their plight is linked to the existential struggles of the state itself. Such a context deepens the degree of legal ambivalence that McNevin (2013) writes about. It increases the scope for state authorities to frame unwanted citizenships as accidents, in line with Nyers' (2006) analysis. And it arguably expands the opportunities for Isin's (2008) acts of citizenship.

3. *De facto* and *de jure* fragmentation of citizenship in Cyprus

There is ample good scholarship on the legal and political history of Cyprus (Bryant and Hatay 2020; Constantinou 2007; Demetriou 2018; Navaro-Yashin 2012; Trimikliniotis 2019; Trimikliniotis and Bozkurt 2012). We suffice here with three broad-stroke remarks. First, postcolonial citizenship in Cyprus was conceived as a bicommunal system under one state – despite this being an oversimplification of Cyprus' diverse and intermingled society.[3] Separate, parallel electoral systems were created for the Greek majority and the Turkish minority in Cyprus, with a meticulous power-sharing arrangement for public office. There were also separate communal court systems and distinct provisions for religious matters and personal law. There were thus two different, but constitutionally equal, kinds of citizens right from the moment Cyprus became an independent republic. Other, smaller minorities were subsumed under these broad rubrics: Maronites, Armenians and Latin Catholics (all Christian) were counted as Greek Cypriots; Roma were mostly considered Turkish Cypriots (though they are not recognised as a minority under the Constitution).

Second, this bicommunal system rapidly collapsed. In 1963, the RoC government suspended foundational (and unamendable) clauses of the bicommunal constitution in the name of the 'doctrine of necessity'. The violent skirmishes that followed eventually culminated in the Turkish military invasion of 1974. This caused displacement across the whole of Cyprus and definitively unmixed what had once been an ethnic checkerboard geography into a Greek South and a Turkish North (separated by what became the UN controlled buffer zone). The only exceptions to this unmixing were the continued presence of Greek Cypriots in the remote Karpaz peninsula and small Maronite enclaves in the North, the bicommunal village of Pyla in the buffer

zone, and individual cases of Turkish Cypriots who remained in the South, for whom special measures were taken. Constitutional power-sharing was now definitively in shambles. The North declared itself the Turkish communal half of a federal state to come. Such a federation never materialized, and in 1983, the North unilaterally declared itself an independent state: the TRNC. Turkish Cypriots now became TRNC citizens, voting for the TRNC parliament, ruled under TRNC laws. Yet, the RoC Constitution remained nominally intact, and the RoC continued to claim sovereignty over the North and Turkish Cypriots as its citizens. From 1974 onwards, northern Cyprus experienced significant migration from Turkey (both through Turkish sponsored schemes and spontaneously). While the TRNC considers these people fully fledged citizens, the RoC sees them as hostile settlers. The RoC has restricted its citizenship laws and denies this community the entitlements that 'original' Turkish Cypriots have.[4]

Third, while this split with all its contradictions remains in place until today, a major change occurred in the early 2000s. The so-called Annan peace plan, though ultimately rejected in the South, enkindled a process of rapprochement. The buffer zone became more permeable with the opening of checkpoints and small forms or re-mixing between the two communities followed. The isolation of Greek Cypriot enclaves in the North was lifted and Turkish Cypriot arrivals gained access to citizenship in the South. Many of our observations are consequences of this transition.

In all, Cyprus comprises four jurisdictions, each of which faces fundamental questions about its legitimacy and projects authority that is legitimized through legal exceptions (Constantinou 2008; Trimikliniotis 2019): the RoC (which has truncated its own legal order in defiance of the Constitution), the TRNC (which lacks internationally recognised legality), the buffer zone (a permanent interim arrangement without formal legal status), and the Sovereign Base Areas (British remnants of empire excepted from Cypriot sovereignty). Figure 1 displays a map, but the representation of differently coloured polygons must be considered critically, because it risks flattening the legal-political landscape. The four entities are different kinds of phenomena, some lines are more porous than others, there are accidental and deliberate ambivalences and overlaps.

Much has been written about citizenship questions in Cyprus, including on the 'asymmetry' of citizenship between North and South (Loizides 2011) and the peculiar effects of 'make-believe' citizenship under the self-declared state of the TRNC (Navaro-Yashin 2012), which simultaneously asserts itself and struggles against its own denial (Bryant and Hatay 2020). Demetriou (2018) places the current international migration dynamics and the displacement associated with Cyprus' division within one frame of analysis. She posits that the notions of displacement, 'refugeehood' and postconflict subjectivity are foundational to all gradations of citizenship on Cyprus (and beyond), resulting in an implied conflation of ethnonational othering, political history and legal norms. Fischer (2020) complements these insights by drawing on the critical citizenship literature. Despite the persistent patterns of exclusion and exploitation, he argues, migrants find ways to challenge prevalent subjectivities and intervene in Cypriot conceptions of citizenship. We expand on these interventions by describing the plight of three communities that defy the territorial logics of the Cyprus conflict, which we will discuss in turn below.
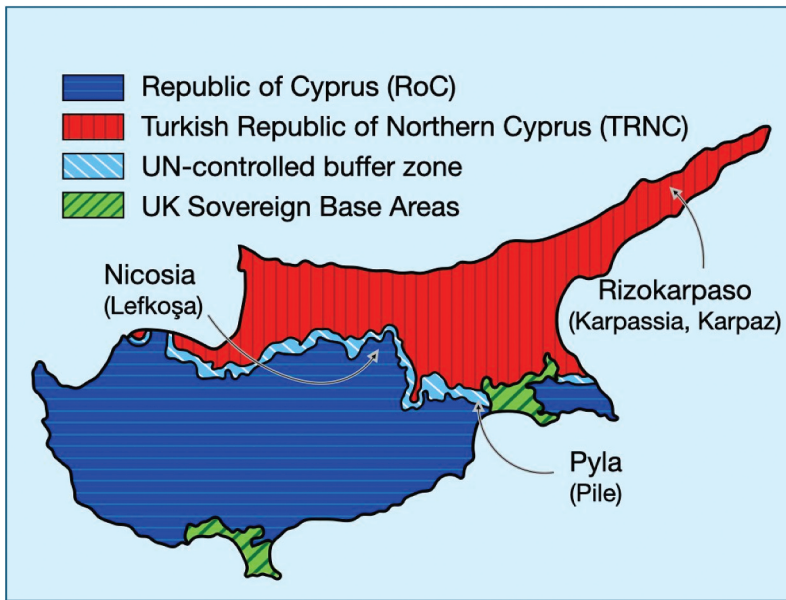
Figure 1. Map of four jurisdictions in Cyprus.

4. Greek Cypriots in the TRNC

This first empirical section focuses on the Greek Cypriots who have been enclaved on the Karpaz peninsula, the northernmost part of Cyprus. The enclaved lived in exclusively Greek Cypriot villages – the largest of which is Rizokarpaso – and, unlike most Greek Cypriots, they refused to leave their houses following the 1974 Turkish invasion. They became anomalous inhabitants of the self-declared entity in the North, and their relatively privileged position in terms of socio-economy (many were land owners) and language (many Turkish Cypriots in the area spoke Greek, and some *only* spoke Greek) transformed into one of precarity. Their original population of roughly 2,000 has dwindled to 272 today (Secretary-General 2024: §42). From the outset, the survival of these Greek Cypriots was dependent on assistance from the United Nations, which sent weekly food packages (paid for by the RoC), a practice that still continues. They also receive a monthly stipend from the RoC. Financially, they are thus better off than their Turkish neighbours, who are often post-1974 Turkish immigrants from marginal Anatolian communities.

Yet, the enclaved face significant restrictions in their civil liberties. Between 1974 and the opening of the checkpoints in 2003, they lived in harsh conditions, we were told in interviews. They faced violence, killings and extreme restrictions on their movements. For Greek Cypriots to leave Rizokarpaso 'for even the most mundane of reasons' (*Cyprus V. Turkey* 2001: §294), such as visiting the close-by Apostolos Andreas monastery or their fields and cattle right outside the village, they needed to obtain a written permit from the TRNC authorities. Permissions to cross the buffer zone into the South were granted rarely (especially to boys and men who were considered security threats) and those remaining in the South for longer than a few days, risked losing the right to return to the North (Cyprus V. Turkey 2001: §292). These restrictions eased in 2003 after the

opening of the checkpoints, because daily arrivals of Greek Cypriots from the South made it impossible for the TRNC to police the whereabouts of the enclaved, who were no longer sticking out as the only non-Turkish Cypriots in the area. As a result, since 2003, the enclaved no longer face restrictions of movement. In fact, some now work in the RoC, but claim that they are permanently residing in Rizokarpaso, thus continuing to receive financial benefits as enclaved persons.

The TRNC authorities acknowledged the existence of the enclaved from early on by issuing them ID cards. Unlike the standard TRNC ID cards, however, which were printed on red paper, the enclaved had blue IDs, thus signalling that they were 'other' citizens of the TRNC. While their status is highly deliberate, their plight resonates with the notion of accidental citizenship in the sense that their very presence in the TRNC is considered a historical accident from a Turkish Cypriot perspective, which then results in ethno-religious identity overriding civic status. Blue ID card holders are, in the words of one Turkish Cypriot interviewee, 'citizens with a special status' as they enjoy more rights than third country nationals, most notably the right to permanent residence, but still face restrictions. Most significantly, the enclaved have no voting rights in TRNC elections. Greek Cypriots have never complained about this, since voting would contradict their rejection of TRNC legitimacy and might compromise their support from the RoC. They enact themselves as non-citizens, or at least as very reluctant citizens, of the TRNC.

Enclaved Greek Cypriots also face restrictions to their right to education in their native language. After 1974, a primary school continued operating, but no school building or teachers were available for secondary education (Cyprus V. Turkey 2001: §278), until 2004. Greek Cypriot 12-year olds had to decide whether to permanently end their education so that they could stay in the North, or attend secondary school in the South. Those who opted to continue with their education stayed for months, sometimes even years, in orphanage-like establishments that the RoC had set up for enclaved children. Their parents remained in the North, as moving to the South for even a few months would result in them losing all their property rights (Cyprus V. Turkey 2001: §292). The situation was especially difficult for boys, who were not allowed to return to the North – even upon asking for a special permit – after they turned 16 (Cyprus V. Turkey 2001: §43). From 1990 onwards, the RoC closed down these establishments, and enclaved children were allowed to study in the South temporarily, as long as one parent left the North and stayed with them there. Until 2004, the choice for many enclaved families was thus between receiving secondary school education, or keeping the family together (Cyprus V. Turkey 2001: §44). These restrictions on the rights of the enclaved were inherently connected to the nation-building project that was taking place in the TRNC, to which Greek Cypriots were considered to be an obstruction.

The enclaved are akin to the 'guardian prisoners' described in the literature on ethnic frontiers (De Koninck 1996; Klem and Kelegama 2020): they protect a national interest as spatial occupants of strategic territory, but their own lives are curtailed in the process. The RoC sought to fixate them in the North, despite the hardship that this generated, because it maintained its narrative of Greek Cypriots as the occupied victims (who could also serve as a bargaining chip in future negotiations). In the early years after 1974, Greek Cypriots received all their information about political developments from RoC official sources, who told the enclaved that the Cyprus problem would be resolved 'any day now', thus encouraging them to stay in the North. As one 87-year-old enclaved interviewee put

it when asked why they opted to stay in Rizokarpaso, 'we thought this was going to be over very quickly. We didn't realise that the Turks would stay for a whole lifetime'. Moreover, when the secondary school became operational in Rizokarpaso, RoC authorities told the enclaved families with children attending school in the South that they had to return to the North and use the school there, otherwise they would lose their RoC status as enclaved persons.[5]

This peculiar constellation also provides scope for the enclaved to navigate identity categories in both the North and the South and receive unexpected advantages. Selectively using ethno-religious identities in a flexible and pragmatic manner is a strategy with long historical roots in Cyprus (Constantinou 2007). Two examples illustrate the use of such tactics by the enclaved. The first concerns financial incentives that the RoC provides to farmers cultivating lands in remote parts of the country. Among the beneficiaries of this scheme are the enclaved in Rizokarpaso (a practice that substantiates the RoC'c claim to sovereignty over the North). While they inform the RoC that they are cultivating their fields, we were told that they often rent these plots to Turkish farmers, who are not eligible for financial assistance from the RoC. Such a collaboration between Greek Cypriot 'patriots' and the Turkish 'invaders' contradicts dominant political narratives, but both in fact see themselves as marginalised TRNC subjects. As one Greek Cypriot interviewee explained:

> I know you are not going to hear many people say this as it's not very politically correct, but in the same way the enclaved were excluded, so were the [Turkish] settlers. Neither are proper Turkish Cypriot. So, many of the problems that were faced by one group, were also faced by the other.

The second, rarer, example of navigating identity categories to their benefit involves Greek Cypriot enclaved women, who have had a child with a Turkish Cypriot. It is common practice in these cases, that the couple obtains a birth certificate from the TRNC, which provides the child with a red ID card and full citizenship rights in the North. At the same time, the Greek Cypriot mother may declare to the RoC that she has given birth to an enclaved baby with an unknown father. Through its RoC birth certificate, the child becomes a full citizen of the RoC and is, therefore, entitled to all rights of an enclaved person (monthly stipend; weekly food parcel) as well as EU citizenship. By navigating identity categories, and sharing only part of the truth with each set of authorities, the parents provide their child with a status that defies both the RoC and TRNC Constitutions. The child is considered a Greek Cypriot in the RoC and a Turkish Cypriot in the TRNC, thus enjoying full rights and acceptance throughout the island. Such rights and acceptance are currently unavailable to the Greek Cypriot mother in the TRNC and the Turkish Cypriot father in the RoC.

In sum, the Greek Cypriot community of Karpaz has an anomalous citizenship constellation – yielding both precarity and opportunities – which has morphed with the dynamics of conflict and peace-making in Cyprus. As peripheral 'stayed behind' Greek Cypriots, they may be seen as accidental citizens to the TRNC and as such they precipitate administrative workarounds, though not in the complete rights-negating manner that we see in Nyers' (2006) work. Rather, they gain a truncated citizen status in the TRNC, while retaining their citizenship in the RoC. Despite facing restrictions, they manage to position themselves as strategic occupants of territory. The resulting

exceptions, tensions and ambivalences in the legal framework enable them to claim entitlements, much in line with McNevin (2013) and Isin (2008). While their claims allude to principled assertions of citizenship, there is also a utilitarian element of maximizing personal interests. The inconsistency between the RoC and TRNC citizenship regimes offers them scope to navigate different identity categories and secure benefits from both sides.

5. Turkish Cypriots in the RoC

Even though the RoC has been exclusively controlled by Greek Cypriots since 1963, on paper it remains a bicommunal state, committed to treating all its citizens equally – through the 1960 Constitution that remains in place. Yet, both in law and fact, the RoC has been treating Turkish Cypriots less favourably than other ethnic groups (see footnote 4 for details). This has resulted in differences even within the Turkish Cypriot community living in the South. This section is concerned with three groups of Turkish Cypriots: (1) those who stayed in the RoC following the 1974 invasion (this group resembles the mirror image of enclaved Greek Cypriots); (2) those who are residing in the bicommunal village of Pyla, located within the UN-controlled buffer zone; and (3) those who lived in the North after 1974, but opted to move to the South after the checkpoints opened in 2003. Ironically, the Turkish Cypriots in the first category (who were arguably the most faithful to the RoC) have faced the most discrimination, while the latter two groups appear more proficient at turning administrative complications to their benefit.

Approximately 2,000 Turkish Cypriots continued residing in the RoC after 1974. By deciding not to move to the North, and sometimes even continuing to work for the government, these Turkish Cypriots arguably expressed loyalty to the RoC. Yet, instead of showcasing this group as proof that it is indeed the country of all Cypriots, the RoC has treated them as 'accidental citizens', who are somehow undeserving of full citizenship. This is most vividly illustrated by the restrictions to the voting rights of these Turkish Cypriots. Under the 1960 Constitution, Greek and Turkish Cypriots were registered in two separate electoral registers. Those in the Greek Cypriot electoral register voted for the President of the RoC and 70% of the House of Representatives, and those in the Turkish Cypriot electoral register for the Vice-President and the remaining 30% of the legislature (Constitution of the RoC 1960, Articles 1 and 72). When in 1963, the Turkish Cypriots left their positions in the RoC government, the Supreme Court (which by then, consisted exclusively of Greek Cypriot judges) relied on a novel legal principle – the 'doctrine of necessity' – and held that the Constitution could continue operating, even without the involvement of Turkish Cypriot officials (*Attorney-General of the Republic V. Mustafa Ibrahim and Others 1964*; Hadjigeorgiou and Kyriakou 2020; Özersay 2005). Since the position of the Vice-President and the Turkish Cypriot seats in the House of Representatives remained vacant, the Turkish Cypriot electoral register became defunct. This disenfranchised Turkish Cypriots who had opted to stay in the RoC.

In subsequent years, Turkish Cypriots proposed that since the RoC effectively had a single electoral register, which also included all naturalised Cypriots, then Turkish Cypriots residing in the RoC could also be included in it. The Supreme Court rejected the argument, finding that the 1960 Constitution already provided mechanisms through which Turkish Cypriots were allowed to vote (*Aziz V. Cyprus 2004*: §21–22).

This stance cold-shouldered the applicant's claim that these mechanisms had not been used – and indeed could not be used because of the 'doctrine of necessity' – since 1964. The case ultimately reached the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which held that this state of affairs was in violation of the right to vote and the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of ethnicity (*Aziz V. Cyprus 2004*: §30 and §38). The RoC complied with the ECtHR's judgment and amended the relevant legislation, thus allowing Turkish Cypriots permanently residing in the RoC to vote via the Greek Cypriot electoral register (Law 2(I) 2006). Turkish Cypriots are allowed to vote in all elections and run as candidates in legislative and municipal elections (though, in practice, almost no one does), but even today they cannot run for the position of President of the RoC.

A second category of Turkish Cypriots are those who were living in the village Pyla, which ended up in the UN-controlled buffer zone in 1974. The buffer zone is a demilitarised area of land that makes up approximately 3% of the island of Cyprus, and separates the RoC and the TRNC (Secretary-General 2018: §4). Unlike other buffer zones in the world, the Cypriot buffer zone is not empty. Within it are agricultural lands and five villages: four are inhabited by Greek Cypriots, and the fifth, Pyla, is bicommunal, meaning that it has been the home of both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots since before 1974 (Papadakis 2005). Although technically, the buffer zone around Pyla falls in the areas that are under the effective control of the RoC (Hadjigeorgiou 2023), the UN presence in the village has prevented the displacement of Turkish Cypriots. Pyla is thus a liminal space in a contested borderland (cf Green 2018; Shewly 2015) and this yields a whole range of ambivalences (along the lines of McNevin 2013). This enables Turkish Cypriots to negotiate a different relationship with the RoC.

Like the Turkish Cypriots living in the 'RoC proper', the Turkish Cypriots of Pyla have not had the right to vote or run for elections. However, a difference between the two groups is that the Turkish Cypriots of Pyla – like the enclaved in Rizokarpaso – have generally not been interested in participating in RoC elections because it would legitimise a state that at least some of them reject on principle. Because of their proximity and ability to access the North, this group of Turkish Cypriots have traditionally had much closer relations to the TRNC than Turkish Cypriots living in the RoC proper. From 1974 to 2003, they were the only Cypriots able to travel both to the North and South of Cyprus without any restrictions.[6] Moreover, Pyla has two mukhtars (village leaders), one Greek Cypriot and one Turkish Cypriot, as well as two primary schools – respectively delivering the RoC curriculum in Greek and the TRNC curriculum in Turkish.

Another unique characteristic of the village is that RoC uniformed police are not allowed to enter Pyla. If there is criminal activity involving Greek Cypriot perpetrators and victims, RoC police in civilian clothes, with United Nations Police (UNPOL) assistance, are tasked with investigating. If there is criminal activity exclusively involving Turkish Cypriots, the TRNC police (with UNPOL) will deal with the matter (Secretary-General 2017: §46). Cases that involve members of both communities (the vast majority) create the most significant challenges (Secretary-General 2017: §12). In such cases, UNPOL takes the lead and seeks to informally coordinate simultaneous action from both the RoC and TRNC police. However, instances of successful bicommunal collaboration are rare, and this makes Pyla a crime hotspot. The village, with a population of 1,200 persons, boasts eight illegal casinos, which are known fronts for money laundering

and human trafficking (Secretary-General 2017: §15). The willingness of criminals to cooperate evidently exceeds that of Cypriot law enforcement.

Navigating identity categories to one's benefit is also evident in more quotidian walks of life. The Turkish Cypriots of Pyla refuse to pay their electricity bills to the RoC-controlled Cyprus Electricity Authority, arguing that this would be an indirect legitimation of a state they do not recognize. Unable to do much about it, the RoC has accepted this state of affairs and negotiated with the TRNC that, in return, Greek Cypriots enclaved in the North would also not pay for their electricity. In practice, these two exceptional communities have unlimited access to free electricity, while all other people struggle to pay soaring electricity prices. For a similar reason – not recognizing the RoC – the Turkish Cypriots of Pyla do not apply to the RoC authorities for building permits. Such principled concerns disappear, however, in cases where interacting with the RoC benefits them. Turkish Cypriots, for example, routinely apply to the RoC for agricultural subsidies.

The third category of Turkish Cypriots comprises those who moved (back) to the RoC from the North when the checkpoints opened in 2003. These Turkish Cypriots gained full citizenship in the RoC and carry the same documents as their fellow Greek Cypriot citizens, but some of their constitutional entitlements as a community have been disabled. They no longer face discrimination in relation to their voting rights, since shortly after the opening of the checkpoints, *Aziz* was decided and the ECtHR's judgment was implemented by the RoC. Nevertheless, they have faced restrictions in their education rights. The RoC refuses to allow Turkish Cypriots to be educated in their native language. This starkly contrasts the lengths that it has gone to in ensuring the provision of education in Greek for the enclaved in the North.

The conflict over the language of instruction escalated to the RoC Supreme Court (Kibris Turk Ilkokul Ogretmenler V. Attorney General 2008). The Court rejected an application from the Cyprus Turkish Teachers Trade Union, who demanded a Turkish school in the South. Specifically, it held that there was no violation of the right to education, as the RoC had made adequate provisions for the education of children from the Turkish Cypriot community, through the existing school system. Following the case, the RoC continued to rebuff pressure from the UN to create a Turkish Cypriot school. In practice, it has addressed the education issue by covering the fees of private (English-medium) schools for Turkish Cypriots residing in the South, who refuse to be educated in Greek. An English education does not give Turkish Cypriots what they are entitled to (education in their native tongue), but it provides them with a significant advantage. Without charge, they attend an elite private school, that is arguably of a higher quality and reputation than an average public school of the RoC.

In sum, despite being a constitutionally anchored community, RoC authorities have denied Turkish Cypriots their constitutional rights, treated them like intruders and responded to protests and court rulings with work-arounds, exceptions and compromises. Different categories of Turkish Cypriots have faced different types of discrimination in the RoC. Paradoxically, Turkish Cypriots who never left the South and who are, in the RoC's narrative, its most loyal supporters suffered the most serious violations. The Turkish Cypriots who returned to the South after the opening of the checkpoints experienced less serious forms of discrimination, because the most serious issues (like the right to vote) had largely been remedied by then. This also holds for the Turkish

Cypriots of Pyla, who have arguably been best positioned to navigate different identity categories to their benefit.

Much in line with Nyers' (2006) notion of accidental citizens, Turkish Cypriots in the RoC were originally full-fledged citizens under the Constitution, but in response to the political circumstances, the RoC treated their constitutional existence as an accident that needed to be redressed in the name of the 'doctrine of necessity'. This resulted in an ambivalent administrative constellation that yielded both benefits and problems for the people concerned. Some of their positioning resonates with Isin's (2008) acts of citizenship – for example, the assertion of being present in the country as a basis to claim Turkish Cypriot voting rights in the RoC (which then led to the *Aziz* case). In many other cases, we see the (selective) use of principled arguments for much more mundane utilitarian purposes (gambling business, evading electricity bills) and outcomes (accessing prestigious English-medium schools).

6. Asylum-seekers in the buffer zone

Asylum-seekers are a third community who do not neatly fit in the dominant ethno-territorial categories in Cyprus. Complementing recent work on asylum-seekers in the RoC (Achiri and Klem 2024; Fischer 2020; Trimikliniotis 2019), we focus here on those who arrive via the TRNC and cross the buffer zone. Simply put, there are two groups of asylum-seekers who travel to or via the TRNC. One group travel by boat to then land – irregularly – on the Northern shores. When caught, they are routinely detained and deported to Turkey. A second group arrive in a regular manner, typically by plane, either as labour migrants or international students at one of the 20-or-so universities in the North. A small percentage of these migrants (which nonetheless comprises a large number of people) simultaneously qualify as asylum-seekers, due to war in their country or grounded fear for persecution. Some of these people may have intended from the outset to travel onwards to the RoC; many others try to work or study in the TRNC, but then lose their job, face financial difficulties and/or drop out of university, and thus lose their legal right to remain in the TRNC. Due to regular police round-ups, these people risk deportation.

Some manage to get support from UNHCR, but this comes with significant limitations and complications. Given the non-recognized nature of the TRNC, it is not a signatory to international refugee or human rights conventions. To avoid implied recognition, UNHCR refrains from entering the TRNC and instead operates via a proxy organization. Even asylum-seekers who are recognized by UNHCR as being at risk of persecution in their country of origin thus do not receive refugee status in the TRNC, and they are left without legal protection. Instead, they are offered an informal status as a 'Person of Concern'. This is effectively a de facto status within a state that itself has a de facto status, and thus leaves these people in a highly precarious condition (Achiri and Klem 2024; Klem 2025). Given these difficulties, a large number of people try crossing the porous boundary to apply for asylum in the RoC. Until 2023, the TRNC did not require pre-travel visas from almost any country's nationals. The de facto status of the TRNC, coupled with this lax legal procedures and the porous buffer zone, provided a pathway into the RoC, an EU member state. By consequence, Cyprus is the country receiving the most asylum applications per capita among all EU Member States (AIDA, Asylum

Information Database 2023). Until the recent tightening of restrictions, almost 9 out of 10 of these asylum-seekers entered the RoC through the buffer zone, according to the RoC's Press and Information Office (2021).

It is no coincidence that asylum-seekers sometimes get stuck in the UN-controlled buffer zone. The contradictions and ambivalences of the RoC and TRNC migration regimes get entangled with each other, and this becomes especially clear on the boundary between the two jurisdictions. This is arguably a 'one-sided border' (cf. Green 2018): a border to the TRNC, a temporary frontline to the RoC. There are nine crossings between the RoC and the TRNC, but these cannot be used by asylum-seekers. They therefore cross the buffer zone through unpoliced fields, sometimes with the help of human smugglers. In the discourse of the RoC authorities, the buffer zone is no border, and even if they see the need to police it, they want to avoid the impression that it is one. By the same logic, they consider the buffer zone part of the RoC's sovereign territory. After all, it is not occupied by Turkey (unlike the North). By implication, the RoC has legal responsibility for what happens in the buffer zone and this includes refugee law: if individuals find themselves in the buffer zone (whether through regular or irregular means), they should be able to apply to the RoC for asylum (Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe 2024). In fact, this is what was happening before COVID-19, but checkpoints were closed during the pandemic and when they re-opened, the RoC no longer accepted asylum applications at the checkpoints (Secretary-General 2021: §41).

Like so many things in Cyprus, migrant arrivals through the buffer zone are understood through the lens of the Cyprus conflict. The buffer zone is the focal point of the RoC's 'cartographic anxiety', to use Krishna's (1994) term, and RoC authorities presume that Turkey and the TRNC deliberately *send* migrants via the buffer zone to the South (Hadjigeorgiou 2022; Fischer 2020). As mentioned earlier, one of the biggest historical grievances of the RoC after 1974, is the in-migration of Turkish 'settlers' to the occupied North, which it sees as a deliberate attempt to alter the ethnic demography. Migrant entries through the buffer zone are portrayed as an extension of this dynamic. Thus, a RoC Minister responsible for migration lambasted asylum-seekers arriving via the TRNC and stated: 'there is a danger that in [the Republic of] Cyprus, a Muslim minority will be created [...] There are settlers in the free areas' (Polydorou 2019).

When asylum-seekers get stranded in the buffer zone, it creates a raft of peculiarities and precarities. A first case occurred when an Iranian man got stuck in the buffer zone, soon followed by a situation that attracted some media attention: four asylum-seekers from Cameroon were stuck in the buffer zone for 6 months in 2021, living in tents that had been provided by the UN and relying on charity to survive. Of the four, two gave up waiting for help, and their tracks were lost – presumably they successfully crossed into the RoC, where they remained as irregular migrants. The remaining two left in a more eye-catching manner when the Pope made an official state visit to Cyprus. Hearing of the story of Cameroonian Christians being stuck, he offered them asylum in the Vatican, to where they travelled a few days later (France24 2021). Arguably, it was the performative spectacle of precarity, through the absurdity of camping in supposed 'no man's land', that precipitated this opportunity.

Over the last 3 years, the RoC has further hardened its stance on asylum-seekers who arrive through the buffer zone. One Kurdish asylum-seeker from Turkey tried to cross in

2023. In our interview with him, he explained that he and a companion jumped down from the ramparts of Nicosia's medieval walled city into the buffer zone near the Ledra Palace crossing. They presented themselves at the RoC checkpoint, but they were told that it is not possible to apply for asylum. The officers indicated that they would be able to make an asylum claim if they somehow (i.e. irregularly) made their way into the RoC. His companion disappeared soon after, but he stayed. He did not want to cross irregularly, neither did he want to return to TRNC, where he would likely be arrested for illegally entering the buffer zone. In both cases, he worried he would risk being deported to Turkey. Stranded in the narrow strip of no man's land in the heart of Nicosia, he ended up camping in an abandoned parking lot of the adjacent UN compound. UN staff gave him a tent and some essentials. He was stuck for 9 months and staged several hunger strikes. In close resonance with Isin's (2008) notion of 'acts of citizenship', this asylum-seeker visibly presented himself as a rights-bearing person to an international audience – the Ledra Palace checkpoint, where he was squatting, is home to the UN compound and the bicommunal meeting point Home for Cooperation and is a crossing that is frequently used by officials, lawyers, academics and civil society activists. Ultimately, this absurd and disturbing spectacle had effect: he was given access to the RoC asylum procedures after pressure from the UNHCR and UN peacekeepers (Secretary-General 2024: §51).

New incidents continued to occur. In the summer of 2024, a group of 57 asylum-seekers, including children, were intercepted by the RoC authorities in the buffer zone and prevented from entering the RoC proper. The asylum-seekers were finally given access to the RoC in November 2024 on the understanding that they would immediately be taken in by other European countries. This 'humanitarian' decision followed an intervention from the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe (2024), as well as a recently decided case of the ECtHR definitively finding that the RoC's pushbacks at sea were in violation of the European Convention (*M.A and Z. R. V. Cyprus* 2024).

The TRNC may seem like a convenient route into the European Union, but those who make it to the RoC often find themselves disappointed. The conditions in the main reception centre (Pournara camp) are known to be despicable. Those who find their way out end up living precarious lives with major restrictions (including the inability to work legally). In addition, most successful applicants are typically granted 'subsidiary protection', which can be revoked and does not allow for family reunification, rather than full refugee status. Even then, they are typically unable to travel to another EU country, since the RoC is not in Schengen and EU countries rarely grant visas to refugees (Fischer 2020). The Kurdish asylum-seeker mentioned above also ended up in Pournara camp, where he was appalled by the conditions. The last thing we heard is that he roams the streets of (South) Nicosia as a homeless, unemployed person, unable to travel anywhere. He went on hunger strike again. In some of his messages to us, he writes that supposedly civilized states like the RoC and the EU are just as bad as Turkey. Indeed, some people who have successfully crossed the buffer zone into the RoC, cross back into the TRNC (from where they are typically deported to Turkey). Others agree to be repatriated by the RoC.

Much like the Greek Cypriots living in the TRNC and the Turkish Cypriots living in the RoC, asylum-seekers in the buffer zone push boundaries and reveal contradictions. Their very presence challenges the legal-territorial assumptions of the RoC, the TRNC and the UN-controlled buffer zone. They expose the implications of having several

competing and overlapping jurisdictions on one island. In part, the unresolved nature of the Cyprus conflict facilitates migration flows. The peculiar constellation of the TRNC, as an unrecognized state with an (until recently) highly permissive visa regime and a highly porous de facto border with the RoC, attracts large numbers of migrants including a significant number of asylum-seekers. Yet, that same constellation also yields major problems, precarities and human rights violations for migrants and asylum-seekers. This becomes particularly pronounced when asylum-seekers get stuck in the buffer zone. The territory under their feet is itself legally ambivalent and the legal contradictions between the RoC and the TRNC in effect disable rights that are supposed to be universal and non-derogable – including the right to apply for asylum. These cases are treated like accidents, but when such accidents continue to happen, they become a pattern that is arguably no longer accidental.

7. Conclusions

In this article, we have engaged with the concepts of accidental citizenship (Nyers 2006), the ambivalence of legal citizenship regimes (McNevin 2013) and the notion of acts of citizenship (Isin 2008). To make sense of different kinds of supposedly out-of-place subjects in Cyprus, we have combined these ideas with insights from Political Geography (Green 2018; Klem and Kelegama 2020; Krishna 1994; Shewly 2015; Yiftachel 2023). As a country riven by conflict and composed of competing and partly overlapping jurisdictions, Cyprus has a variegated legal landscape. This has a raft of implications for questions of citizenship and political subjectivity. The three communities that we describe have complex citizenship constellations, because different legal-administrative norms contradict each other and/or because exceptional measures are taken to include them into – or exclude them from – a particular citizenship regime.

Our first community – the Greek Cypriot community in the TRNC – expose the 'cartographic anxiety' (Krishna 1994) of both North and South. They challenge the TRNC's claim as a state founded exclusively for the Turkish Cypriot community. Vice versa, they are occupants of strategic territory for the RoC. As such, they resemble the agrarian frontiersmen described by De Koninck (1996). As 'guardian prisoners' they are simultaneously treated with privilege and restraint. As an enclaved community, the Karpaz Greeks suffered long periods of hardship, but their strategic territorial location also created opportunities for 'acts of citizenship', of both a principled kind (to claim rights of mobility, family, education) and of a more utilitarian kind (strategically navigating the incentives of the welfare system as special citizens).

The Turkish Cypriots living in the RoC are 'in place' constitutionally speaking, as one of the two communities that compose the RoC, but given that these constitutional clauses are subject to a permanent exception legitimised by the 'doctrine of necessity', they are in effect treated as anomalous and out of place. As an extension to Nyers' (2006) argument, the whole notion of Turkish-Cypriot citizenship was arguably treated like an accident after 1963. The laws that define them as foundational RoC citizens remain intact, but in the name of state security, exceptional legal and political measures have been taken to exempt this citizenship category. Because of their presence on RoC-controlled soil, they prompt a whole welter of citizenship-related 'ambivalences' (McNevin 2013). The legal work-arounds that the RoC has come up with are premised on a post-split assumption of

an occupied Turkish North and a South without Turkish-Cypriots, which renders a range of provisions moot, e.g. the right to vote on the Turkish register, the right to education in Turkish. But through their very presence as right-claiming citizens, Turkish Cypriots in the RoC falsify these premises. These ambivalences afford space for Turkish Cypriots in the RoC to enact themselves as its citizens, thus causing the RoC to provide different forms of redress.

The third community – asylum-seekers who get stuck in the buffer zone – face the most severe forms of hardship. They find themselves in an ambiguous legal territory. Given the TRNC's peculiar status as a self-declared state, basic concepts like refugee, jurisdictional responsibility and non-refoulement are not straight-forward (Achiri and Klem 2024). The buffer zone is defined by provisional arrangements that did not anticipate the (protracted) presence of third country nationals. And because of the contradictions between RoC and TRNC law, the buffer zone in effect becomes a 'one-sided border' (Green 2018) – a national border for the TRNC, a frontline of the occupation for the RoC. As an analogy to Nyers' term, these people are treated like 'accidental refugees' – they are refugees under a universal set of norms, but the RoC's spatial imaginaries and practices the very possibility of presenting oneself as a refugee in the buffer zone is negated. Yet, through their physical presence in that stretch of supposed no-man's land (and much in line with Isin 2008), these refugees visibly enact themselves as right-bearing subjects of the Refugee Convention, thus exposing the legal contradictions and neglect of the state.

Our material underlines the highly variegated nature of citizenship constellations in Cyprus, and it highlights people's ability to navigate the convoluted legal-political land-scape of a divided country. Their bundle of duties and entitlements is not simply a derivative of the law. It emerges from the continuous interaction between legal frame-works, political scheming and everyday practice. At the same time, it is clear that the agentic space for manoeuvre is highly constrained and that this space is not evenly distributed. All three communities experience structural violence, but this is especially severe for the asylum-seekers whom we have described, and there are big differences between and within the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities that we have discussed.

Combining the critical citizenship literature with insights from Political Geography thus offers us a helpful conceptual idiom to analyse the contested citizenship constella-tions of a country riven by competing jurisdictions. Vice versa, the Cypriot context – with its contested patchwork of jurisdictional responsibility and the complications of a de facto state – adds new impetus to the critical citizenship literature.

First, there is an unusually large propensity for framing citizenship as an accident. Much of the discussion on this term has revolved around the negated citizenship of individuals (an American Taliban fighter in Nyers 2006). The context of a state that is locked in a conflict over sovereign fundamentals affords scope to frame the citizenship of whole population groups as accidents that warrant special treatment. This is evident in both the plight of the Turkish Cypriot community in the RoC and the negation of refugee rights of persons who irregularly enter the RoC through the buffer zone. This helps keep in check the fiction of the South as a homogeneous – or at least non-Turkish – entity. In contrast, the enclaved Greek-Cypriots in the TRNC stand out as essential RoC

citizens (in Nyers' terms). Given their special status, it may even be apt to consider them as *quint*essential citizens of the Republic: outside the RoC's territorial control but vital as living proof to the claim of the whole island (minus the Sovereign Base Areas) is RoC territory, and therefore subject to special privileges and restrictions.

Second, all citizenship regimes comprise ambivalences, and thus space for acts of citizenship, but the Cypriot context evinces an unusually high degree of ambivalence, due to the contradictions between two competing and overlapping citizenship regimes (the RoC and the TRNC) and the concurrent rift between legal projections and ground realities. The RoC keeps its bicommunal constitution in check but is reluctant to grant Turkish Cypriots all the entitlements encoded in it, and therefore resorts to improvised solutions, work-arounds, administrative delays. This is most evident in Pyla, where the RoC and TRNC systems operate within one village. However, with the rapidly growing presence of Turkish Cypriots in the South after the opening of the checkpoints along the buffer zone in the 2000s, state improvisation around Turkish Cypriot entitlements has become widespread. Facilitating access to elite English-medium schools to avoid having to run Turkish-medium schools is one example. The special arrangements for the Karpaz Greeks in the North in terms of schooling and agrarian subsidies – provided by the RoC, condoned by the TRNC – are another.

The important point here is that these ambivalences are not incidental cracks in the system, an oversight of the administration. Some administrative arrangements need to *remain* ambivalent, because resolving the contradictions at hand would create or expose a problem. As an incomplete state pursuing recognition, the TRNC needs problems with the RoC to be in place to legitimize its existence (Bryant and Hatay 2020). And the RoC, as a half-occupied state that legitimizes a fundamental truncation of its constitution through the doctrine of necessity, needs the exceptional conditions creating that 'necessity'. The inhabitants of Cyprus know this and they are, therefore, also able to attract state attention or promulgate state action through their claims and positions. Some of the resulting tactics are of a utilitarian kind. In Karpaz, the Greek-Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots with a 'settler' background collaborate using the identity of the former to attract subsidies while using the labour of the latter to work the fields. Inhabitants of Pyla tactically opt in or out of the RoC's administrative system to reap benefits and dodge bills.

Other claims are of a more principled kind. They assert fundamental rights and expose government hypocrisy and legal inconsistency. These assertions may thus be seen as acts of citizenship. The case of *Aziz* evinces a demonstrative refusal to accept the fiction of the RoC as a country exclusively inhabited by Greek-Cypriot citizens, a deliberate insistence to remain present as a Turkish Cypriot and claim the rights resulting from that in a court of law. In terms of street-level acts of citizenship, the rights-claiming practices of refugees in the buffer zone stand out. The RoC authorities claim that the buffer zone is its territory and that the ceasefire lines are not borders, yet they deny the right to apply for asylum to those who find themselves stranded there. The TRNC does not recognise refugees as a legal concept at all. Through their protracted and visible presence in the buffer zone, refugees enact themselves as right-bearing subjects, thus exposing the voids and contradictions inherent to the stance of both governments.

Notes

1. The 1960 RoC Constitution uses the terms Greeks and Turks, rather than Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. We use the latter terms, which have gained widespread currency, because the former terminology conflates Greeks in/from Greece with Greek Cypriots and Turks in/from Turkey with Turkish Cypriots.
2. The (Christian) Maronite community living in Kormakitis (in the North) and Roma people in different parts of the island similarly defy the imposed territorialised citizenship structure that prevails in Cyprus (Constantinou 2007).
3. Using the binary of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots is indispensable to an easy-to-follow introduction to Cyprus, and it is the language of the Constitution. Yet, this terminological pair offers a simplified picture and replicates the categorization that arguably stood at the root of the Cyprus problem, by subsuming other identity groups and by erasing the long history of syncretism, mixture and mobility (see Constantinou 2007 on Linobambakoi). Even today, there are children of mixed marriages between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots.
4. More specifically, Article 109 of the RoC Population Records Law (14(I)/2002) provides that anyone born in Cyprus to one Cypriot parent is a Cypriot citizen. This provision has been qualified by Council of Ministers decision No. 65.067 of 2007 which states that, subject to certain narrow exceptions, no citizenship will be granted to an individual if their non-Cypriot parent is Turkish. In practice, this disproportionately affects children of Turkish Cypriots, since it is very rare for Greek Cypriots to be married to a Turkish citizen. Inhabitants of the North who are thus excluded from RoC citizenship would be entitled to TRNC citizenship (which has no internationally recognized status) and Turkish citizenship (and perhaps the citizenship of a third country). In a recent case, the RoC Supreme Constitutional Court confirmed that persons with one Turkish Cypriot and one Turkish parent were not entitled to RoC citizenship (*Eda Hancer 2025*). In the North, where the community of post-1974 Turkish migrants (and their offspring) are sometimes referred to as 'mixed families', there is also a growing ambivalence towards Turkish influence in North Cyprus' society.
5. In fact, the first generation of enclaved children who left their families and stayed in orphanage-like establishments to attend secondary school were prevented by the TRNC from permanently returning to the North. The RoC then followed suit and stopped considering them enclaved persons, thus stripping them of their status and benefits.
6. The Maronites living in the North also had (more restricted) freedom of movement throughout the island.

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