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ARTICLE

"Fraternal" Other: Negotiating Ethnic and Religious Identities at a Muslim Sacred Site in Northern Cyprus

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Abstract

This article shows how everyday religious practices inform the processes of social identification, complicate presumed ethno-religious categories, and mediate local cultural differences in face of political and cultural hegemonic practices. In the context of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, a de facto state recognized only by Turkey, Turkish Cypriots and Turks are considered to share an ethnicity and religion. This "overlap" has been employed to justify Turkey's military intervention and its political, economic, and cultural domination over the island. Yet the cultural diversities and "perceived" differences between and among these groups are exacerbated by power dynamics, nationalist agendas, and mutual biases. The article explains subtle discussions around "genuine" Turkish and Muslim identities, as well as the enforced coexistence and constructed brotherhood of Cypriots and Turks on the island. The competing accounts of the "correct" interpretation of Islam at a Muslim tekke reflect intragroup power asymmetries and the conflict between institutionalized Sunni-Orthodox and "heterodox" local Islam. The article focuses on two overlooked issues in the scholarship on Northern Cyprus—the relations between Turkish Cypriots and settlers from Turkey, and the role of religion in the political processes—as well as on literature on shared sacred sites and an analysis of competitive intracommunal interactions.

Keywords: Cyprus; ethnicity; religion; nationalism; shared sacred sites

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

This article provides an analysis of the interface between ethnicity, religion, and political dynamics from within a Muslim community. The historical affinity between ethnic collective identities and religious traditions has been mobilized in hegemonic, nation-centric political discourses of belonging and exclusion. However, the pluralism of being, belonging, and believing operate to de-hegemonize preconceived affiliations, privileged interpretations, and orthodoxies. While generic, intertwined ethnic and religious identities are expected to create a collective sense of solidarity and support national(ist) policies, they function in a dynamic, ambiguous, and even conflictual way in everyday interactions and lived experiences in a changing political landscape. By focusing on encounters and interactions at a Muslim site, Hz. Ömer Tekke, the article examines the negotiation of ethnic and religious identities, cultural differences, and competing accounts of Islam in relation to local power struggles and the prevalent ideological and political atmosphere. It shows how everyday religious practices are used to construct, emphasize, and sustain local affiliations and cultural differences with the "fraternal" Other. Claims on the "proper" way to be Muslim reflect the conflict between orthodox Islam and vernacular forms of religion (Asad 1986; Elbasani & Tošić 2017). Government-supported attempts to "purify" the faith and "tame" practices of local invention

sharpen the distinctions between Turkish Cypriots and settlers from Turkey, and the discomfort with the hegemonic policies of Turkey on the island.

My analysis in this article is informed by and contributes to two bodies of scholarship. First, the article focuses on a largely unstudied political and social conflict internal to Northern Cyprus between Turkish Cypriots and settlers from Turkey, a subject that has been overlooked in comparison to the interethnic conflict on the island (Ramm 2009). Moreover, while nationalist and post-conflict paradigms dominate the study of Cyprus, the scholarship on religious dynamics in Cyprus is much less developed (Moudouros 2019; Nevzat & Hatay 2009). Following independence from British colonial rule and the ensuing ethnic conflict with Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots welcomed Turkey's military intervention in 1974 and the establishment of a separate Turkish Cypriot entity in 1983. Large numbers of immigrants from Anatolia were subsequently settled in the north in order to meet labor shortages and to control the political landscape. However, the relationship between Turkey and Northern Cyprus has evolved over the last two decades, and some Turkish Cypriots have become increasingly critical of Turkey's policies concerning Cyprus. They stress their local identities in order to distinguish and dissociate themselves from mainland Turks and Turkish nationalism. Turkish Cypriots and Turks are seen as sharing an ethnicity and religion, yet the cultural diversities and "perceived" differences between and among these groups are exacerbated by power dynamics, nationalist agendas, and mutual biases. I should note that the analysis in this article explains patterns observed at religious sites and does not claim to be representative of viewpoints among all Turkish Cypriot or settler communities. Mutual perception has been influenced by various factors including political and ideological positions, family backgrounds, war-time experiences, age, gender, etc.[1]

Secondly, the article shows how shared sacred sites mirror political processes, aspirations, and mutual identity formations in a society. Sacred sites that are shared by different religious groups have long been at the center of scholarly attention. Broadly put, scholars portray shared sites and the interactions that take place in them as fundamentally peaceful (Barkey 2014; Bowman 2012) and/or competitive (Hasluck 1929; Hassner 2009) with periods of interruption either in peaceful coexistence or in violence. These works extensively discuss the intercommunal and, to a lesser extent, intracommunal relations, emphasizing long-term historical patterns (Albera 2008; Hayden et al. 2016) or daily choreographies of sharing at a specific time and place (Bowman 2010; Henig 2012). Robert M. Hayden's theoretical model of Antagonistic Tolerance (AT)[2] explains situations in which two communities distinguish themselves as Self and Other, primarily on the basis of differing religions, and predicts long periods of relatively peaceful interactions, interspersed with periods of violence when dominance is challenged. Using the AT model, we have shown elsewhere (Harmanşah et al. 2014, 337) how the state in Turkey claims the right to regulate religious beliefs and actions through museumification of key religious sites and explicitly favors Sunni practices while tacitly obstructing Alevi-Bektasi practices, even if it claims to tolerate other faiths as a secular state. In the case under study here, although I examined intracommunal[3] interactions, in which conflict is less conspicuous compared to intercommunal ones, I observed manifestations of similar patterns of competition and attempts to redefine the boundaries of the sacred.

The case of Northern Cyprus and the interactions between Turkish Cypriots, Turkish settlers, and religious officials at sacred sites is evaluated within the wider context of colonial politics and socioeconomic conditions in which local relationships are played out. The article explains competing accounts of the "correct" interpretation of Islam through the practices at sacred sites, which fundamentally reflect an unequal power relationship between Turkey and TRNC, and subtle discussions around "genuine" Turkish and Muslim identities. On the one hand, some Turkish Cypriots voice their criticism of Turkey's prolonged presence and policies in the north and their antipathy towards "backward and conservative" Turkish settlers. On the other, the AKP-led government in Turkey has attempted to reinforce Sunni Islam in Turkish-Cypriot society, especially through education and the construction of mosques. Imams from Turkey express distrust in the religious devotion of Turkish Cypriots by imposing a government-sponsored orthodox

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interpretation of Islam at sacred sites in Northern Cyprus. This is, at times, accompanied by negative comments from a group of Turkish settlers, who question both the ethnic and religious identities of Cypriots in order to express their own resentment towards the prejudice, humiliation, and discrimination some of them experience on the island. The Tekke has become a structure through which mutual thoughts, feelings, and disappointments are expressed and where "otherizing the fraternal" has come into play.

Methodology

The material discussed in this article is based on extensive multi-sited ethnographic research I have conducted in 2010–2012 in Greek and Turkish parts of the island and revisits to the Turkish part in 2018–19. My methodology combined participant observation, structured and unstructured interviews, and informal discussions. The research chiefly examined the practices of social forgetting through religious landscapes by analyzing the perceptions and utilizations of shared sacred sites which are or used to be frequented by Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The tension between the Turkish Cypriots, settlers, and the Imam at the Hz. Ömer Tekke emerged as an unexpected theme in the field. Since Turkish Cypriots and Turkish settlers currently share their everyday living space, their interactions at the sites are more visible than the interactions with rare visitors of Greek Cypriots. I visited the Tekke regularly for one year and later continued interval visits. I observed people's rituals and asked them to respond to a set of questions on their personal experiences and memories at the sacred sites. I talked to Cypriots, settlers, and the visitors of the site, as well as those who live or used to live in the vicinity of the Tekke. In terms of gender, I conducted the formal interviews mostly with men, since people usually directed me to male informants as they are seen as "sources of knowledge." However, I had the opportunity to have informal conversations more with women at the religious sites as they practice religion more than men in such places—with an exception of prayer times at mosques. The vast majority of my informants were in their 40s and older. I used the snowball technique to find and reach out to Greek Cypriots who used to live in the neighborhood before 1974. I had long conversations with the Imam and the Keeper of the site many times and observed their interactions with the visitors. I also consulted with religious leaders, local academicians, historic preservation specialists, and people working for NGOs. The research was complemented with archival research in the Kyrenia National Archives. The archival material provided various stories about the site, and the physical transformation of the building and the landscape that cannot be observed from the present conditions.

The article starts with a descriptive overview of the historical and political context on the island since independence from British colonial rule in 1960. It then explains the construction and negotiation of identities within the Turkish-Cypriot community with regard to their position (or perceived position) vis-à-vis Greek Cypriots—the majority population on the island—the so-called motherland Turkey, and Turkish settlers. The subsequent sections focus on the islanders' relations with the Turkish settlers, and the Muslim identities of Turkish Cypriots along with an analysis of the secularization process in the north. The article concludes with a case study of Hz. Ömer Tekke and the negotiation of "proper" religious practices by Turkish Cypriots, Turkish settlers, and the Imam appointed from Turkey.

The Historical and Political Context

Cyprus is divided geopolitically in two. Independence from British colonial rule and the creation of a new independent state in 1960 increased the political tension between the majority Greek and minority Turkish populations. During the period of intercommunal violence in 1963–64 and 1967, the Turkish community established its own administration in armed enclaves. Growing Greek-Cypriot nationalism, in the form of a demand for union with Greece (*enosis*), transformed into a mass movement after the Second World War. Turkish-Cypriot nationalism and mobilization

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became evident in the face of Greek national desire, which Turkish Cypriots perceived as a threat to their existence. Turkish Cypriots initially expressed their desire for the continuation of British rule, but later demanded the division of the island (*taksim*). They turned towards Turkey, both for protection and as a "role model" country. The crystallization of ethnic identities and self-identification with reference to the mainland led to the transformation of religious Orthodox Christians and Muslims into ethnic Greeks and Turks. A Greek-sponsored coup and subsequent Turkish military intervention resulted in the division of the island in 1974. Greek Cypriots residing in the north fled to the south of the island and Turkish Cypriots in the south to the north. The partition was followed by the repopulation of the north with settlers from Turkey.

The Republic of Cyprus is an internationally recognized state but its recognized government controls only approximately two-thirds of the island, inhabited overwhelmingly by Greek Cypriots. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), a de facto state recognized only by Turkey, was proclaimed in 1983 and controls the northern third of the country, inhabited primarily by Turkish Cypriots and Turkish settlers. The Green Line is the buffer zone separating the two parts and is controlled by the United Nations. The Republic of Cyprus became a member of the European Union in 2004 without its Turkish-Cypriot partner. Many Turkish Cypriots had initially welcomed the arrival of the Turkish army in 1974 but gradually felt uncomfortable with the influx of Turkish settlers, and the political, cultural, and economic hegemony of Turkey over Northern Cyprus. According to the census in 2011, the population of TRNC is 286,257, of which 190,494 were TRNC citizens, 80,550 were Turkish nationals, and 15,215 were other nationalities.

The Question of Turkish-Cypriot Identities

Turkish Cypriots[4] have been torn between different conceptions of collective consciousness since the division of the island. The construction and negotiation of identities within the Turkish-Cypriot community is closely related to their position (or perceived position) vis-à-vis the Greek-Cypriot majority, the so-called motherland Turkey, and immigrants from Turkey who started to arrive in the north in 1975 as part of a settlement policy by the Turkish authorities. They have competing, conflicting, and overlapping notions of identity, located between an ethnic nationalism closely bound up with Turkish nationalism in the motherland, and Cypriot nationalism or Cypriotism.

The literature provides various accounts of the rise of nationalism among Turkish Cypriots in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is argued by some that Turkish-Cypriot nationalism and mobilization developed mainly in reaction to Greek-Cypriot national desire and propaganda for *enosis* (unity with Greece), which Turkish Cypriots perceived as a threat to their existence (Apeyitou 2003; Attalides 1981; Beratlı 1999). Others argue that the first expressions of nationalism appeared before the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, spurred by the impact of British colonial policies and the threat of rising Greek nationalism, and was also due to an increasing political awareness among Cypriot Muslims and the aspiration to be part of Western civilization (Bryant 2004; Nevzat 2005; Ramm 2009).

Turkish Cypriots began adopting Turkish nationalist ideas in the 1920s. This period witnessed friction between two groups within the elite community: the modernist group which supported Mustafa Kemal's radical reforms based on secularism and Turkish nationalism, and the traditionalist group which was loyal to British colonial rule and traditional religious values. The rising political opposition to the traditional Muslim elite formed a new type of leadership that replaced Islamic elements with secular ones and used Turkish nationalism to combat *enosis*. Turkish Cypriots organized their first mass organization, the KATAK (Association of the Turkish Minority of the Island Cyprus) in 1943, established closer relations with Turkey, and adopted a Kemalist reform program, all of which resulted in the idealization of Turkey as the motherland and Turkey's increasing involvement in the Cyprus issue (Kızılyürek 2006, 323). However, this romantic idealization of Turkey and Turkish nationalism quickly developed into a separatist, militant

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political project. By the end of 1956, with the support of government-controlled lobby organizations in Turkey, Turkish-Cypriot nationalist leaders began to mobilize the public for partition (*taksim*), replacing the old slogan "Cyprus is Turkish, and it will remain Turkish" with the new slogan "Partition or Death" (Ramm 2009, 121).

Independence from British colonial rule and the creation of a new, independent state in 1960, after the five-year guerilla struggle for *enosis* by Greek Cypriots, did not satisfy either Greek or Turkish communities and caused an escalation in tension and interethnic fighting. The EOKA (the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters) was formed in 1955 with the aim of bringing about *enosis*. In 1957, Turkish Cypriots established their own paramilitary organization, the TMT (Turkish Resistance Organization), to fight against the EOKA and in favor of *taksim*. During the fighting in 1963–64 and 1967, Turkish Cypriots abandoned their homes and withdrew into separate enclaves under their own control. The interethnic fighting was followed by a period of intra-communal conflict among Greek Cypriots following the military junta's seizure of power in Greece in 1967. The coup and Turkey's subsequent military intervention resulted in the division of the island in 1974. This time, Greek Cypriots suffered most. Around 165,000 Greek Cypriots and 45,000 Turkish Cypriots were displaced from one side of the Green Line to the other. This relocation led to the two parts of Cyprus being largely ethnically homogeneous.

Turkish Cypriots welcomed Turkish military intervention in 1974 and the establishment of a separate Turkish-Cypriot entity in 1983. This, in fact, stood for the liberation of the Turkish minority from the Greek majority at the time, and Turkey was seen as the liberating motherland (*ana vatan*) protecting its babyland (*yavru vatan*). The presence of the Turkish army provided Turkish Cypriots with a sense of security. However, the unresolved problems of Cyprus, of economic and political isolation, and a dependent and volatile economy, have combined with recent drastic changes on the island, such as the opening of the Green Line in 2003, which gave Turkish Cypriots the opportunity to physically interact with Greek Cypriots; the rejection of the Annan Plan[5] by Greek Cypriots, which resulted in an emphasis on Turkish Cypriotism over a common Cypriotism; the accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the European Union in 2004; and the election of a majority left-wing parliament for the first time in TRNC. The initial positive atmosphere created by the Justice and Development Party (AKP)'s steps towards democratization and different approach to the Cyprus problem to clear the path to European Union soon disappeared with its nationalist policies similar to previous governments in addition to its religious-oriented political rhetoric (Bryant & Yakinthou 2012). Feelings of discontent and dissatisfaction have grown among the Turkish community and stimulated demands for change and the desire for a political solution.

Cypriotism gained popularity among the Turkish-Cypriot community, starting within intellectual circles and left-wing political parties in resistance to Turkish colonization. Despite recognizing the historical connections, Cypriotism opposes Turkey's and Greece's motherland status as well as the precedence of Turkish and Greek nationalisms over Cypriotism. It implies a common land and a peaceful coexistence throughout Cyprus. The Turkish version of Cypriotism demands self-determination and equal relations with Turkey as well as a federation based on equal relations with Greek Cypriots. Baker (1995) argues that Turkish-Cypriot nationalism is neither reaction nor nostalgia nor a discourse of harmony with modern Turkey. Turkey was invented as a "motherland" in a complicated process lasting many years. For him, the so-called Turkish-Cypriot nationalism is more of a reaction to immigrants from rural Turkey who settled on the island after 1974 than an opposition to Greek Cypriots. Greek Cypriots who hid behind the British administration, then behind the Turkish trade elite and then behind the chasm of the border, no longer offered familiar faces to Turkish Cypriots (Baker 1995, 16).

With regard to the nationalist discourse, Turkish Cypriots are part of the "greater" Turkish nation and called "our kinsmen" in reference to their (alleged) common lineage. However, the particularities of the Turkish-Cypriot identity have been rigorously denied by the nationalist discourse. It is not even recognized as a "local differentiation," unlike Turkish kin in Caucasia,

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Central Asia, or the Balkans (Bora 1995, 18). This lumping together of Turkish and Cypriot identities has been constructed by the nationalist ideology and employed both by Turkish nationalists and Turkish-Cypriot nationalists to justify the military intervention, the partition of the island, the subsequent prolonged presence of Turkey, and its political, economic and cultural domination over Northern Cyprus. Bora points to the association between Turkish and Cypriot identities as "broken" since the "kins" are not equal, and rightly notes that this patronage-guardianship relationship is a reflection of state protocol and the discourse by Turkish politicians with regards to their associates in Northern Cyprus. This inequality is a result of the imbalance in the relationship between populations in the motherland and minority communities abroad, which are considered to be subject to the dangers of cultural and racial hybridization due to their proximity to foreign and even enemy communities (Bora 1995, 19). A well-remembered example is what the then Prime Minister of Turkey, Tayyip Erdoğan, said in response to the protests against austerity measures in Northern Cyprus. He claimed he would call the Prime Minister of the TRNC to his office to talk to him, using the term "*besleme*" for Turkish Cypriots, a word that describes the practice of adopting an orphan/poor child and raising them as a servant. The media in Northern Cyprus reacted with indignation. One quote from the editor-in-chief of the *Kıbrıslı* newspaper, Doğan Harman, summarizes both the situation and the frustration:

> Erdoğan has already begun speaking like a colonizer. We do not need a puppet government and a president. The state that is called the TRNC should be abolished. A governor should be appointed to Cyprus so that it can be a modern colony. (quoted in *T24 Bağımsız İnternet Gazetesi*, February 6, 2011)

The construction of the Turkish-Cypriot identity has gone through a specific historical process which cannot be discussed in isolation from the effect of relationships with the Greek-Cypriot community, but this is beyond the concern of this article. While Turkish Cypriots had to pronounce their "Turkishness" during the war with Greek Cypriots, they started to turn to their local identity in the face of the presence of Turkish settlers and the isolation they experience through the hegemony of Turkey over their land. Although Turkish Cypriots still continue to express closeness with Turkey, they seek a more equitable relationship with Turkey, instead of a no more relevant motherland-babyland relationship, and a bi-communal federation with the Greek community, also on equal footing.

Relations with Settlers from Turkey

The migration of several thousand people after Turkey's military intervention, especially from rural areas, was encouraged and facilitated until the late 1970s. These people received abandoned Greek-Cypriot properties as well as citizenship upon arrival. Although it has been demonstrated that settlers have low levels of politicization due to lack of resources and incentives for mobilization (Loizides 2015, 175), some Turkish Cypriots view settlers as Turkey's agents in the implementation of colonial policies, and believe that they are not able to integrate into the modern and secular culture of Cyprus because of their lack of education and rural background.

Settlers are considered as a homogeneous group and sometimes confused with soldiers from Turkey. As Hatay (2005, vii) points out in his report, there are several subcategories within the settler community. There are Turks who are already citizens of the TRNC and have the right to vote. Not all of them came to the island as part of the deliberate settlement policy pursued by Turkey and Turkish-Cypriot authorities. Other Turkish nationals have migrated to the island on their own initiative, acquiring citizenship either through naturalization or assisted naturalization (e.g., through marriage to a Turkish Cypriot). In addition, there are temporary residents of Turkish origin, such as registered workers, non-registered workers, tourists, university students, lecturers, and Turkish army personnel. Kurtuluş and Purkis (2014) identify three waves of migration from

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Turkey to Northern Cyprus since 1974, which are historically different in nature. The immigration issue has been politicized by the left wing in opposition to the nationalist agenda and policies of Ankara. However, at the same time, Turkish Cypriots are aware that Northern Cyprus is still economically dependent on Turkey's cheap labor force and military.

Some Turkish immigrants have been living on the island for a long time and tend to identify themselves as Turkish Cypriots. The younger generations, especially those who were born in Cyprus, have weak links with Turkey and consider themselves as belonging to Cyprus. Moreover, those who migrated from Turkey came from different areas and have different political, social, and economic backgrounds.[6] Ramm points out the selective and complex nature of the exclusion of settlers on the basis of social criteria and class distinction by Turkish Cypriots:

> …it is not the culture of Turkey as a whole (in comparison to any kind of Cypriot culture) but specific origin, appearance, lifestyle, and behavior of certain groups from Turkey which mark the distinction between Cypriots and immigrants. "Backwardness" is thus ascribed to regional origin, social background and class status of *Türkiyelis*. (2009, 252)

Quite paradoxically, there is on one hand the ideal, modern, republican Turkish culture to which Turkish Cypriots aspire and feel they belong to, though they are resented by its urban elite, who display arrogant and paternalist attitudes towards them (Ramm 2009, 191) and on the other, there are the uneducated, traditional, lower-class villagers and laborers who come from rural areas of Turkey with whom they have to share their everyday lives and whom they consider incompatible with the higher level of civilization in Cyprus. Some recent studies explain the experiences of settlers in Cyprus, such as the discrimination in the labor market (Besim et al. 2015), and their social exclusion and spatial segregation due to their nationality and cultural capital (Purkis and Kurtuluş 2013).

Turkish Cypriots are careful about openly expressing negative feelings, since criticizing Turkish settlers could mean questioning the nationalist discourse and Turkey's policies, and thus seen as a betrayal to the nation. Turkish Cypriots sometimes even complain about the prevalent image that "Turkish Cypriots dislike Turks." On the other hand, Turkish settlers often articulate their resentment towards being humiliated and sometimes respond to criticism by reversing the dominant/subordinate actors of the discourse by recalling Turkey's military intervention in 1974: "who rescued you from the Greek Cypriots' atrocities?" Some Turks recognize the concerns of Turkish Cypriots but assign responsibility to other groups among the settlers, such as to those from southeastern Turkey, or Kurdish settlers.

One of the main areas in which Turkish Cypriots differentiate themselves from settlers and which they use as grounds for prejudice and discrimination, is the latter's greater religiosity and conservatism, which they associate with the culture of Turkey. Interestingly, Turkish Cypriots sometimes use religious criteria to criticize the lifestyle of Turkish settlers, such as the wearing of veils by women, and to articulate their frustration with the policies of Turkey, whereas Turkish settlers refer to the same criteria to denigrate the religious beliefs and practices of Turkish Cypriots. Although not openly expressed by either group, the tension can be observed in practice at some Muslim sites. The next section explains the process of secularization on the island —another aspect that both brings together and divides the two communities.

Islam and Secularism in Northern Cyprus

Islam's historical decline in Cyprus is a consequence of many political, social, and administrative transformations on the island since the Ottoman Empire withdrew. Governmental action during the British system of administration, based on indirect rule and proportional participation, undermined the privileged position of the Muslim community. The British period witnessed the exploitation of ethnic and religious differences between the two communities, and the rise of

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Greek and Turkish nationalism which was already in place along with rising nationalism in the Balkans in the 19th century. Orthodox Christians and Muslims were transformed into ethnic Greeks and Turks. The religious estrangement was furthered by the gradual disintegration and impoverishment of Islamic institutions that had previously connected the Muslim community. Specific milestones in this were the abolishment of the Mufti's office in 1928 and the appointment of a powerless *Fetva Emini* subordinate to the *Evkaf* (Pious Foundations), which became a government department, directly under the power of the governor. The office of the *Kadı* (judge) was also eliminated in 1927. The British gradually took control of all traditional structures of authority, and Muslims lost their basic communal organization. According to Atalay (2003, 89–90), the abolishment of the Mufti's office was not only detrimental to the religious life in the Turkish community—due to the void left by the closure of mosques, the lack of imams, unqualified people serving as imams, the decrease of religious education, etc.—but it also had political consequences, since the Mufti was the elected ecumenic and political leader of the community. He argues that the Mufti was the unifying and guiding leader of the community which no longer had political ties with Turkey and was nothing more than Muslim subjects of the British administration alongside the majority Orthodox Christian community, which was represented by the influential archbishop of the Church.

The decay of these traditional religious institutions was combined with the secularization and nationalization of education, and the impact of Kemalism and Turkish nationalism. Cypriots embraced the ideology of Turkish nationalism, secularism, modernization, and Westernization that took place in Turkey during the early years of the Republic, as they were confronted with growing Greek nationalist propaganda for *enosis*. It is noted in several places in the literature that the political elites of the Turkish-Cypriot community voluntarily and enthusiastically adopted the revolutionary reforms that were compulsory in Turkey, such as the introduction of the Latin alphabet, ban on religious dress in public places, and changes in family law (Beckingham 1957a; Killoran 1998; Nevzat and Hatay 2009). A serious and irreversible decline in religious education and religious services has been the result (Atalay 2003; Hendrich 2015).

When the nationalist movement came to prominence, Islam lost its power to connect the Turkish population of the island. Turkish nationalism became the primary point of reference, holding the Turkish community together against Greek Cypriots in the British period. Killoran (1998) argues there was a "religionalization" of nationalism for Turkish Cypriots: "Turkey and things Turkish became a kind of religion of Turkish Cypriots. In summary, the period from the British annexation of Cyprus (1914) until the war in 1974, and the subsequent separation of Greek and Turkish Cypriots into two separate populations, can be characterized as pro-Western, anti-Islamic, secular, and 'religiously Turkish'" (187). Nevzat and Hatay justify this point by claiming that "(i)ndeed, religious references, symbols and buildings have been used more as a means of sanctifying the 'national' struggle" (2009, 925). The following quote from one of my informants exemplifies these points:

> I am asking my grandfather, my aunt; how were religious practices of people in the past? They said going to mosque was not very often, but it was regular. They were going to mosque for Eid prayers; then they were eating fried liver; that was the custom. But now neither of these customs exists. There was a structure in the past, and the British destroyed it in the 1940s and 50s. They took the control of Evkaf and closed down the religious institutions. Then comes the period of CHP (Republican People's Party in Turkey), when nationalism prevailed. Everything was copied from Turkey … Religion declined in this society. But it actually keeps the societies together. (A Turkish Cypriot officer working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in his late 40s, 2012)

According to a report by a Turkish commission in 1949, there were around 300 mosques in Cyprus (Atalay 2003,150), and only very few imams were working in them. In our interview in 2011,

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Talip Atalay, the then (and current) head of the Religious Affairs Department of TRNC, told me there were 264 mosques in the TRNC and that imams and preachers were all requested from Turkey.[7] In fact, the only Turkish-Cypriot Imam I met during my fieldwork in Cyprus was Şakir Alemdar, who was Imam of the Hala Sultan Tekke, located in Larnaca in the Republic of Cyprus, and representative of the Grand Mufti of Cyprus. In my interview with him in 2012, Alemdar blamed the early Turkish-Cypriot leadership for following the Kemalist ideology and for rejecting the cultural values that were inherited from the Ottoman Empire. He noted, "there were 11 madrasas in this small island, we came down to begging imams and religious wisdom from Turkey." In a newspaper interview in 2012, the Second President of TRNC, Mehmet Ali Talat, made a self-criticism admitting that they could have solved this imam problem during his six-year term in the office. He remarked that there is no Turkish Cypriot imam to perform funerals and the Turkish imams are not only foreign to the culture and identity of the island, but also imposing the conservative agenda of Ankara (Gürsel, 2012).

Depending on my findings and Turkish Cypriots' descriptions of their religious identities, I argue that Turkish Cypriots are relatively more secular and moderate than both Greek Cypriots and Turkish settlers, and their Muslim identity is more cultural than religious. Many Turkish Cypriots practice their religion selectively and occasionally. For most of them, religion is based on moral values, rather than practices. In my interviews, they emphasized the primacy of being good people and believing in God. A Turkish-Cypriot man in his 50s said to me, "I do have religious belief, but my worship is my belief. The greatest worship is to believe" (2012). The secular character of Cypriot Islam was also observed in the 1950s by Beckingham: "Cypriot Islam is in general latitudinarian in character. It is very rare indeed for the foreign visitor to encounter any trace of fanaticism" (1957a, 80). Religious traditions provide a cultural reservoir that determines the lifestyles, values, and practices of people as well as contributing to the categorizations of Self and the Other as signifiers of communal membership. Yeşilada, Noordijk, and Webster claim that while Turkish- and Greek-speaking communities in Cyprus both attribute high levels of importance to God in their daily lives, they drift apart when it comes to following organized religion (e.g., attending church or mosque services) (2009, 20). They conclude that "(d)espite different denominations, and levels of development, Turkish Cypriots have religiosity and practices that mirror those of mainland Greeks while Greek Cypriots have the more intense religiosity associated with mainland Turks" (Yeşilada et al. 2009, 30).

Although Turkish Cypriots do not appear to show much interest in practicing religion, they don't question their own Muslim identity and can even become defensive on the subject, probably due to the criticisms they have been subjected to by Turkish immigrants. For example, during my fieldwork at Hz. Ömer Tekke, I visited a coffee shop at a nearby village, Ozanköy/Kazaphani, and had a conversation with some men about religious sites shared with Orthodox Christians. One of them turned to me in a rage and said: "All these shared site narratives are conspiracies made up by Turks who want to insult our beliefs by claiming that we were degenerated by the common life with Greek Cypriots. No, we are true Muslims" (October 3, 2011).

There is a widespread perception among Turkish Cypriots that Turkey is attempting to Islamize Northern Cyprus, through education (e.g., theological schools [imam hatips] and Quran classes), or changes in the landscape (constructing new mosques). The constitutionally secular Turkey and its Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) openly support and promote Sunni Islam as opposed to folk Islam and disapprove the local "syncretic" practices at sacred sites, such as lighting candles, tying clothes, gift-giving, touching tombs, and women not covering themselves. The policies of Islamization and the promotion of Sunni Islam have been considerably accelerated during the Justice and Development Party rule (specifically since 2009 to present) and exported to Northern Cyprus as well. As Moudouros argues "the process of Islamisation is accompanied by the political aim of overthrowing Kemalist ideological references, and above all secularism, which has historically characterized the Turkish Cypriot community" (2019, 36). Şen highlights a similarly active role that the Directorate of Religious Affairs takes in Central Asia to expand the religious field

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in the post-socialist countries, transform the local traditions and rituals, and support the idea of "Great Turkey" (2018).

A heated discussion continues with regards to religious education in general but found specific expression with the Hala Sultan Religious High School.[8] Hendrich explains how the dispute over religious education reached a climax in 2009, partly due to the election of the conservative UBP (National Unity Party, Ulusal Birlik Partisi) in the north. She elucidates various viewpoints within the Turkish-Cypriot community, including perceptions of compulsory religious education in state schools and faith-based summer classes as part of the politics of cultural assimilation practiced by the Turkish Republic and its allies in Cyprus, aimed at the imposition of Sunni Islam rather than an equal treatment of all denominations (2015, 24–27).

However, it can be claimed that Turkish settlers were not the cause of a significant change in religious practices and institutions in Cyprus. While acknowledging the fact that there is insufficient research on the impact of Turkish migrants on religious life in Cyprus, Atalay asserts that it is unlikely they led to a visible change in religious life in Cyprus since their knowledge of Islam is "basic" and limited to their traditional background. In fact, he argues that the reverse is happening: a decline in previously strong religious attachment can be observed since their arrival in Cyprus (Atalay 2003, 127, 131). He forwards the example of immigrants from Trabzon-Çaykara who settled in Kaplıca village, who had more than 20 Quran reciters before they arrived in Cyprus (Atalay 2003, 131). Some Turkish settlers are assimilated into the local culture, and young generations are clearly less inclined to practice religion and to form strong religious attachments. There are many variations within the Turkish community across generations, and background has a huge impact on religious attachment. For example, settlers originally from Black Sea cities are known to follow a more orthodox and strict approach to Islam.

In any case, the transformation of the landscape and familiar spaces has created a reaction among Turkish Cypriots. Turkey's intervention in this, through the changing of village names, the building of new mosques or making mosques more visible by adding minarets, and the imposition of barricades and wires that are heavily guarded by soldiers, is part of a process regarded as the "Turkification" or "Islamization" of the landscape. Hz. Ömer Tekke is one of the places in which this tension stands out. Turkish Cypriots express their concerns about the imposition of Islam through criticizing the way in which this sacred place is organized and run.

Are Turkish Cypriots Alevis?

The relatively secular, moderate religious identities and flexible approach to religious practices among Turkish Cypriots raise the question as to whether they are Alevi or not. This discussion is apart from the fact that there is an Alevi community in Cyprus who openly claim this identity and have diverse ethnic backgrounds, including settlers from Turkey.[9] The U.S. Department of State International Religious Freedom reported in 2018 that there are approximately 10,000 immigrants of Turkish, Kurdish, and Arab origin and their descendants who identify themselves as Alevi Muslims in the total population of 286,000 (2018, 10–11).

Their welcoming of Kemalist reforms, skeptical approach to institutional Islam, infrequency in attending mosques for daily prayers, consumption of alcohol, etc., are all seen as evidence of the inheritance of the Alevi culture. Nazım Beratlı's work on the background of Turkish Cypriots discusses the settlers who arrived on the island from Anatolia post-1571, who had mixed religious affiliations, including Alevi, Bektashi, Mevlevi, and Naqshbandi (2008). Beratlı states that the difference between Turkish-Cypriot and Anatolian-Turkish identity, and the secular character of Cypriots, is not due to their long-term everyday interaction with the Greek population, as often assumed, but rather their Alevi/Bektashi background, which was the reason of their exile to Cyprus by the Ottoman Empire (2008, 7–9, 189–198). Based on the results of the 2006 World Values Survey in Cyprus, Yeşilada also claims that "a sizable number of the Turkish

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Cypriot community are either descendants of Alevi settlers from Anatolia or Bektaşi Janissaries, who held religious values that are different from those of their Sunni Ottoman relatives" (2009, 49). Similarly, Erdengiz suggests that among other groups that comprise the ancestors of Turkish Cypriots, most were Janissaries and members of Turkmen and Yoruk tribes from rural Anatolia, who were Bektashis and Alevis (1994, 23).

Alevi associations in Cyprus also emphasize and suggest Alevism is an appropriate religion for Cypriots (Hendrich and Strohmeier 2015, 4). I have observed certain practices usually associated with the Alevi culture (such as bringing green fabric to the tombs at Hz. Ömer Tekke) being performed by Turkish Cypriots. However, I did not meet any Turkish Cypriot who openly called themselves Alevi during two years of fieldwork at religious sites in Cyprus. Erdengiz claims that Turkish Cypriots have abandoned their Alevi identities and rarely identify themselves as such, but it is still possible to observe the influence of this background today, for example in their fast and extensive communication with non-Muslims on the island, gender equality, monogamy, women's rights, lack of religious fanaticism, consumption of alcohol and production of wine, the use of names widespread among Alevis, and in certain beliefs and customs among Cypriots (1994, 22–26). He also outlines some reasons as to why Alevism no longer exists in Cyprus as it does in Anatolia: the deceleration of Turkmen-Yoruk settlement on the island, their escape from the island or death cause by epidemics, conversion to Sunni Islam, the transformation of Alevism with the impact of local culture (Erdengiz 1994, 23–24).

In terms of historical background, there is also an argument that a substantial portion of the island's Muslims during the Ottoman Empire were Christian converts. Based on Ottoman court records, Jennings claims that more than a third of Muslims appearing at court in Cyprus in the 16th century were converts, although he adds that the level of conversion cannot be measured precisely (1993, 137). There is also a separate hybrid group called *Linobambakoi,*[10] who are known to have practiced a mixture of Muslim and Orthodox Christian rituals and are acknowledged by many scholars to have become extinct in the 20th century due to the ethnic/nationalist feelings that emerged during the British colonial period (Beckingham 1957b, 173). There is no consensus in the literature regarding the historical reasons for the emergence and distinctive features of the *Linobambakoi* in Cyprus, due partly to scarce data concerning this inherently secret group and partly to disagreements about how to identify them. However, *Linobambakoi* are usually seen as a local group with syncretic practices that were prevalent in many parts of the Ottoman Empire.[11]

While the claims that Turkish Cypriots are of Alevi background are an attempt to provide historical reasons for their compatibility with Kemalism and a secular approach to religion, their *probable* Alevi identities are also manipulated for denigrating their belief systems as being "unorthodox" and "non-Sunni." Alevis have always had uneasy relations with predominantly Sunni political authorities, and they have been persecuted or at best discriminated against for engaging in heterodox practices since the Ottoman Empire. A similar argument might be put forward concerning the claims that Turkish Cypriots are descendants of converted Greeks, although this discourse is mostly used by some Greek Cypriots to emphasize their common culture and to deny their separate ethnic identity, to accommodate them in a future together and to prove that Cyprus is Greek.[12] In summary, the origins and religious identities of Turkish Cypriots have been discussed in-depth and served as a pretext for designating them as a single community belonging to a particular geography and culture.

A Case Study: Hz. Ömer Tekke and Negotiations over "Proper" Religious Practices

Hz. Ömer Tekke[13] (see Figure 1) is situated near the coast in the east of Kyrenia. The site is used predominantly by two neighboring villages, Çatalköy/Ayios Epiktitos and Ozanköy/Kazaphani, and this was most likely the case in the past too. However, it is not uncommon to see visitors from all over Northern Cyprus and Turkey, as it is one of the most prominent sacred sites in the north.

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Figure 1. Hz. Ömer Tekke, 2014. Photograph by the author.

The Tekke is surrounded by beautiful landscape and is used both as a place of worship and for recreation and relaxation. Pilgrimage to holy sites has always been more than a religious activity for Cypriots. Fairs (*panayır*) were particularly crucial for socialization, interacting with neighbors, relatives and friends, and for selling and exchanging products. The cave under the Tekke building is also venerated by Orthodox Christians and called Agioi Saranda and Agioi Fanontes (which means "Saints who appeared").[14] Since some Muslims believe that the saints were formerly buried at the cave, they still light candles at this spot as well.

Hz Ömer Tekke is thought to contain the tombs of seven Muslim warriors, located on the right side of the entrance to the masjid. There is a simple *mihrab* on the north wall. The room next to the tombs is used by employees who sell religious books, Quran, ornaments, etc. The ambiguous nature of the graves means they can be associated with different legends. The widely accepted Turkish version of the history of Hz. Ömer Tekke says that a small masjid was built after the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus in the 16th century (1570/71) on the spot where an official of the general Muawiyah, named Ömer, and six of his soldiers had died in the 7th century (648/9) during the first Arab raid against the island. This is also the version documented at the entrance to the Tekke, and I have heard slight variations on this story from informants. Another narrative is the victory of Hz. Ömer and his friends over a pirate ship that was attempting to attack Ayios Epiktitos from the sea, when seven cavalry soldiers suddenly appeared and rode their horses onto the sea and sank the ship. People believe that traces of horseshoes were left behind on the rocks in the sea. It is even claimed that some Greek Cypriots converted to Islam when they saw these imprints in the rocks (Bağışkan 2009, 44).

Legends regarding the origins of the site reflect the desire in popular discourse to establish a direct connection between the land and the community. The stories of Turkish Cypriots mostly refer to the Ottoman era or the first Muslim presence in Cyprus. They usually pertain to the heroism of the (purportedly) entombed warriors who protect the land from incursions or were martyred for the sake of creed or nation. Anachronism exists and does not matter when it comes to the

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supernatural: an old woman from Kazaphani told me with great conviction that her uncle witnessed the arrival of cavalry soldiers from the sea at Hz Ömer Tekke, which she believes to have happened in the 18th century. Sites with such ambiguous stories are convenient for accommodating various legends and allowing inclusivity.

The Tekke is open daily from 9 am to 4 pm, and there are usually two people working there: an Imam and a Keeper. This is rather interesting since tekkes do not usually have imams. During my fieldwork, the Imam and the Keeper worked rotating shifts, as I never saw them at the Tekke at the same time. When I was there in 2011–12, the Imam at Hz Ömer Tekke, as well as those at the other Muslim sites I studied—except for Hala Sultan Tekke in the Republic of Cyprus—was from Turkey. The Imam had been working at the Tekke for 6 years. When I revisited the site in June 2018 and February 2019, there was no imam, only a Turkish-Cypriot Keeper who has worked at the site for more than 20 years and whom I interviewed many times during my fieldwork. He said that the appointment of an imam has been awaited for quite some time. When I asked what the problem was, he said: "A Turkish-Cypriot imam was to be selected, but the candidates were not found qualified enough, so we now wait for an imam from Turkey."

Hz. Ömer Tekke has recently been at the center of much controversy. Two hotels and a mosque are currently being constructed on the site. The construction of a hotel with a casino close to the tekke has been opposed intensely by the public and an online platform called *Manevi Havama Dokunma Platformu* (Don't Touch My Spiritual Atmosphere) (Milli Gazete, October 7, 2016). The landscape planning and restoration project implemented by the Çatalköy Municipality and financed by Turkey started in 2016 and is not yet complete, probably due in part to the dispute between the High Council of Monuments and the municipality that necessary permission was not obtained for the restoration of the site (Yeni Düzen, March 6, 2018). The project covers the restoration of the Tekke, the construction of a road and a recreational area (including a park, a walking trail along the shore, a coffee shop, sports facilities, parking, etc.). The project has also been criticized by the public and the media for ruining the historic and natural value of the site.[15] The Keeper told me that a new mosque is necessary, specifically for women, since the building is not sufficient during prayer times. He said that the Tekke is not a place for performing namaz anyway. A warning has been added to the entrance saying that visiting the tombs during namaz is not allowed.

Turkish Cypriots whom I met at the spot or those who live or used to live in the neighborhood expressed their complaints about the organization and functioning of the Tekke. They criticized and felt deprived of their relatively less strict sacred place, where currently new rules had been imposed on the site by the Turkish imams, such as the obligation of women to cover their heads when entering the site. I witnessed many instances of women entering the Tekke without covering their heads or without being dressed "properly" and being warned by the Imam or the Keeper. Headscarves and long skirts were provided at the entrance of the building. Women were also expected to avoid entering the site during menstruation.

Turkish Cypriots light candles and incense at saints' shrines or tombs, a practice which was also not allowed inside the Tekke. Despite the discouragement of this practice with oral and written warnings, Cypriots continued to light candles, either on the windows of the building or in the cave under it (the spot sacred to Orthodox Christians) and on the two graves outside the Tekke (one of which belong to Yeşilbaş Hacı Osman Efendi, a shaikh at the tekke in 1940s). Another practice criticized by the Imam was that people were taking soil from the cave under the Tekke, where the tombs were located before, and some were mixing it with water and drinking it, believing in its curative power of several sicknesses.

Turkish Cypriots claimed that they used to bring green fabrics to the Tekke in the past[16] or offer food to other people, when their wishes were granted. They mentioned a special dish cooked with lentil and bulgur, *abudardar pilavı*, brought to the site and distributed to everybody.[17] These

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practices are no longer allowed, but people continued bringing candies and sweets to offer visitors. Some Turkish Cypriots criticized that the place ran like a museum with strict opening and closing times while at the same time ran like a mosque since there is the call for prayer which did not exist before. Moreover, some were disturbed by the fact that there is the new practice of selling religious books and Quran next to the Tekke.

The imams from Turkey define the religious beliefs of Cypriots as "weak" and their practices as "superstitious." I witnessed many instances in which Cypriots were hesitantly asking the Imam to read Quran, burn incense for them, comment on their dreams or their visits to a fortuneteller, or tell them which specific prayer they should read for a sickness or trouble, which usually resulted in the Imam telling them that they should not look to anyone or anything else but God. He made the following comment after the Turkish Cypriot woman, who asked him to burn incense she brought, left: "One should not rely on the dead, they [Cypriots] come here only for making a wish. They ought to come, of course, these [the buried] are people close to Allah, but they only come for wishes. They will pay for it in the afterlife" (April 10, 2010). Although both the Turkish Imam and the Cypriot Keeper were applying the regulations at the site, they had relatively different approaches to the visitors. While the Imam had a more critical and strict approach to how people worship at the site, the Keeper did not intervene much as long as they did not harm the site or disturb other visitors.

Atalay mentions a report by the Department of Religious Affairs in 1990 claiming that Turkish Cypriots are ignorant of many religious practices (such as ablution, Quran verses, and sura) and that they do not feast or attend mosque except during the feasts and holy days (2003, 131–132). As I argued before, some practices of Cypriots are objected to by institutional Islam; they are listed on the walls of some sacred sites as "superstition" and forbidden by Islam. Not only the imams at the sacred sites, but also some Turkish settlers or visitors from Turkey were critical of the beliefs and practices of Turkish Cypriots. A Turkish settler woman told me: "They [Turkish Cypriots] have become infidels living with infidels [Greek Cypriots]" (2011). Another commentary made by a Turkish woman in her 40s whose children were students at a university in Northern Cyprus:

> They [Turkish Cypriots] were caught in the middle, no one taught them religion, they were under the influence of British colonialism and Christianity. They even don't know these kinds of places, they don't come. (May 11, 2011)

Another woman in her 50s who moved to Cyprus 21 years ago replied my question about the practices at the site:

> You can recite Ihlas 11 times and al-Fatiha once, read Quran or perform namaz. There is no restriction. Some also light candles, I don't do that, how would a candle benefit you? You pray to Allah. I didn't visit the cave. Cypriots burn candles, they burn at Apostolos [Apostolos Andreas Monastery] but that's a church. (May 11, 2011)

An article published in the newspaper *Kıbrıs Star* by Ipek Halim with the title "Hz. Ömer Tekke and the list of impossibles" (*Hz. Ömer Tekkesi ve olmazlar listesi*) shared similar concerns with other Turkish Cypriots. I conducted a two-hour interview with the author in 2011. In the article, Halim mentions her own childhood memories of the place and how people were free to do whatever they wanted. She told me that she and other Turkish Cypriots feel that their understanding of religion was being rejected at the Hz. Ömer Tekke. She resisted the current "oppressive" practices at the Tekke and sarcastically asked, "Then, what happened to the candles we lit? So, they were all wasted? Or did I become a Christian? Or why is a religious practice that belongs to any religion bad? Isn't it that Islam is a belief system that recognizes and embraces all religions?" (2007). Regarding the relationship between Turkey and Northern Cyprus in general,

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she said: "now it feels as if there is an eye watching us; the uneasiness of 'will-I-do-something-wrong' feeling prevails" (2011). Halim and her family were displaced from Limassol, in the Republic of Cyprus. She told me how these kinds of religious sites became places of consolation, melancholy, and peace for many Cypriots who were trying to relieve the pains of war and the longing for home. Moreover, it was a place for picnics and entertainment when she was a child in the 1980s. In fact, I saw many Turkish Cypriots coming here not only to pray but also to relax, some eating picnics next to the sea, some fishing in front of the Tekke. On my most recent visits to the site, I observed that this area was covered to build a walking trail, blocking off the use of the seaside for such purposes. Turkish Cypriots were critical and unhappy about how the surrounding landscape has been changed over time through increasing settlement in the area, destroying the natural environment.

Halim didn't say explicitly that all of the changes that have occurred at the Tekke were imposed directly by Turks or Turkey, but it was easy to sense the implicit, underlying reference, which could be understood from her comparison of the religious beliefs of the two communities. Regarding Turkish-Cypriot approaches to Islam, she said, "We are more easygoing and tolerant about religion. We don't have strict rules" (2011). She explained this differentiation as being due to the impact of a shared life with Greek Cypriots, ethnic conflict, and the forced migration that resulted in the "decrease of their religious beliefs." However, there were other people who did openly criticize Turks for their intervention in religious places and practices. One old Cypriot woman told me that Turks set out graves the wrong way because people are normally supposed to pray next to the feet of the dead, not next to their heads. She said, "look, this is obviously the work of Turks." The following quote by another Turkish Cypriot woman in her 50s was also an example of a comparison:

> We come here very often. We come for making a wish. We [Cypriots] don't have Shiism here, we only have Sunni Muslims. You [Turks][18] have discrimination, sectarianism. We don't have that; everyone is Sunni Muslim. We don't intervene in different beliefs, we respect them. Each to [has] her/his own religion. And we don't have head covering here, you [Turks] have chador and all. Namely, people don't wear sleeveless t-shirts here, but they do wear short sleeve. Of course, the weather is hot, that's also why people don't cover themselves much. We also perform prayer, fast, there is no difference. (April 16, 2011)

Turkish Cypriots and Turkish settlers not only compare, negotiate, and challenge their own, and each other's, religious identities and practices at the Tekke, but also question their enforced coexistence and their constructed "brotherhood" on this small island. Many Turkish Cypriots are critical of Turkey's assimilative policies, implemented through various media (education, army, language, demography), but usually make political remarks in rather subtle ways, embedded in everyday conversations about ordinary issues—apparently as irrelevant and small as "how the dead are positioned in a tomb." Hz. Ömer Tekke appears to reflect, on a small scale, the political controversy between Turkey and Northern Cyprus as well as the conflict between Orthodox Sunni and the local interpretations of Islam.

In response to the religious-oriented policies of Turkey and conservative Islam of some settlers, some Turkish Cypriots embrace and praise the past mixed religious practices with Orthodox Christians as part of their local culture. In the case of Hz. Ömer Tekke, only few old people remembered that Christians were also attending the site, but "shared sacred sites" is a discourse that is used to emphasize the common practices as evidence of coexistence and harmony of Greek and Turkish Cypriots in the past as the "real" inhabitants of the island. The Tekke has been transformed by Turkey from an interreligious site, shared by Greek and Turkish Cypriots as a place of sanctity and recreation, into an exclusivist Sunni-Muslim one with a destroyed environment.[19] Namely, not only the practices and discourses attached to the site, but also the physical qualities of the building and its environment has been claimed and altered by the politically dominant (Hayden et al. 2016).

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The competition over controlling the site or its aspects display intragroup power asymmetries and the imposition of institutionalized Sunnism by the colonizer.

Conclusion

The case of Hz. Ömer Tekke shows that sacred sites are not necessarily shared peacefully and worshipped similarly by the members of the Muslim community who (are supposed to) share an ethnicity and a religion. It exemplifies the manifestation of conflictual relations between two groups through a discussion over religious practices and identities in the wider context of political and cultural hegemony of Turkey over Northern Cyprus. Turkey has been transforming both the political and religious landscape since its military intervention, and Islam has been represented more vigorously and more aggressively in an exclusivist manner in the last decade of pro-Islamic AKP-government. Sacred sites have become catalysts for Turkish Cypriots to express their dislike of Turkey's interference in the internal political processes of the TRNC, attempts at Islamizing the Cypriot community, and frustrations with the cultural differences with settlers.

Turkey the "motherland" has appeared to present contradictory images to Turkish Cypriots. On one side is the role-model, modern, secular, Kemalist republican project coherent with the Western world they aspire to, despite the fact that this image has been altered with the recent pro-Islamic government in Turkey. On the other are the arrogant middle- and upper-class Turks who patronize and look down on Cypriot culture and local identity, and the backward lower-class immigrants from Anatolia who they have to deal with in their own everyday life. Religious sites where Turkish Cypriots are confronted with this negative image lead to a questioning of both themselves and the "fraternal" Other. For decades, Turkish Cypriots have been stuck between the unresolved Cyprus problem and the nationalist paradigm, infused with ethno-religious overtones, but could yet have a future built on identities beyond the blind exclusivism currently prevalent in the region.

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Notes

1 For example, Psaltis et al. (2019) identify variations in acceptance of renewed cohabitation among Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, and settlers with the impact of demographic profile, past victimization, perception of justice, etc.

2 The theoretical model of antagonistic tolerance depends on Hayden's 2002 article in *Current Anthropology* on competitive sharing of religious sites in India and the Balkans and the successive comparative research in Bulgaria, India, Turkey and Portugal (Hayden et al. 2016).

3 I use intracommunal in an emic way, meaning that both communities call themselves Muslims. The terms "intra" and "inter" refer to a community's perception of the Self and the Other in a certain context and time frame.

4 Yaşın argues that the vagueness and blurriness of Turkish-Cypriot identity is even reflected in how they name themselves—there are three distinct versions (2013, 10). In this text, I will use the term "Turkish Cypriot" as it is the one most commonly used in the English-language literature. However, different denominations strongly refer to specific political stances and a desire for an emphasis on a certain part of the identity: (1) Kıbrıs Türkü (Turk of Cyprus), with an emphasis

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on nationalism; (2) Kıbrıslı Türk (Cypriot Turk), with an emphasis on both Turkishness and Cypriotness; (3) Kıbrıslıtürk (Cypriotturkish), with an emphasis on Cypriotness, which is used by most local intellectuals and some researchers from Turkey. Cypriotturkish also has its Greek counterpart, Cypriotgreek.

5 The United Nations comprehensive solution plan for the Cyprus conflict, named after UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, suggested a federal system based on the principles of bi-zonality, bi-communality, and shared sovereignty. In the referendum in April 2004, it was opposed by 76 % of Greek Cypriots, while it was supported by 65 % of Turkish Cypriots.

6 Hatay argues, "(t)he majority came to Cyprus between 1975 and 1977 from the regions around Trabzon (East Black Sea), Antalya, Mersin, Adana (Southern Turkey), Çarşamba, Samsun (West Black Sea), Konya (Central Anatolia) and southeastern Turkey" (2005, 12).

7 According to the most current information I received from the Religious Affairs Department of TRNC on August 15, 2019, there are currently 211 active mosques in the TRNC and no new mosques under construction. This number may exclude the mosques that currently have no imam and do not function on a daily basis since the number of mosques in the north has grown visibly since my last fieldwork year in Cyprus. According to the number given by the 2018 US Department of State Religious Freedom Report, imams at the 192 mosques in the north have continued to be appointed and funded by the Religious Affairs Department (2018, 15). Dayıoğlu & Hatay claim that the mosques belong to the Evkaf Administration according to the law; 90% of the mosque maintenance and staffing are financed by the Ministry of Finance, which in turn requests this amount from Turkey (2011, 144).

8 The 2018 US Department of State Religious Freedom Report mentions complaints against vocational teachers from Turkey, who pressured students with regard to religion (2018, 15).

9 According to Hendrich and Strohmeier, approximately 15% of Turkish settlers are Alevis (2015, 4).

10 The word *Linobambakoi* is a compound of two Greek words, meaning "linen" and "cotton," referring to the dual character of the group's religious identity.

11 For a discussion of this group, see Beckingham 1957b, Luke 1957, Skendi 1967.

12 For a more detailed discussion of this approach, see Harmanşah 2014.

13 Tekke is a term usually used for the local headquarters of Sufi orders. However, I could not find any evidence about whether the site has ever been associated with a brotherhood at any point in the past and why tekke is preferred instead of türbe (tomb), a commonly used word for such sites. Moreover, similar to the Kırklar Tekke in Nicosia, Hz. Ömer Tekke might be established only for spreading Islam (makam türbesi) and has nothing to do with people buried.

14 The site is rarely visited by Orthodox Christians nowadays and is only remembered by those who used to live in the neighboring villages. For a discussion on Hz Ömer Tekke as a sacred site shared by Muslims and Christians, and for the Greek account of the site, see Harmanşah 2014.

15 The Tekke building has been restored a couple of times; archaeologist Tuncer Bağışkan points out mistakes made during restoration (Bağışkan 2014).

16 This is mainly practiced in Alevi/Bektashi communities but does not necessarily connote Turkish-Cypriots' Alevi identities.

17 For an explanation of how the dish is cooked and served during *mawlid* gatherings at homes, see Anıl 1986.

18 As I introduced myself as a citizen of Turkey, she included me in her category of "Turks" in the conversation.

19 Kırklar Tekke in Nicosia has gone through a similar transformation. See Harmanşah 2014.

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