
A Narrative of My Personal Experience of Assimilating and Understanding the Culture in Cyprus

A World Away in Cyprus

My name is Human and I am choosing to write about the five years spent adapting to, and understanding the culture I encountered when living in the village of Ypsonas, Cyprus. After growing up in Long Island for most of my life, I was accustomed to the culture and social norms of the United States. For my entire life, I had thought that society was the same everywhere and the world was all similar in customs and culture. This idea was broken soon later, when at the age of seven, my family relocated to Cyprus and my views of culture and society remained predominantly American. Prior to the move to Cyprus, I was adapting well to my new journey into public school in New York, where I absorbed the cultural norms of society around me and began to make efforts to blend in. As a child, I worked hard to conform to society and did my best to adopt the customs and culture of the world around me. In the first grade, this seemed easy, as I was raised very similarly to the people around me, but that all changed a few months later. After school had gone to break for the summer, my family and I took off from John F. Kennedy airport where I embarked on my voyage to Europe, where I would face the biggest change of my young life, and effectively have my cultural ideals completely shifted forever.

The culture I was immersed in shaped who I was, and at that time the nutritional culture of Suburban New York consisted eating 'All-American Foods', like hotdogs, hamburgers, and stake, on the couch, alone, with a fork, spoon, or knife. In Cyprus, it was quite common for the locals to eat in a different social dimension. Social dimensions, being the way one eats in regard to who is at the table and why, were completely different in Ypsonas, Cyprus. Being used to eating alone while watching TV, I was in for a shock when I discovered that everyone from all branches of the family ate together at the table every evening. The temporal dimensions, otherwise referred to as when one ate and for how long, were also different from what I was used to. Locals would eat at exactly six o'clock every evening, and spend more than an hour on eating alone. The entire family would meet every night at the same time and eat as if it was a feast, every single night. To my surprise, everyone at the table was relatively thin and maintained a healthy lifestyle. The bodily dimension, also known as the body image in the Cypriot culture, was much more fitness orientated than in the United States. This meant that people would put more work into keeping their bodies healthy and fit, which differed from what I was used to in the US.

Mechanical solidarity, a term for societies with limited social diversity, one common language, a common ethnicity and common religions, seemed to describe Cyprus at first. This description seemed real to me for a prolonged amount of time, and was only disproved when I was old enough to explore the country. At about ten years old, I was able to go out more and explore the area surrounding me, which led me to discover that Ypsonas more resembled organic solidarity. This meant that society was diversified and had a high levels of privacy, with no common language, many ethnicities and no common religion. This meant there were hundreds of languages and dialects for me to learn, with a diverse population for me to discover. Just like the United States, Cyprus had organic solidarity, but one had to search for it, in order to find it.

Within my society in New York, I was always accustomed to seeing strangers fall in love and later get married. This practice of exogamy meant that two unrelated strangers met and then married each other. The practice of exogamy was very popular in the United States and was viewed as the responsible and humane thing to do. In Cyprus, where exogamy was existent and completely acceptable, Endogamy was the popular way of marriage. Endogamy, also known as marrying one within the community or local limits, was very common in Ypsonas. Whilst incest was frowned upon, anything after second cousins was very normal and most people married their childhood friends. Cyprus was matrilocal, so after people married, they tended to move in with the bride's family, and until the couple had children, continued to live under the bride's mother's rule. When the couple produced a child, they would effectively inherit the house, and the new mother, also the wife, would take command of the household. As a new system to me, the local matrilocal system seemed strange, but once I got used to it, it seemed completely normal.

Within the Cypriot society, people spoke one of two languages; Greek and Turkish. Within the village of Ypsonas, almost everyone spoke strictly Greek. Coming to Cyprus, I knew an adequate amount of Greek to be able to communicate with others and get basic necessities. The language that I used was Parole, which is the basic understanding of the language and the ability to speak it, with no rules or clear grammar to follow. This allowed me to get by and communicate, but when I began school in Cyprus, it was very clear that I had to learn the grammar and rule set behind the language. I could not read, write, or even form complex sentences, but eventually I learned the language. Langue is the grammar and rules behind the language as well as the way people can compartmentalize the language elements. Things like tense, tone, grammar, and parts of speech all fall under the langue of the language. After a tedious year in school, I finally began to learn the very complicated and confusing language of Cyprus; a dialect of Greek containing Turkish slang. I eventually was able to learn the language and can still speak, read, write, and effectively use the parole and langue of the language. In all, my journey in Cyprus has provided me with knowledge that I've learned through struggle and eventual understanding of the culture and society surrounding me.