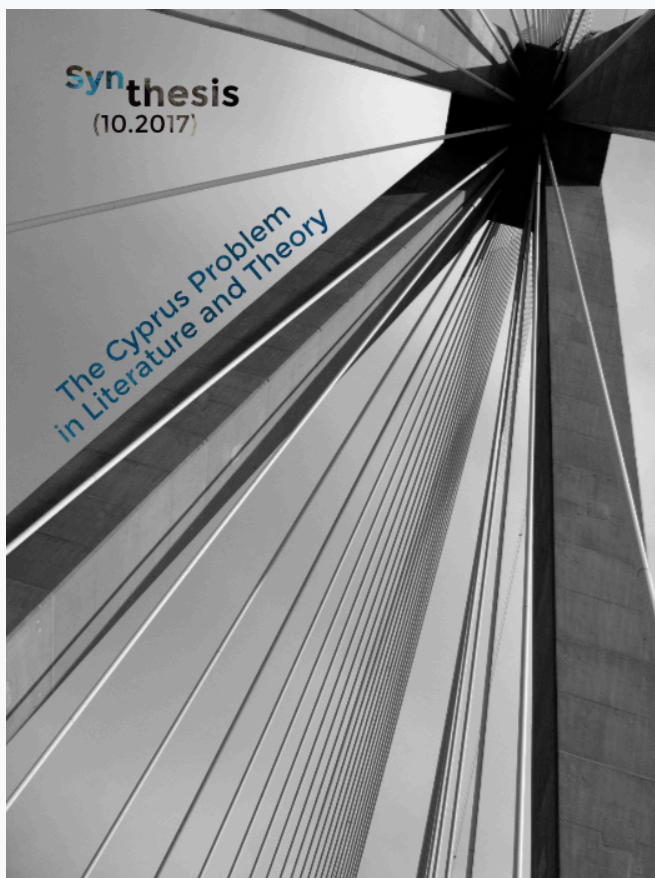


# Synthesis: an Anglophone Journal of Comparative Literary Studies

No 10 (2017)

The Cyprus Problem in Literature and Theory



## Situating Cypriot Anglophone Literature

*Marios Vasiliou*

doi: [10.12681/syn.16243](https://doi.org/10.12681/syn.16243)

Copyright © 2017, Marios Vasiliou



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

## Situating Cypriot Anglophone Literature

Marios Vasiliou

### **Abstract**

This paper situates Cypriot Anglophone literature in relation to local and international literary categories. Discussing Cypriot Anglophone literature, it draws on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'minor' literature that minorities construct within major languages. Cypriot Anglophone literature expresses itself in ways characteristic of 'minor' literature because it explores deterritorialisation with regard both to local cultural practices and the island's English literary legacy. While official nationalist discourses on the island marginalise discourses that question nostalgia for ethnic purity and sexual heteronormativity, Cypriot Anglophone literature re-imagines communities beyond ethnic lines and across heteronormal sexual boundaries, enacting an experimental cosmopolitan aesthetic.

While literature is still understood through the seemingly natural, yet always forced, alignment between language and national culture, definitions of literary categories, and their processes of construction "are always controversial and speculative, particularly in multilingual, multicultural countries which, according to the dictates of nationalism, are supposed to be homogeneous" (Yashin 223). Cyprus is precisely such a multilingual and multicultural place, traversed by various languages and cultures that have left their particular imprint on the island and on its literary topographies. Although more space has been carved recently by cross-linguistic anti-nationalist discourses, the general reality of the cultural field on the island remains grim indeed: nationalist official discourses in both communities dominate the cultural front, and marginalise discourses that question the nationalist nostalgia for ethnic purity and sexual heteronormativity. The literature that is written by Cypriots in English comes into this heated cultural front as a discourse that endeavours to re-imagine community

across ethnic lines and against heteronormal sexual boundaries, taking in the process a cosmopolitan orientation.

However, Greek and Turkish were cosmopolitan languages themselves at some other point in history, the first being the language of the Byzantine Empire, and the second of the Ottoman Empire. Their translocation in Cyprus and their frontal confrontation brought about their vernacularisation, a process that is still prevalent and living. The advent of English in 1878 as a colonial language on the island finds the two vernacularised languages at the beginning stages of writing the Cypriot 'topos' with their voice. As the years pass and literary modernity develops on the island, the two vernaculars come steadily at loggerheads not only with each other, but also with English, especially Greek. English, as a colonial language, comes to mediate between these languages, and engages in various deterritorialisations and reterritorialisations bringing with it a cosmopolitan fabric of voices. Yet, this cosmopolitan legacy that English leaves on the island is swathed in a colonial rhetoric, and is, thus, too problematic for the postcolonial Cypriot to inherit as it is. Therefore, some of the postcolonial Cypriots who come to seek their home in English, do so with a sense of unease, and have to rework the language to make it conducive to their projects of re-envisioning community beyond the local paradigms, and against the tradition of English. Indeed, the famous literary friendship between Lawrence Durrell and George Seferis, and its cooling because of Cyprus can be read symbolically as the failure of colonial English to take root on the island, even when it was purporting to be speaking the idiom of cosmopolitanism. Therefore, in the case of some Cypriot Anglophone writers, the issue of language is associated with a sense of unease since these writers are not 'at home' in using the colonial language, as it brings with it a colonial baggage. Yet they need it, because it is either their inevitable or chosen medium for expressing their affective relationship to their place, and, thus, for "mediat[ing] their own cultures" (Young 220). It is precisely in this straddling position of unease that Cypriots who write in English reach their highest proximity to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'minor' literature. In what follows, I will briefly discuss some of the work of three Cypriot Anglophone writers, namely Andriana Ierodiconou's, Alev Adil's, and Miranda Hoplaros's, in terms of tropes that their works use that can be read as 'minor'. Such literary tropes entail the deterritorialisation, on the one hand, of the local paradigms, and, on the other, the resistance to the "exoticist or domesticating impulses of a metropolitan audience" (Laouyene 3) through the estranging of the English

language.

Are those writers who write in English, and claim a kinship and an affective relationship to the island through their parents, or through birth, really 'Cypriot'? This is not a facetious question since no official literary anthology has contemplated their inclusion. Indeed, as Yashin rightly points out, the category of

'Cypriot Poetry'...includes only poets writing in Greek who refer to Hellenic literary traditions and who appear as outsiders, or 'minor' to metropolitan Athens. Almost all Greek critics, writers and poets of Cyprus, official or unofficial, left-wing or right-wing, young or old, use this definition in their works. (Yashin 223-24)

Yashin's reference to 'minor' literature here is perhaps erroneous since the overwhelming majority of Cypriot literature produced in Greek is, in fact, simply peripheral to the metropolitan literature of Greece, but not necessarily 'minor' in the way that Deleuze and Guattari conceptualise 'minor' literatures. The fact that Cypriots who write both in Greek and Turkish still aspire to publishing their works in the metropolitan centres of Athens and Istanbul is an indication of peripheral relationships and not of a 'minor' position. Indeed, an aspect of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'minor' literature is the latter's discomfiture with national categories of literary circulation. Such discomfiture with national categories is certainly evident in contemporary Cypriot Anglophone literature, which endeavours to imagine community in ways that contest national markers. Evidently, I am not arguing that there is no 'minor' literature in Greek or Turkish that is produced in Cyprus; rather, I am arguing that the overwhelming majority of literary production on the island is actually colluding with the established symbolic orders of literary circulation by aspiring to fit into the larger categories of metropolitan Greek and Turkish literatures. In contrast to this majority, though, there are some literary figures from all literary communities of the island who are forming cross-linguistic literary friendships, and share a vision of community beyond nationalist strictures. Unlike the failure of the literary friendship between Durrell and Seferis<sup>1</sup> due to the incompatibility of their literary and political projects, the re-emergence of English in the last twenty years is a harbinger of a different idiom, one that perforates borders and reaches out for relationships. But how does a literature become 'minor', and how does Cypriot Anglophone literature come to proximity to these conditions of being 'minor'?

Speaking specifically about Kafka's position in a nexus of various languages, Deleuze and Guattari maintain that as a Jew living in Prague writing in German, Kafka

is in essence a multiply deterritorialised subject. They argue that he is deterritorialised from his “primitive Czech territoriality” (Deleuze and Guattari 16), cut off from the major German language by his position in Prague, but also in a problematic position in relation to the German language “as a ‘paper language’” (Deleuze and Guattari 19). As they maintain, his deterritorialisation is accentuated by his Jewishness, which renders him at the same time “part of this minority and excluded from it” (Deleuze and Guattari 17). In a similar fashion, Cypriot writers who write in English are caught in linguistic nexuses that entail deterritorialisations, territorialisations and reterritorialisations: “they are cut off from the local Greek and Turkish speaking establishments that erect linguistic barriers to them, while concurrently being in an ambivalent position in relation to global English and its attendant colonial and imperial connotations” (Vasiliou 84). In relation to local literature written in Greek and Turkish, Cypriot English appears to be in a majority position by virtue of its proximity to a major language, yet is, in essence, in a minority position, both at home—since it is ignored and excluded—but also internationally. Indeed, in relation to global Anglophone writing, Cypriot literature written in English is in a minority position because of its small size, which has prevented it from eliciting the literary world’s interest, but also because even its own postcoloniality is obfuscated by the dominance of the local discourses to the extent that it remains outside the literary circuits of the larger categories, such as ‘post-colonial literature’ and ‘commonwealth literature’ (Vasiliou 84).

Deleuze and Guattari tell us that “a minor literature does not come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language” (16). Such a position has three main characteristics as Deleuze and Guattari argue: “the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation” (18). Speaking specifically about Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari write: “To hate all languages of masters...What interests him even more is the possibility of making of his own language—assuming that it is unique, that it is a major language or has been—a minor utilization. To be a sort of stranger *within* his own language” (26). The Cypriots who write in English and whose works are discussed in this paper are implicated in similar projects. On the one hand, they seek to establish their home in English, while, on the other, they endeavour to emphasise their dislocated identity by estranging English through ‘minor’ utilisations. Moreover, through English, albeit of a ‘minor’ nature, these writers

envisage (an)other community beyond the strictures of nationalism and patriarchy that have become hegemonic on the island, and imbibe an alternative engagement with the 'political' in the process. Importantly, not all Cypriots who write in English share this anxiety with regards to their language. There are some, evidently, who are at home in English and are the happy heirs of its literary tradition. Deleuze and Guattari pose a series of questions that address precisely this discomfiture of minor writers regarding their language:

How many people today live in a language that is not their own? Or not longer, or not yet, even know their own and know poorly the major language they are forced to serve? This is the problem of immigrants, and especially of their children, the problem of minorities, the problem of a minor literature, but also a problem for all of us: how to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language and follow a sober revolutionary path? How to become a nomad, an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one's own language? (19)

If language is the innermost of homes, or "the home that never leaves us" (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 89), and if language is the most mobile and most immobile home, at the same time (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 89), then, how do Cypriots who write in English fit into a home which is recognised as 'unhomely'? Are they 'others' at home? Or do they become 'othered' by their own language, and, thus, also in a position to 'other' it? And what does 'othering' the language mean for both the small emerging local audience for Anglophone literature, and for a purported and potential metropolitan audience? The writers I discuss under the heading of Cypriot Anglophone Literature estrange, on the one hand, the local paradigms by unburying the past and resisting the closure of the future, and, on the other, resist the metropolitan audience's thirst for exotic and domesticating tropes by estranging and defamiliarising the language.

At this point, I would like to shift the discussion onto the literary texts themselves and attempt to show that the ways in which they express themselves could be read as paradigmatic of 'minor' literatures. Before reading a very small part of Ierodionou's novel, *The Women's Coffee Shop*, let us see her personal itinerary and how she comes into English. Born in Cyprus, she grew to be bilingual due to her private education at the English School of Nicosia. She continued her tertiary education in Britain and graduated with a degree in Biochemistry. Ierodionou is an interesting case of someone who writes her poetry in Greek and her novels in English. She claims that English afforded her novels a neutrality that she did not feel that Greek in Cyprus could

allow her to have on such controversial times as the ones that her novels occupy. Moreover, she insists that in such a tense cultural milieu, English allows the writer more freedom to engage with issues that have remained sealed in controversy and dispute. However, such literary decisions are both enabling and disabling, as she herself is aware. Ierodiconou's entrance into English is the product of her British education whose prominent presence in Cyprus is not unrelated to colonialism. Interestingly, Ierodiconou is one of the few writers of this emerging corpus of Cypriot Anglophone literature who writes novels. Indeed, the overwhelming presence of poetry in Cypriot Anglophone literature is not unrelated to the living realities of the authors that traverse diaspora, exile, and division, all of which are inextricably related to disruption and dislocation on a day-to-day basis. It is of interest, however, that even Ierodiconou's novels exemplify this fragmentation and dislocation both in content and in form.

As a way of elucidating how her work becomes 'minor,' I would like to draw on two examples from her work. Let us start from an episode from her novel, *The Women's Coffee Shop*. Ierodiconou's novel starts by describing the condition of the dead Avraam Salih, a condition that also describes, to a large extent, the shifting location of 'minor literatures':

Everything about Avraam Salih was humble: from his name, which revealed that he was the offspring of a mixed marriage between a Christian and a Moslem and therefore an outsider among Moslems and Christians alike; to the ill-cut suit of a too-bright blue which clothed him; to his condition, which was dead. And not only dead, but unburied—or, to be more exact, unburiable, since a baptismal certificate pertaining to the dead man could not be found, yet neither had he even been seen at Friday prayers. ( 5)

Avraam Salih's unburiable corpse can be read metonymically as the elusive, evasive, and shifting corpus of 'minor literatures.' The burying of Avraam Salih's corpse through a proper burial becomes coterminous with a recognition of his identity as a dead man by one of the dominant institutions, either the Christian or the Muslim, and, thus, his readmission in the symbolic order. Being unburiable, though, the corpse escapes placement, engraving, interment, and identification. More importantly, it escapes becoming the property of any dominant order. In other words, his 'unburiable condition' becomes a metonymy for resisting placement, interment, and territorialisation. Similarly, 'minor' literatures contest the established symbolic order through their acts of deterritorialisation. However, Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge that these acts of deterritorialisation that 'minor' processes engage in entail also some

form of reterritorialisation. Specifically, they argue that “ordinarily, in fact, language compensates for its deterritorialization by a reterritorialization in sense” (20). However, as long as Avraam Salih’s corpse remains ‘unburiable,’ it eludes identification with the symbolic order and becomes identified solely as a corpse resisting placement, both literal and discursive. Buried, the corpse would have reached its final homecoming. Unburied, or unburiable as it remains, the corpse continues to seek home by haunting the text and the latter’s desire for a conclusion. Aware of this, the novel does not reach a conclusion. Instead, it provides multiple possibilities, all narrated by the ghostly apparition of Avraam Salih. In this process, the text rends asunder the possibility for reading the past conclusively, or for foreclosing the future in prescribed models and formulas. As such, it expresses a nostalgia for a community that refuses to coalesce into an identity but which remains open to experimental possibilities, and becomes political through its playfulness.

To exemplify this politicisation of the novel through playfulness, I want to draw on another example from her novel *Margarita’s Husband*. The novel provides neither a spatially nor a temporally clear context but through its unfolding we slowly surmise that it grapples with the events preceding the 1931 uprising against colonial rule in a village in Cyprus. The spatial and temporal vagueness that surrounds the text should not be taken for an indifference to history. Quite the contrary, the text is obsessed with history, but, in lieu of the master-narratives of nationalism, and their temporal and spatial alleged lucidity and explicitness, it opts for temporal and spatial inexactitude, if not opacity.

Instead of a linear narration that unfolds over a ‘homogeneous, empty time,’ the novel employs a non-linear narration laden with snippets of life in rural and urban Cyprus, where we experience the tremendous changes that are taking place on the island during this time with the island’s entry into modernity through political parties, national education, and urbanisation. Alongside this entrance into modernity, we are also presented with village life and its attendant traditional customs. As the title indicates, the main character is Margarita’s husband, Homer Kyroleon, whose self-chosen surname is a reflection of his status as a rich and powerful landowner. Kyroleon’s wealth and power are the outcome of clever and deceitful manipulations of colonial policies which enable him to swindle his co-villagers’ land, thus taking revenge for his father’s prior loss of property through a natural disaster, but also through his creditors’ greed and lack of compassion. Kyroleon’s wealth is accompanied by



enormous prestige and power and he is, thus, the recipient of contrasting attitudes and feelings. As I suggested elsewhere, Kyroleon “is dreaded by his workers, hated by his son Adonis while adored by his daughter Polyxene, and pitied, loved, and feared at the same time by his wife” (Vasiliou 89). The sudden death of his daughter Polyxene plunges Kyroleon into mourning. Moreover, his son’s return to the island from Paris, where instead of pursuing his studies in medicine he becomes intoxicated with surrealist poetry, exacerbates the already antagonistic relationship between the two men. The appearance of a refugee girl from Asia Minor brings the two men at loggerheads since, unbeknownst to each other, they both become enamoured with her. Margarita, Kyroleon’s wife and Adonis’ mother, is caught in the middle of the hostility between father and son and resorts to her numinous powers to find solace. In the background of this family saga, the island is on the cusp of momentous changes that the author patiently and subtly inscribes into the narrative. Through the inscription of these changes as well as the description of the family saga we become witnesses to a politics of otherness where the self and the ‘other(s)’ fuse, contesting thus the segregation of the two that characterises most discourses of alterity, including most postcolonial discourses.

In brief, the novel can be seen as a post-colonial rewriting of history which challenges the official portrayal of the events preceding the anti-colonial revolution and more specifically the 1931 disturbances. I would like to concentrate on an episode from the novel, where the refugee girl who becomes the reason for antagonism between the male patriarch of the novel, Kyroleon, and his son, Adonis, is given a voice to tell her story. Indeed, in Chapter eleven, titled ‘Gethsemane’s story,’ the author extends an invitation to the refugee girl to narrate her story without the author’s interference:

The sun was going down the wind died he lowered the sail he said “I’ve got to get some sleep by tomorrow morning we’ll reach the land” she said “Before you do perhaps you’d like some payment in advance for your trouble” he stared at her she jerked her head towards me she said “Half the gold and the girl or all the girl it’s your choice” he looked at me he looked at her I knew what he would say he said it his eyes were like foxes she sat in the bow with her back turned he was heavy the boards hurt my back he rolled over and started to snore I straightened my clothes I sat next to her I had saved half the gold she was pleased I was pleased half the gold I curled up half the gold half the gold I fell asleep half the gold. ( 120)

The general absence of punctuation accentuates both the author’s lack of interference as well as the presence of the refugee’s voice. In the three and a half pages of this stream of consciousness we are presented with the pervasive affliction and adversity of

the experience of fleeing home and of persecution. The breathlessness of the narration and the general lack of punctuation reflect the inadequacy of structured language to convey the refugee experience. The author, in other words, invites the refugee girl to convey her experience on her own terms, without being asked to pause for clarification, or to abide by the author's rules of language. Moreover, the refugee girl here is not forced to satisfy a metropolitan audience's thirst for exoticism and domestication. In such an invitation to the other, the 'other' is not expected to abandon his/her foreignness but is invited to be both host and guest, to host the writer and the readers, in other words, to 'other' contours of writing. By foregrounding unreadability and disruption, the text expresses (an)other community, and participates in the forging of another sensibility, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, in their discussion of 'minor literature.' Importantly, the change of the narrative voice, from a third person to first person during the telling of the refugee girl's experience, problematises the common approach of inviting the other, the non-citizen, the woman and so on, to say their story. In this way, it others and alters both the text and the reader by astonishing us and shaking us out of our homely structures. In a community so overwhelmingly and uncritically conditioned to identify with victimhood, and where being a refugee is monolithically identified with the 1974 war and the displacement of its own people, the insertion of another refugee experience, and the inversion of the Greek-Cypriot from victim to victimiser, comes to shake the local audience out of its illusion of homeliness. In undermining both the local dominant discourses of nationalism as well as the strictures of the English language and of the metropolitan audience's expectations, the text becomes 'minor' through the tensions and deterritorialisations that it endeavours. However, one should not forget that invitations to whomever are never devoid of structures of power. In writing, in other words, the author is the one who is generally in a position to invite.

Similar to Ierodiconou's suspension of a conclusion is the work of Alev Adil. I will draw on one of her poems, namely, "Ariadne Unwinding." Before that, let us see how she comes into English. Alev Adil was born in Cyprus and left the island at a young age because of political instability to go to London where she grew up. Having an English mother, Adil's relationship to English is somewhat different to those of the other writers. Yet dislocation, exile, and their role in identity formation are also profoundly felt by Alev Adil, and these issues permeate her writing. Indeed, when I tried to contact her for some personal information regarding the time of her forceful departure from

the island, Alev Adil evaded giving a clear temporal answer, but chose instead to foreground the fogginess that accompanies such traumas. Such traumas create a predicament for some Cypriots who write in English with regards to their literary and personal identities as it is conveyed in the following passage:

Is being Cypriot in English a translation or a mutation of identity? I write in English, in the language of the island's colonial masters, I am heir to their literature; the ties of language, education, and literary engagement are more binding than biology. I feel fraudulent if I claim to be a Cypriot poet. It is easier to see myself as a British writer, as part of London's rich multiculturalism. However, that multiculturalism, whilst affording a measure of inclusivity, still cannot solve or dissolve the question of my Cypriot identity. Multiculturalism presupposes, rather than deconstructing, the hybridity of different authentic ethnic identities. ("Translating and Mutating Identities" 5)

Alev Adil's work is a relentless and poignant attempt to untangle the various strings of her identity. The outcome of such attempt is the foregrounding of split identities and of her overall distrust of any homely representations. Indeed, her work brings out the fragmentation of diaspora and the attendant blurring of the seemingly neat boundaries between home and abroad. This intricate web of pressures on the issue of identity is what compels Alev Adil to seek another form of politics in her writing. Her poem "Ariadne Unwinding (in the Regent Palace Hotel)" exemplifies this fragmentation of identity:

I kept faith with the silence  
which was calm and whole  
and the moon, a luminous bowl of milk  
with the sheen of poison  
hung limpid over us.  
The things I needed to tell you might be lies.  
For years I have been petrified  
stone-still listening  
for the laboured bullish breaths of the minotaur  
trapped in these long corridors. (*Venus Infers* 84)

Her faith in the wholeness and calmness of silence, and the soothing ambience created by the milkness of the moon are abruptly disturbed by the "sheen of poison" that is hanging over. The mood changes suddenly, and instead of the calm and homely silence, we start listening to the minotaur's "labored bullish breaths." Home, wholeness, and meaning are displaced, and, instead, we get a feeling of the unhomely, the insecure, the feeling of being trapped. Home appears but then disappears as a fleeting illusion. The poem playfully inscribes this uncertain and unhomely ambience in the heart of one of

the most successful (initially) stories of homecoming. In the myth, Ariadne contributes to the demise of the Minotaur by providing Theseus with a sword and a ball of thread for retracing his steps back to the entrance of the labyrinth. But such rapturous and elated homecomings are suspect for our poet, whose rendition of the myth inserts an unhomely metamorphosis in it. Instead of the clarity of *lysis* to the problem of the labyrinth, Ariadne lingers on the opacity of *analysis*:

My story made history,  
Rendered serene and strange  
Through time.  
I often get lost I admit,  
Tangled in skeins and schemes  
of my own weaving.  
I don't want to blind you  
To keep you here  
In the loneliness of the labyrinth  
I call home.  
You cannot save me.  
I should have warned you.  
I let you call me Ariadne,  
No lie nor harm in that.  
But there is more my love  
Much more  
I am the maze  
I am the minotaur. (*Venus Infers* 85-86)

Home in the poem is the loneliness of the labyrinth, that sense of loss of meaning where the unhomeliness allows the most fruitful metamorphoses, where the self and other each recognise their inseparability, where Ariadne is the maze and the minotaur. Similar to Ierodiconou's work, Adil's poem here points to the playful suspension of a resolution through the image of the labyrinth, which can also be read metonymically as the infinity of interpretation. Such infinity of interpretation resists the temptation of bringing home a community that coalesces into identity. Instead, it keeps the future open for the kind of community that is envisioned, taking in the process a cosmopolitanism of the kind outlined by Pollock et al. where cosmopolitanism "may be a project whose conceptual content and pragmatic character are not only as yet unspecified but also must always escape positive and definitive specification" (Pollock et al. 1).

Those are often the tangible realities of diaspora; identities are acutely disputed by the living realities of everyday life. Alev Adil reminds us of this when she says that "perhaps because I am a Cypriot, born on that tiny war torn island in the

Mediterranean, I'm especially aware of how constructed and contingent identity can be, how mutable and frail are the imagined communities we inhabit as certainties, not a bedrock, more a rickety bricolage of politics, everyday life and literature" ("Translating and Mutating Identities" 1). Nevertheless, instead of swathing her work in despondence and pessimism, Adil's work attempts to imagine community in playful ways that contest both monolithic identities of nationalism as well as the uncritical cultural celebration of neoliberal London-style multiculturalism, whose rendition of home and abroad remains neat and fixed along national strictures. Interestingly, Alev Adil contests the national patrimony also through her choice of raw materials and themes in her work, since she borrows myths and archetypes from various cultures, including the Greek ancient culture, only to transform them in playful ways in her poetry. I read such literary gestures as a metonymy of the refusal to accept the tradition and patrimony of the dominant paradigms of the island in terms of ethnic, political, and sexual identities. This playfulness, which is also evident in the work of other authors, but more specifically in Hoplaros's work which follows in this paper, is theoretically interesting and intriguing since it both exemplifies the experimental nature of this literary corpus, and also points to another form of viewing the 'political.'

Let us now see another example of what happens at the level of language by drawing on the work of Miranda Hoplaros, whose personal itinerary also crosses diaspora. Born in Rhodesia to Greek-Cypriot parents, Miranda Hoplaros grew up speaking the Greek-Cypriot dialect at home, learned English at school and attended Greek lessons, as she tells us in her autobiographical fragments titled *Mrs. Bones* (9). Her experiences from her tempestuous childhood in a war torn Rhodesia are recorded in small vignettes that do not follow any chronological sequence and which can be seen as a stylistic metonymy for her fragmented and dislocated upbringing. Her overall work is preoccupied with issues of dislocation, migration, exile, but also with abandonment but, unlike the other authors, she does not place her stories in a Cypriot setting, but instead in former Rhodesia. Like a child playing hide and seek, Hoplaros's child narrator tries to seek answers to a profoundly emotional, yet strained, relationship to her (m)other, brushing on issues such as abandonment, survival, and desire, while hiding behind the inherent ambivalence of language, an ambivalence that she exploits in order to underline her own particularity in English. Having been almost exclusively educated in English, she also adopted English as her literary language. Nevertheless, her adoption of the language does not mean its uncritical emulation and adaptation.

Conversely, Hoplaros's work takes the English language to unknown contours and as such foregrounds her sense of dislocation and her difference in English.

Through the constant insertion of ambivalence in her text and behind the naivety of the child narrator, the author reproduces the 'otherness' of the diasporic experience. Under the heading of 'Desire,' the text amusingly tells us that

Desire is like Pinocchio, an ellipsis. I was taught the word ellipsis at Greek school. It sounded important. Our Greek teacher, Mr Papadopoulos, told us that in Rhodesia there is a shortage of teachers from Greece, an ellipsis. I didn't mind that. I hoped no more would arrive." (65)

The remainder of the vignette uses the word 'ellipsis' at times to mean desire, and, at other times, to mean lack of something, which is what it means in Greek. Apart from foregrounding the proximity of 'desire' and 'lack,' the narrator's usage of 'ellipsis' is in tension with both its monophonic Greek meaning, as well as its grammatical meaning in English as

1. a) the omission of a word or phrase necessary for a complete syntactical construction but not necessary for understanding, b) An example of such omission, **2.** a mark or series of marks ( . . . or \* \* \* , for example) used in writing or printing to indicate an omission, especially of letters or words. (The Free Online Dictionary)

While being in tension with both Greek and English, the text embellishes the two languages while inscribing its difference as a metonymic outcome of its diasporic position. As such, it reveals its inability to be 'at home' in either of the two languages, and the inevitability of inscribing its difference as a diasporic text. The fluidity of meaning that results from such usage as the one of the word 'ellipsis' is one where (an)other meaning of the word is brought to the fore, one which has to omit, not a word or a phrase as the English meaning denotes, but the established meaning of the word itself, in order for it to create space for itself. While the conventional usage of 'ellipsis' as the definition above maintains does not affect understanding, the author's twisting and distortion of the word can be seen as an invitation to (an)other (mis)understanding. It is thus that 'minor literature' deterritorialises both the major language whence it springs, as well as the referential languages of meaning. Its deterritorialising is a diasporic practice or a metonymy of the diasporic experience. Through her twisting and distortion of established meaning, the author succeeds in both seeking (an)other meaning, but also failing (deliberately?) to hide her anxiety about her 'ellipsis' of her (m)other.

It is evident that these writers exemplify a variety of precarious relationships to their language that are the result of war, exile, education—not only as a result of colonialism but also as a result of personal choices—migration, or contingency. Indeed, their engagement with issues of migration, exile, dislocation, but also with gender is not unrelated to their lived experience and material conditions. In other words, their lived conditions are such that they cannot be conveyed, contained, or communicated by national markers or by a community that is envisaged along the strictures of the nation-state. It is precisely because of this reason that I describe their literature in terms of discomfiture, since their work conveys and foregrounds the dislocation and disruption that are inevitable in a cultural and political context where the strictures of national imagining are simply inadequate to convey their particularities. Such dislocation and disruption are often imparted in a refreshing playfulness that brings another form of politics. The narratives in English by the Cypriots I discuss in this paper share a nostalgia and a vision for a community beyond nationalist, racial, and gender strictures that have become hegemonic. Moreover, they share a nostalgia for a community where the self seeks home or a cultural arrival in a language that is already identified with, and implicated in, the above hegemonic strictures, and is, thus, in need of alteration. Consequently, by seeking home, on the one hand, in an idiom of dislocation and deterritorialisation of established paradigms, and, on the other, in an idiom of English that defamiliarises a metropolitan audience and breaks away from the legacy of English on the island, even when the latter claims the cosmopolitan idiom, Cypriot Anglophone literature underlines its presence in a shifting location vis-à-vis both the local paradigms as well as the major language from which it springs.

---

<sup>1</sup> Durrell's decision to work for the colonial government estranged him from his local friends but also cost him the friendship of old friends from Greece, including George Seferis, with whom he enjoyed a literary and personal friendship in the 1940s in Greece.

### Works Cited

- Adil, Alev. "Translating and Mutating Identities: Cypriots Who Write in English". <<http://www.memorymap.org.uk/projects/amnesia-and-ghosts-time-stopped-streets>>.

- . *Venus Inferis*. London: NE Publications, 2004.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Trans. Polan, Dana. *Theory and History of Literature* 30. Minnesota and London: U of Minnesota P, 1986.
- Derrida, Jacques, and Anne Dufourmantelle. *Of Hospitality (Cultural Memory in the Present)*. Trans. Bowlby, Rachel. Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2000.
- Hoplarios, Miranda. *Mrs. Bones*. Nicosia: Laser Graphics, Ltd., 2008.
- Ierodiaconou, Andriana. *Margarita's Husband: A Fable of the Levant*. Nicosia: Armida Publications, 2007.
- . *The Women's Coffee Shop*. CreateSpace. Independent Publishing Platform, 2012.
- Laouyene, Atef "Review of *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature*." *Postcolonial Text* 7.4 (2012): 1-5.
- Pollock, Sheldon, et al. "Cosmopolitanisms." *Cosmopolitanism*. Ed. Pollock, Sheldon, et al. Durham & London: Duke UP, 2002. 1-14.
- Vasiliou, Marios. "Cypriot English Literature: A Stranger at the Feast Locally and Globally." *Kunapipi* XXXIII 1-2 (2011): 83-93.
- Yashin, Mehmet. "Three Generations, Three Identities, Three 'Patriae' within Twentieth-Century Cypriot Poetry." *Cyprus and Its People: Nation, Identity, and Experience in an Unimaginable Community, 1955-1997*. Ed. Vangelis Calotychos. Colorado and Oxford: Westview Press, 1998. 223-33.
- Young, Robert J.C. "World Literature and Postcolonialism." *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*. Ed. Theo D'Haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir. New York: Routledge, 2012. 213-22.