

The Impact of the History of Colonialism on Identity Formation Among the Cypriot Diaspora in the United Kingdom

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Master Thesis in Sociology

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Politics of Sociology, MA

Colonial Studies

Erasmus University Rotterdam

Word-Count: 9786

June 2023

The logo of Erasmus University, featuring the word "Erasmus" in a stylized, cursive script.

Acknowledgements

To my beloved family — my mother Ayşe, my father Ediz, and my little brother Derviş— I am deeply grateful for the privilege of being your daughter, and sister. Your support and presence in my life have been my guiding light. Although distance separates us from our cherished home, your warmth reaches me from afar. I desire to make you proud and carry our family's values with me. I love you.

My appreciation also extends to my grandparents Dervişe, Nebile. Ibrahim and Derviş. Your presence gives me strength and boundless love has been my greatest source of strength throughout this journey. May your lives be blessed with health and longevity. I love you.

To my dear partner and other half Çağın, I dedicate this research to you as well. Your unwavering love and companionship have been a constant source of inspiration. Thank you for lighting our journey and sharing life's joys together with me. I love you.

I am thankful to my supervisor, Dr Vivian Visser, for her valuable guidance throughout the research process. Your dedication and encouragement have propelled me to new heights, and I am truly grateful for your mentorship.

I extend my gratitude to my second supervisor, Dr Jeroen van der Waal, for generously sharing your time, insights and constructive feedback. Your contributions have been instrumental in identifying areas for improvement and strengthening my academic work.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to my friend Sevasti, my cousin Nebile, and my classmates. Your warm friendship and welcoming personality made me feel at home during my studies. I am thankful for all of you.

Abstract

This study explores the intricate influence of colonialism on the identity formation of the Cypriot diaspora by integrating critical race studies, decolonial studies, and hybridity theory. The historical context of Cyprus as a colonized region plays a significant role in shaping the prevailing binary understanding of racial identity that continues to impact the lives of Cypriots residing in the UK. Colonialism's impact on knowledge production is evident, with the colonial era establishing the binary framework for racial categorization and hierarchy, which colonial powers utilized to assert dominance. This framework, rooted in Western and non-Western notions, perpetuated the dichotomy between identities, such as Greek and Turkish, while reinforcing the Western construction of superiority and rationality. Consequently, this colonial legacy perpetuates the marginalization of indigenous knowledge and the acceptance of biased narratives. The consequent binary identity perspective, endorsed by hegemonic postcolonial narratives, engenders a sense of superiority between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. However, through various coping mechanisms, individuals within the Cypriot diaspora navigate and embrace the multifaceted dimensions of their identities. This engagement with hybridity allows for a more nuanced and softened impact of colonial history on the identity formation process.

Keywords: Colonialism, culture, classification, hybridisation, history education, identity

The impact of the history of colonialism on identity formation among the Cypriot Diaspora in the United Kingdom

1. Introduction

During the early twentieth century, Cyprus was under the colonial control of the United Kingdom, which had established its authority over the island in 1914 (Küçükcan, 2014). For a variety of reasons, many Greek and Turkish Cypriots around this time immigrated to the UK. The political factors were the main motivation for this migration influx. A sense of insecurity and instability resulted from the colonial government's policy toward the island's many ethnic groups, which frequently led to tensions and clashes. On the island, the political upheaval was also influenced by the formation of nationalist movements that aimed to oppose colonial control and various tensions among different ethnic communities. Due to these economic and political challenges, many Cypriots, as many other ethnic minorities throughout the world have as well, believe that moving to the United Kingdom would increase their chances of leading a better life. Such migration patterns which these communities have in common are that they reside in host nations while retaining close cultural, social, and economic ties to their place of origin and are often referred to as 'diasporas' (Sheffer, 1986).

The social, cultural, and political climate of the island was profoundly changed by the British Crown's annexation of Cyprus in 1914. Communities on the island identified themselves predominantly along religious categories before the British annexation, such as Orthodox Christians and Muslims. In contrast, following the arrival of the British, a new type of identification and 'dual categorisation' based on ethnicity started to replace the previous norms about categorisation, which were based on religion. (Köseoğlu, 2021). As Akcaali (2007) states, this type of categorization excludes various communities such as Armenians, Maronites, Afro-Cypriots, Latins, Gypsy population, Pontians, Anatolians, Jews and the British.

Scholars have extensively researched the connection between post-colonial history and the process of identity formation, yet the dominant explanations lack fully satisfactory explanations (Childs and Williams, 2014). Firstly, scholars often ignore the cultural components that are important and relevant to understand the identity formation process by concentrating only on political or economic issues. Besides, some studies could define identity in a limited way that ignores the complexity and flexibility of identity in the context of diasporas, such as dual nationality, experiencing the legacy of colonialism in the UK in practice in the context of diasporas.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate how the historical implications of colonialism influence the process of identity formation by analysing how individuals negotiate, construct and navigate their identities, to provide a wider picture of the Cypriot Diaspora in the UK. By integrating three distinct perspectives encompassing diverse cultural, colonial, and racial origins, the research aims to provide an inclusive analysis of the national and cultural identity process within diasporic communities.

Therefore, if diasporas can thus be seen as tools for the deterritorialization and delocalization of conflicts, as discussed by Demmers (2002), it holds significant implications for policymakers and governments in multicultural host countries, as it can inform the formulation of international or national policies. Also, this research is particularly relevant for countries like Cyprus, where various ethnic backgrounds live together with ongoing hostility over race and identity among communities and where the colonial discourse is deeply rooted.

In the works of Edward Said, I find indications that colonial discourses are relevant in explaining the identity formation process (Said, 1994). Therefore, the current research seeks to address the research question: *How do people construct their identity in the UK diaspora -the land of colonizers- and in what way does living in the UK influence their identity construction?* This study aims to contribute to the understanding of the complex relationship between colonial history, cultural elements, and identity construction among diasporic communities using a qualitative research technique that involves interviews with individuals of the UK diaspora.

In the course of my thesis investigation, these sub-questions played a vital role in shaping my understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding the colonial influence and formation of identities within the Cypriot diaspora in the UK. By delving into the following inquiries derived from decolonial studies, critical race studies and hybridity theory, I was able to define mechanisms that shed light on the intricate nature of my research topic:

How does the creation of racial categorizations impact the identity formation of Cypriot communities in the UK, specifically concerning Greek and Turkish national identities? To what extent can we attribute the categorization of these identities to the historical process of colonialism? Does colonialism play a role in reinforcing the notion of the fundamental distinction between groups based on their ethnic and national identities, as seen in the case of the divided Greek and Turkish communities? How does the concept of race function as a socially constructed entity that is historically and culturally dependent?

Can embracing multicultural identities and interactions influence the identity formation process, particularly within the Cypriot diaspora in the UK? In what ways does focusing on the experiences of the Cypriot diaspora in the UK shed light on the narratives of colonialism and the utilization of categorization for control? How do the narratives of Cypriot identity evolve due to geographical distance and the perceptions and experiences shaped within the UK?

2. Theoretical Framework

To comprehend the complexities of identity construction in diasporas with a colonial history, adopting a decolonial standpoint becomes imperative, as it illuminates the process of "production of knowledge" (Said, 2003) that is influenced by power dynamics. As Schiller, Ember, Ember, and Skoggrad (2005) suggest, individuals within diasporas often encounter challenges in formulating an identity that encompasses both their country of origin and their present location, leading to a sense of detachment from both. Despite this detachment, diasporic communities strive to maintain connections with their ancestral homelands through cultural attachments, as highlighted by Fortier (1998), which involves a persistent commitment and identification with the country of origin despite physical separation. The production of knowledge and with this, the formation of identity is intricately linked to the pursuit of preserving cultural identity, a phenomenon deeply influenced by historical power dynamics, which removes diverse perspectives from history production that have the potential to be perpetuated across generations, underscoring the lasting influence of colonial legacies (Said, 2003).

This is also in line with Bhabra, which further develops this by stating that knowledge production often reinforces stereotypes and a sense of cultural superiority which show themselves in practices such as categorisation based on racial, religious and linguistic (Bhabra, 2014, p.116). When referring to the West, it is crucial to clarify that it refers to the historical context of empires and kingdoms which played a significant role as colonizers.

From the critical race theory which the emphasis is vastly on categorisation and hierarchy, Bhabra's (2014) and Said's (2003) arguments can be further understood. The categorization of race and its implications for segregation and inequality within communities were the key themes of Star and Bowker's (2008) study. Star and Bowker's (2008) research examines the categorization of race and its relationship to systems of power and control, particularly within the context of apartheid. Star and Bowker's (2008) study highlights the nature of racial categorization, challenging the notion that race is

solely based on physical features. Instead, they argue that apartheid's racial categorization primarily relied on socially constructed systems of power and control (Bowker and Star, 2008).

The adoption of Star and Bowker's perspective on the socially constructed nature of race, as opposed to its solely physical differentiation, offers a valuable theoretical framework for examining power dynamics and the construction of narratives that influence the formation of colonial narratives. Therefore, this perspective aligns with colonial studies, which emphasize the role of social constructions. By recognizing the socially constructed nature of race, scholars can uncover the underlying power dynamics and critically analyze the narratives and discourses that uphold these dynamics within colonial legacies. The classification of race has been further developed by M'Charek by dividing the form of appearance and acceptance of races into two categories: fact and fiction. Race as a fiction approach states that race is more about an ideology and is socially constructed. 'We are talking about, something in our heads or our institutions.' (M'Charek, 2013, p.421). The problem which makes this reasoning complicated as Azoulay argues, is the regime-made disaster, in this case, colonial narratives, 'can occur without acknowledgement and be recognized as disasters.' (Azoulay, 2012, p. 21) As it is stated in the previous lines, the general norm of identity before the control of the UK was only based on religion: Christianity and Muslim. In contrast, the disaster of the classification of races caused the conflict over identities as Turk and Greek which presents the change in the collective norm in line with the change in the colonial narrative (Köseoğlu, 2021; Akcali, 2007)

While Bhabra (2012) also acknowledge the 'regime-made disaster', colonial legacy, which creates a power imbalance, and hierarchies of races by the regime's narratives, her article 'Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues' makes this argument more inclusive and diverse. 'We must not merely change the narratives of our histories but transform our sense of what it means to live.' (Bhabra, 2014 p.116) In addition to Edward Said's argument, which focuses on examining the dominance and elimination of cultures, Bhabra asserts that it is essential to consider both sides and accept the "inheritances." This means that while postcolonialism shapes countries by influencing their historical narratives, it is necessary to acknowledge and embrace both the cultures shaped by colonial roots and the original historical backgrounds. Only this way a country who have colonial background can make 'an attempt to interrupt the Western discourses of modernity' (Bhabra, 2014 p.116). Therefore, the perspectives of Said (2003) and Bhabra (2014), posit the importance of acknowledging the impact of colonialism and the hegemony of colonial discourse on the formation of cultural identity since it emphasizes that stereotypes and segmentation of races are power-related constructions of colonial cultures over non-Western cultures.

Hybridity theory emphasizes the blending and mixing of different cultural elements, identities, and narratives in the process of identity formation. Hence, the process of hybridization provides a wider

perspective by arguing the formation of cultural identities is the product of active negotiation and participation of people from many cultural backgrounds (Bhabha, 1994).

3. Data and Methods

The research study was conducted online over two months, specifically in April and May of the year 2023. To delve into the topic of identity formation among the Cypriot diaspora in the United Kingdom, the study employed an inductive approach and relied on qualitative methods, particularly in-depth interviews. (DeCarlo, 2018; Dudovskiy, n.d; Hammarberg, Kirkman, Lacey, 2016). By utilizing these methods, the aim was to explore the impact of the history of colonialism on the formation of identities within the Cypriot Diaspora in the UK (Morris, 2015).

The qualitative nature of the research allowed for a comprehensive examination of the intricate dynamics between the history of colonialism and identity formation. (Hammarberg, Kirkman, Lacey, 2016) To ensure a thorough exploration, respondents were purposefully selected based on their country of birth, specifically the United Kingdom (UK). This deliberate selection process enabled the inclusion of participants who could provide insights into the mechanisms and their perceived environment through which their identities are shaped.

By focusing on the country of residence as a determining factor for respondent selection, the research sought to capture the multifaceted aspects of identity construction. It recognizes that the location in which individuals reside plays a crucial role in influencing their self-perception, as well as the social, cultural, and political contexts in which they navigate. As such, the study acknowledges the complex interplay between individual agency and the structural forces that shape identities.

Given the sensitive nature of identity and ideological positioning, a cautious approach was employed to ensure the inclusion of participants who could provide valuable insights. The selection of respondents was primarily conducted through social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. The technique of snowball sampling was utilized to expand the pool of potential participants. Prospective respondents were approached and asked if they were willing to discuss their experiences of identity

formation and the impact of colonial history. Those who expressed interest were invited to take part in in-depth interviews.

The in-depth interviews proved to be a suitable method for this research. They provided a platform for attentive listening and meaningful engagement with respondents who often feel marginalized and confused, as the ensuing results will demonstrate (Morris, 2015).

Participants themselves expressed their appreciation for the interviews and the overall research objective, highlighting the need for more investigations on the relationship between the effects of colonialism and identity. Their comments included statements such as "We need much more research like this" and "We need to understand more about this relationship between the effect of colonialism and identity" (Sofia and Thekla). The interviews provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on their struggles and emotions, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the individual-level processes of identity formation. Factors such as personal experiences, education, living outside Cyprus, and post-war experiences were examined to capture a holistic understanding of participants' thoughts on their identity and their selection of historical narratives. Additionally, the practical implications of identity and historical exploration in participants' daily actions were emphasized. Participants were encouraged to freely express their thoughts and articulate their actions related to identity and history search, as well as coping mechanisms linked to the outcomes of this process.

The in-depth interviews followed a semi-structured format. Initial sensitizing concepts and topics derived from the existing literature guided the interviews and aided in the interpretation of participants' responses. Empirically recurring and relevant themes and topics were further explored and introduced as needed. Respondents were prompted to reflect on the categorization mentioned in the introduction, including their opinions on the initiators of such categorizations and whether they identified themselves within those categories. Furthermore, participants were asked about their general opinions, attitudes, relationships, and experiences in the UK, as well as their connection to Cyprus. They were also invited to express their associations with Cypriots living in Cyprus, British, and other minority populations in the UK. Open-ended questioning was employed to allow for the emergence of unforeseen themes and attitudes.

Thirteen interviews were conducted using various online platforms, including WhatsApp, Instagram, and Zoom, to accommodate respondents' preferences. Nine interviews were held on Zoom, three on WhatsApp, and one on Instagram. The duration of the interviews varied, with two lasting 30 and 50 minutes, while the remaining interviews ranged from one and a half to two hours. All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim, resulting in a total of 152 pages of transcriptions. The

interviews were conducted and transcribed in English. To protect the privacy of the participants, fictitious names were assigned.

The interview transcriptions were analyzed and coded using a constant comparison method, beginning with open coding and progressing to axial coding. This process culminated in selective coding to identify underlying discourses and themes within the data (Holton, 2010).

4. Results

The exploration of the relationship between the history of colonialism and identity formation among the Cypriot diaspora in the UK represents an important area of study within the broader field of diaspora research. By employing qualitative methods and conducting in-depth interviews, this research endeavour seeks to shed light on the experiences, perspectives, and narratives of individuals who have born in the United Kingdom and who are part of the Cypriot Diaspora in the UK. In doing so, it aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how imperialism influences the construction of identities in diasporic communities, ultimately enriching the existing body of knowledge in this field.

However, the experiences of the UK Cypriot diaspora extend beyond external factors. To fully comprehend their experiences, it is necessary to delve deeper into the both external factors and personal meaning-making processes of the respondents. Following this, two dimensions of the history of colonialism on identity formation are delineated, drawing upon the discourses to evaluate the aforementioned practical and emotional examples of the outcome of colonial history: colonial narratives and coping mechanisms.

4.1 Colonial Narratives

In exploring the struggles of identity formation among respondents in the UK, it becomes apparent that their explanations often align with the theories identified in existing research. The narratives of colonialism, encompassing various dimensions such as education and the categorization of language, religion, and race, serve as significant preconditions for identity formation among the Cypriot diaspora in the UK. Out of the 13 respondents, 11 explicitly acknowledge experiencing the repercussions of colonial narratives in their everyday lives, both in practical and emotional terms. I will now delve into

the dimensions that emerge as outcomes of the history of colonialism, namely *Selective History, and Labelling in ethnical terms based on Language and Religion Classification*.

4.1.1 Selective History in Education, Production of Knowledge Leading to Knowledge Gap:

One crucial aspect that emerged from the interviews was the influence of education on the formation of identity and the perpetuation of selective history, which contributes to a knowledge gap among certain individuals. This sentiment is echoed by respondents:

“I think there're people who very closely identify with certain relations or ideas which are mainly misguided actually and it's kind of sound arrogant.” (Thecla)

“The schooling education and everything leading to that (gap and labelling) is the problem” (Bloom)

“Even though I went to a private school, and it was slightly different, I think at least the Greek-speaking side has a problem with teaching”(Clair)

“The way they're teaching history (Turkish speaking side) in school, big problem.” (Berk)

These quotes imply that the current educational approach to teaching history perpetuates a problematic understanding of colonial narratives, contributing to a limited and biased perspective among students. By failing to provide a comprehensive understanding of colonial history, the education system may perpetuate certain narratives while neglecting others, hindering a nuanced understanding of identity formation within the context of colonialism.

Several participants highlighted the impact of education on their understanding of colonial narratives and the shaping of their identities. As Thekla sheds light on the complexity of Cypriot culture, stating:

“We come from a very complex culture with a lot of different opinions.” As Ayse states, “You know, everyone here goes to either Greek or Turkish school, but I learnt Cypriot-turkish with my grandparents they were the ones who talk in their language.”, and Jordan further explains the issue by saying “If you want to learn Cypriot-Greek, you need to be in Cyprus, since you know, it is a dialect. You can't find it in books.”

The use of colonial narratives to teach history has led an entire generation to construct their identities based on the historical accounts presented to them. However, discrepancies between the narratives in history books and the participants' lived experiences have created confusion and a sense of identity crisis. The history books predominantly emphasize certain Turkish or Greek identities and their practices such as language, culture, and history, which they disregard the wider identities. This dichotomy between the historical narratives and the participants' cultural practices and personal environments has resulted in an internal struggle to reconcile their multiple identities. Hence, a perceptible disparity emerges between the historical narratives presented in education and the lived experiences of individuals, resulting in a notable discrepancy between the information people read and perceive.

Thekla and other participants also challenge the emphasis on Greek and Turkish identities, highlighting that it is largely constructed and based on opinions rather than concrete evidence. They express,

"So, this Greek and Turkish emphasis is effectively made up, we're looking at data which is largely an opinion." They assert, "The only reason that happens is because people reinforce that idea, so that idea hasn't come from nowhere."

They question the validity of these identities, asserting that they are effectively made up and dependent on the reinforcement of certain ideas. They imply that the strong connections to ancient ancestral identities in Cyprus are not natural or universal. In line with that, they argue that the emphasis on Greek and Turkish identities in Cyprus is largely constructed and based on conscious decisions rather than concrete evidence. Bloom suggests that there may have been a deliberate decision by the colonizers to withhold this history, remarking,

"I think there's been a conscious decision maybe from the colonizers not to share that history." They also highlight the confusion within contemporary Cyprus, referencing political shifts and contrasting leadership styles, indicating a lack of direction and coherence. There might be a potential link between the conscious decision of history education, specifically the use of colonial narratives, and the political confusion observed in Cypriot elections, where there is a notable shift from left to right in each election. Thekla stated, "Even as the government, like looking at the last election in the Republic of Cyprus, they don't know what they're doing."

These quotes from the interviews shed light on the impact of selective history on individuals' personal experiences and self-perception. This knowledge gap arises due to the omission or distortion of certain historical narratives in educational curricula, resulting in the perpetuation of specific narratives about colonial history. For example:

"I had to change the way I talked for him to understand which is fundamental to me. I visited him in Athens, and the lifestyle was different ... the people were different." (Clair)

"I was trying to feel connected to my family, so I was changing the way I speak Turkish ... to talk properly." (Sylvia)

By quoting these interviewees, these experiences led them to question the notion of being Greek and recognize the fundamental differences they encountered, prompting them to reevaluate their own identity. It becomes evident that the selective history of colonial narratives in Cyprus has shaped the respondents' perceptions and experiences. Clair recounts a personal experience wherein their identification as Greek was challenged as a result of their prior education and narratives. They describe a situation in which they realized significant differences in lifestyle and modes of communication. This realization prompted them to reflect on their own identity and question the notion of being Greek and Turkish. The contrasting experiences encountered in 'mainland' and the fundamental differences observed in lifestyle and people compelled them to reevaluate their understanding of identity.

4.1.2 Labelling based on Language, Religion and Race:

Likewise, labelling has also been expressed as an obstacle to identity formation which mostly appeared as an example for colonial narratives. The participants' accounts shed light on how labelling based on ethnicity, language, and religion affects their sense of self and perpetuates colonial narratives. The following quotes from the participants provide deeper insights into this theme:

Like Clair, 13 out of 11 participants also reflected on the experience of being labelled as Greek and the British tendency to categorize things strictly. They stated,

"I very slowly realized I was being labelled as Greek because the British love to label things and categorize things very strictly. That doesn't necessarily apply to Cypriots; it's not black and white." (Ayse)

They recalled instances when their work was negatively associated with being Greek, stating, "My supervisor at the time said my work is very Greek, meaning that it wasn't very good. Other comments felt like they were meant to shame me for being from a particular geographic

location. That's racism, I guess, right?" (Clair) / "...and then there's always going to be a British person who categorizes something at one point in time and then they build on their category ... it's what they do, they categorize, the cluster they do." (Mary)

These participants' remark illustrates how labelling leads to a sense of discomfort and the desire to reject such labels. This interviewee's perspective emphasizes how labelling can perpetuate stereotypes and contribute to discrimination within everyday life. Thekla and others mentioned the significance of language and religion in Cyprus and the potential for these factors to create divisions among people.

"Things like language and religion are a massive deal in Cyprus. If you go to Cyprus, a church and mosque is being built every five minutes. Religion and language are good ways to separate people in some respects." (Thekla),

"For example, one of my grandparents was Christian, and if the majority of my family were Christian, then today I would be seen as Cypriot Greek." (Berk)

"By saying 'I'm a Turkish-speaking Cypriot,' you are being very specific about what you are, there's no question ... Words are really powerful; they matter." (Ayse)

"...it erases identity to only language." (Jordan)

These observations highlight how language and religious affiliation can be instrumentalized to differentiate and categorize individuals, further contributing to the perpetuation of colonial narratives by determining one's ethnic identity. They emphasized the importance of recognizing one's multifaceted identity beyond just language. The interviewees' perspectives underscore the significance of acknowledging the complexities of ethnolinguistic identities and the potential limitations imposed by narrow labelling practices.

The participants revealed that being part of a minority outgroup further intensified their struggles and led to a greater understanding among fellow minorities. They recounted experiences where they felt the need to constantly explain their background, ethnicity, and identity due to the prevalent colonial narrative that focused solely on Turkish and Greek ethnicities in Cyprus.

"I would have to go through such an explanation that it wasn't worth it" (Ayse),

"I feel like a lot of the times I had to justify myself and I'm like hang on why am I justifying myself to these people? like I don't own them anything" (Clair),

"For me and I think for a lot of British Cypriots I know that I've always, I've always needed to explain where I come from or where I originate from" (Berk)

“When I say I am from Cyprus, directly the other question is: from North or South?” (Jordan)

This quote illustrates the consistent need to define and explain oneself to counter the limited understanding of their complex cultural background. This duality of cultures often posed challenges, making it difficult for them to fully fit into both their Cypriot and British identities. The participants also discussed the challenges they faced in navigating their identity within the broader societal context. They encountered instances of casual racism and prejudice, which prompted them to question their place in society. Participants expressed concerns about racism and exclusionary dynamics within Cypriot society. They stated,

"For a tiny country like Cyprus, it's extremely racist; it can be a very exclusionary society... Probably I've become one of the Charlies." (Clair)

“I have had a lot of comments like ‘You are living in the UK, you have got a lot of money and that is a big thing and I hate it because it is not true.’ (Sylvia) "I feel like I'm threatened. I've been here for so long; I feel like I'm kind of falling behind." (Mary)

"I didn't feel like I had a cultural identity or an ethnicity; I felt insecure." (Ayse)

This quote highlights the internal struggle between maintaining their cultural roots and keeping pace with the dominant culture in their current environment. And also highlights how labelling based on ethnicity and the resulting racial dynamics can perpetuate racism and create divisions within the community. For example, several participants explained their experiences with colourism which was highly emotional during interviews.

As Jordan states “I’ve been judged by me look a lot in my life. Lots of, lots of old people who just seem to have no idea I’ve been called names. How rude it is just keep guessing at your ethnicity. But maybe it’s not. I went on holiday and after I came back home, my mom opened the door and said hello terrorists.”

“I was also feeling disconnected from the UK because of, you know, my appearance was different from British.” (Mary)

“... they said I don’t look like a Greek, and during that time I felt insulted” (Clair)

This observation aligns with the broader theme of colonial narratives, where language and race serve as key elements in understanding and categorizing the ethnic groups within Cyprus. They expressed feelings of not fully belonging to either British or Cyprus culture, and how they had been judged based

on their appearance throughout their life leading to a consistent need to define and explain themselves to counter the limited understanding of their complex cultural background.

1.2.2. Being an Outgroup

The complexity of dual nationality within the UK Cypriot diaspora is not only shaped by the colonial narrative perspective but also by the psychological sacrifice of being an outgroup.

As Thekla mentioned, "Outside of Cyprus it didn't matter because when they came to England they didn't really treat differently."

"... how they treated those immigrants when they came in and how little the English knew about Cypriots which shows that it was a policy, it was a tactic you used to control people in that environment." (Mary)

"...you are aware of it, you're aware of your Cypriotness when you live in another country." (Karen)

"I was part of the cluster of people who was kind of rejecting that. But then I realized I was being pushed into this bucket and then I had to challenge this categorization and it was a very slow process of feeling guilt and shame and then slowly identifying it." (Clair)

This quote highlights that living in another country can strengthen one's awareness of their identity as they become conscious of their differences. The participant reflects on various markers that signify their "otherness," such as their name being difficult for others to pronounce and attending Greek/ Turkish school to learn Greek/Turkish, and common experiences for Greek and Turkish Cypriots. However, this awareness of their Cypriot identity can also lead to feelings of insecurity and the need to challenge the categorizations imposed upon them.

"I think in my experience this it's not because people are they really believe this but it's what they've been told all their life and when you challenge that idea that's frightening because you're challenging the foundation of their identity." (Berk)

"... it is a very, very slow process." (Clair)

The struggle to reconcile one's identity becomes more pronounced when individuals challenge the foundational beliefs of others. The experience of being an outgroup extends beyond personal interactions and permeates institutional structures as well. For instance, participants discussed the

challenges they faced when filling out forms that required them to indicate their ethnic background. Thekla shared,

"Whenever I have to do like you fill in those forms where they're called like equality and diversity in the UK. And I never know it always has white and my mum would always tell me to tick white British because if you put anything else they're gonna treat you differently... I felt misleading, and I didn't feel honest."

In summary, the participants' experiences illustrate the process of balancing cultural preservation with fitting into the host society. Despite the desire to fit in, there is an underlying need to retain their cultural heritage and acknowledge their struggles as immigrants. And furthermore, the psychological sacrifice of being an outgroup within both the UK Cypriot diaspora community and the wider UK society is evident. The experiences shared by participants shed light on the challenges of being perceived through a colonial lens, heightened awareness of their Cypriot identity as a result of living in another country, the internal struggle to challenge imposed categorizations, and the conflicts arising from questioning established beliefs. Additionally, the difficulties encountered when navigating institutional structures further underscore the complexities faced by individuals in their quest to reconcile their multiple identities.

4.2. Coping Mechanisms

In Section 4.2, titled "Coping Mechanisms," the study delves deeper into the intricate process of balancing cultural preservation with fitting into the host society as experienced by the respondents. This section sheds light on the strategies employed by individuals to navigate the complexities of their identities and assert their agency in defining who they are by blending food, attaching themselves to older family members, and engaging in open discussions, respondents demonstrate their resilience and creativity in managing the multifaceted challenges they face.

4.2.1 Cultural Blending Through Food:

Food plays a significant role in blending cultures and preserving identity within the context of the interviewee's experiences. Participants demonstrated how they incorporate their own cultural influences into traditional dishes, thereby creating a unique blend that represents their dual identity. Ayse, Mary, Sylvia and Jordan also mentioned the culture of brunch, waiting in the queue, and respect for diversity as a part of integration. It is also important to note that 13 out of 13 participants emphasized the importance of food as a way of integration or in some cases as a way of experiencing different cultures to gain more understanding.

As Karen expressed, "If I have to choose between the two and I can, I'll try to represent my separate side because it is the one less seen, and I don't want our culture to be forgotten." And Jordan also stated, "I add a lot of my own twists to it, I'll make lots of different types of hummuses because I make a lot of hummuses, so I'll add things that I guess you just wouldn't usually see. So, that's putting my own blend on it.", "I see so many different people in a restaurant enjoying food from all around the world." (Ayse)

"I think it is very open to different cultures because it is more accessible here, you know there'll be a Polish shop then next to an African shop, you can get all kinds of food and all kinds of things. So I think that's made me more open to cultures. This is probably why I have travelled in my life because I wanted to go to those countries and see those cultures myself." (Sylvia)

Their strategies involve actively challenging dominant cultural norms and expectations while advocating for their voiceless identity. By embracing cultural blending and respecting diverse traditions, the participant aims to foster a more inclusive and nuanced approach to identity formation.

Discussing the impact of cultural blending on identity formation, Grey stated, "I think it's a good thing because I think it's what will always happen and what has always happened. You can honor both Traditions as long as both sides are respected and one doesn't fade away." / "Here, I am more receptive to other cultures" (Mustafa) This quote reflects the participant's positive outlook on cultural blending, emphasizing the importance of respecting and preserving multiple traditions without erasing any aspect of their identity.

Regarding strategies to challenge dominant cultural norms and expectations, Jordan states, "Being present and seen, not adhering to the status quo. So being as alternative and pushing back as you can." / "I think not blending wouldn't have worked otherwise you are just constantly feeling displaced and that's a horrible way to feel" (Sylvia) / "Before I was like which one do I belong? But now I'm like I belong in both and that's okay." (Clair)

The participants' quotes highlight the ongoing struggle to strike a delicate balance between preserving their cultural heritage and integrating into the host society. These experiences demonstrate the complexities involved in managing the tension between cultural authenticity and assimilation. Through food blending, individuals not only express their unique cultural influences but also ensure the visibility and appreciation of their heritage.

4.2.2 Attachment to Older Family members

Another coping mechanism highlighted in this section is the attachment to older family members. Through strong intergenerational bonds, individuals seek guidance and wisdom from their elders, who embody the traditions and values passed down through generations. By embracing their elders' knowledge and experiences, individuals gain a deeper understanding of their cultural heritage, finding solace and strength in their familial connections. This attachment serves as a source of identity validation and empowerment, enabling individuals to navigate the challenges of cultural preservation and integration. They emphasized the importance of retaining their cultural roots and resisting the erasure of their identity as immigrants in the colonizer's land.

"Investigating that and going back to my roots and then thinking about influential people in my life like my grandma and what she would have done... I feel like a sense of pride." (Clair) They recognized the vulnerability of losing their cultural identity in the face of assimilation and the ease with which it can happen. Thekla shared a personal example, stating, "I didn't speak Greek until I was like Because I didn't speak it, it wasn't my first language, my parents spoke to me in English, obviously my grandparents would speak." Sylvia exemplifies this sentiment: "... my grandmother passed away last year, and since she passed away I've been trying to make all the dishes she used to make for me. That's really made me feel very tied to my culture." / "To a Cypriot who living in Cyprus they wouldn't have a connection, to me I do consider England another home because my family's been here for 60 years." (Berk)

These quotes highlight that the participants' sense of identity is deeply rooted in their historical background, shaped by their ancestors' experiences and also reflect the challenges faced by individuals in maintaining their ancestral language and cultural practices when they are not the primary language spoken in their immediate environment. Through this attachment, individuals gain a deeper understanding of their heritage and find solace and strength in their familial connections. Also, some

quotes like the one from Berk also emphasizes the significant role that time, and generational ties play in fostering a sense of belonging and attachment to the host country. This connection is further reinforced by the experiences and memories accumulated over the years, contributing to their perception of England as another home.

4.2.3 Importance of Discussions and Balancing Cultures

Discussions also emerge as a significant coping mechanism for the respondents. Engaging in open dialogue within their own groups provided individuals with spaces for self-reflection, collective support, and sharing experiences, challenges, and aspirations. These discussions fostered a sense of belonging and solidarity within the community, allowing participants to explore diverse perspectives and challenge binary constructions of identity.

"I am attending to the meetings and online platform of UK Cypriot Diaspora to explore more' or "I don't feel 100 percent Cypriot, things changed so I am part of that change... and if there are negative parts of my culture then I can kind of ignore, I don't have to carry those. So I can be that change." (Jordan)

"I kind of felt like it was my duty to explain events. " (Sylvia)

"I hate people turning up at my house without telling me, which is a very British thing. I think there is a lot of Britishness in that sense.... I have seen it in terms of acceptance, people are more accepting of me, my family, and my husband too... I think it has just gone back to the idea of just merging the two." (Sylvia)

"It is choosing the good sides of both cultures and adapting things that seem good and logical." (Karen)

These quotes highlight the role of open discussions in enabling individuals to reconcile different aspects of their cultural identity. Also, sometimes it can be seen as a duty to discuss or share your thoughts to challenge the norms and combine different aspects of cultures. However, the results also revealed challenges associated with participating in discussions.

Jordan explained, "Sometimes I have the energy to talk, but sometimes I don't have." This quote highlights the emotional and mental energy required for engaging in discussions, suggesting that it can be demanding at times. Clair expressed a selective approach to discussions, stating,

"I don't discuss with everyone which I know will never change anything." This quote suggests that participants may choose to engage in discussions with those who are open to dialogue and potential change.

On the other hand, participants also recognized that meaningful connections and shared experiences can be as effective as formal discussions in bridging cultural divides. Jordan shared an anecdote, saying,

"I have met someone from Turkey, and we got on very well, and we didn't talk about Cyprus the whole time. But we got on, and we had a nice time. The next day before we left, before we said goodbye, we thought confirmed, it was like my family is from Cyprus, and your family is from Turkey. And I was like, look at us, perfect." This quote illustrates the power of personal connections in fostering understanding and unity.

Overall, open discussions played a crucial role in the UK Cypriot diaspora community, providing platforms for dialogue, self-reflection, and support. The quotes shared by participants demonstrate their experiences, perspectives, and the significance of open discussions in balancing cultural influences and fostering a sense of belonging and understanding within the community. Additionally, the role of personal connections and shared experiences in bridging cultural divides was acknowledged by the participants.

5. Discussion

The discussion of the thesis revolves around the influence of colonialism on the identity formation of the Cypriot diaspora in the UK. The thesis begins by highlighting the challenges faced by diaspora individuals in constructing an identity that encompasses both their ancestral country and their present location by researching the following question: *How do people construct their identity in the UK diaspora -the land of colonizers- and in what way does living in the UK influence their identity construction?*

The analysis presents the notion of 'education' as a key finding that highlights the critical role represented by knowledge production, which has been defined by scholars like Said (2003) and Bhabra (2014). In examining the impact of education on identity formation, it uncovers that the selective history taught in schools reinforces certain narratives while marginalizing others. According to Said (2008) and Bhabra (2014), this knowledge gap leads to a limited understanding of colonial

history and perpetuates narrow and inaccurate views about identity. The interviews revealed that the emphasis on Greek and Turkish identities in Cyprus is largely constructed and reinforced through education, rather than being based on concrete evidence. The conscious decision to use colonial narratives in history education suggests a deliberate withholding of historical information. The discrepancies between the historical narratives presented in education and individuals' lived experiences create a sense of identity crisis and internal struggle to reconcile multiple identities. Participants expressed frustration with the limited representation of their cultural practices and personal environments in history books, which further reinforces a biased and incomplete perspective. According to Said (2003), universal knowledge is only an elision of the analytic bifurcation of the world. Therefore, this type of mechanism removed diverse perspectives from the production of history. This is also in line with Bhabra, which further develops this by stating that 'history became the product of the West in its actions upon others.' (Bhabra, 2014, p.116) It is important to recognize that such knowledge production often perpetuates stereotypes and fosters the notion of cultural superiority associated with a particular culture. This can be converted into practice by classification over race, religion, and language.

Further layers of insight unravel through the exploration of socially constructed nature of race, the concept of race as a fiction including the labelling and racial hierarchy imposed by colonial regimes, perpetuated the power dynamics and reinforced the dominance of certain groups over others which is informed by Star and Bowker's (2008) and M'Charek's (2013) studies. During the discussions with numerous interviewees, a recurring theme wherein a sense of sadness was expressed regarding the perception that they were labeled as 'lazy' based on their language of choice or their country of origin. Additionally, a significant number of participants, irrespective of their Greek or Turkish linguistic affiliation, conveyed feelings of sorrow concerning their perceived 'ugliness' or 'otherness' due to their skin color. These sentiments collectively underline the existence of deeply ingrained prejudices that further fuel the divisions within and among these communities.

According to the authors, the segregation of the system was an essential feature of the colonial control since it allowed for the sustenance of white supremacy by holding various racial groups physically apart. Therefore, indeed there is a fact of race, but the type of fact is not in line with simply the appearance of individuals. The consequences of the classification and the socially constructed fiction of race are fact (Azoulay, 2012; M'Charek, 2013).

These prevailing prejudices contribute significantly to the perpetuation of categorization and division among these communities. This omission has had repercussions on the collective consciousness of the

Cypriots, contributing to confusion, uncertainty, and political shifts. The lack of exposure to diverse perspectives and comprehensive education creates a knowledge gap among individuals, hindering their ability to form a nuanced understanding of their own identities and discrimination towards other sub-communities of Cyprus. Participants highlighted the need for comprehensive education that includes diverse perspectives and challenges the dominant colonial narratives.

This study finds the implications of living in another country can strengthen individuals' awareness of their Cypriot identity as they become acutely conscious of their differences. The outcomes reveals that this understanding led individuals to have an active role during the processing their own identities, and to challenge the identity constructions by negotiating their cultural and social environments, rejecting predetermined identities, and embracing the complexity of their heritage. Simultaneously, a notable number of interviewees shared that they had undertaken DNA tests in an effort to better understand their ancestral origins. Others reported their participation in multi-communal gatherings and their engagement in reading books focused on prehistory. Understanding the fiction of race helps to deconstruct and challenge the social constructs that contribute to segregation and inequality within communities, as Bowker and Star (2008) and M'Charek (2013) states.

However, this role as an 'active agency' and negotiation process of their Cypriot identity also often led to feelings of insecurity and the need to challenge categorizations imposed upon them. Individuals may resist conforming to preconceived categorizations and grapple with the pressure to identify with a particular group. The struggle to reconcile one's identity becomes more pronounced when individuals challenge the foundational beliefs of others, leading to potential discomfort and fear. By exploring the experiences of the Cypriot diaspora in the UK, it becomes particularly relevant as they navigate both the narratives about the Cypriot identity because of distance and the perceptions and experiences shaped by the rooted legacy of colonial rule in the UK. The importance of 'agency' of individuals for fostering a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of identity formation to challenge the norms, reflects Bhabha's (1994) insights.

Furthermore, this study also found that the negotiation process and active role of individuals in challenging the colonial norms and adapting several cultures most of the time stated as vulnerability and a sense of falling behind when they engage with their ancestral culture, particularly in situations like holidays or formal interactions where they need to use the language or customs of their ethnic background. This highlights the internal struggle between maintaining their cultural roots and keeping pace with the dominant culture in their current environment. The desire for acceptance and assimilation can sometimes conflict with the pressure to preserve their cultural identity, resulting in internal conflicts and a need to navigate their sense of self.

The participants also acknowledged that their identity is constantly being questioned, both in Cyprus and in the UK, where the issue remains unresolved. The commonality of the questioning of the identity in both countries might be related to the widespread of the colonial narratives over United Kingdom and the acceptance of these norms over Cyprus as well. Said (2003) argues that these power dynamics have the potential of lasting influence of colonial legacies. The ongoing questioning of their identity reinforces the need for individuals to hold onto their cultural roots and remember their struggles and motivations for coming to their current country of residence. This serves as a reminder of the complex dynamics of identity formation and the challenges faced by individuals in navigating their multiple identities. The purpose of this categorization was to maintain the dominance of the white category, effectively segregating the population and granting unique rights and privileges to each racial group. The authors emphasize that the classification of races is not founded on objective or scientific standards. Rather, it is a social construct that serves the interests of the apartheid regime in perpetuating its system of power and control over non-white groups. The classification of races, according to the authors, is an excellent illustration of how social constructs can have significant effects on society. It is crucial to comprehend these constructions to solve problems of segregation and inequality which colonialism posits (Bowker and Star, 2008).

The problem which makes this reasoning complicated in the case of Cypriot Diaspora's identity formation in the UK is the occurrence of colonial roots therefore the colonial narratives of the regime can be hard to be recognized by the citizens, especially when they reside abroad. As Azoulay argues, the regime-made disaster, in this case, colonial narratives, 'can occur without acknowledgement and be recognized as disasters.' (Azoulay, 2012, p. 21) Because the disasters which are made by power holders (colonizers) can be perceived by the diasporic community in line with the hegemonic opinion of the colonial identity norm, the process of acknowledgement can be especially hard for them due to the geographical distance. From the perspective of Azoulay, one way to recognise a regime-made narrative disaster is to 'focus on the entire governed population, and not only the population that suffers immediately from the disaster' (Azoulay, 2012, p.30). Hence, the diasporas which are the groups of people who are not socially and culturally marginalised from their home country but at the same time who are displaced or migrate to another country because of political or economic reasons, become the 'observers', 'viewers', of the consequences of the post-colonial identity narratives that are the remained products of the previous colonial regime of the British Empire (Azoulay, 2012). The people who left their home country had shaped their identities based on the discourse of colonial norms. We can observe its consequences from the work of Robins and Aksoy (2021), the authors contend that even though people in this group might share some cultural customs and practices, they have never been capable of developing a fully developed national identity. Cypriots residing in the UK could thus have a sense of displacement or alienation from both their homeland and the greater British community in which they

currently reside. The migration patterns and experiences of different ethnic groups from Cyprus in London have been greatly influenced by the colonial past of the UK. Although these groups have various racial backgrounds, they nonetheless have the same history of colonization. The processes of reproduction of knowledge about cultures and integration are significantly more difficult for diasporas from war-torn nations. As Feron (2012) states, here colonial narratives, memories and discourses can be used to both justify disaster -colonialisation-, and ethnic conflict by positioning communities of Cyprus as opposed to the 'enemy' of each other. This may exacerbate tensions already present between various groups and impede attempts to promote cultural acceptance and equality among identities.

During interviews, the emergence of coping mechanisms — such as food blending, attachment to older family members, and open discussions interplayed as contributors to the identity formation process, which unveils the potential for embracing diverse identities. This study found that participants using coping mechanisms to embrace diverse aspects of their own identities by an active participation in the formation of cultural norms and identity processes, challenging binary and hegemonic identities. This resonates with Bhabra's (2012) call to challenge Western discourses by transforming the historical narratives with diverse cultural backgrounds (Bhabha 1994, Bhabra, 2014). These strategies allow individuals to navigate the complexities of their identities, preserving their cultural heritage while actively engaging with the host society. The participants' experiences also underscore the importance of education in challenging colonial narratives and fostering a more inclusive environment. By incorporating cultural hybridity theory into the educational curriculum, institutions can provide a framework for students to explore and celebrate their diverse identities. This approach goes beyond simply acknowledging cultural differences; it encourages a deeper understanding and appreciation of the complexity of identity formation.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study presents a comprehensive interpretation of how colonialism has significantly influenced the identity of the Cypriot diaspora, achieved through the integration of critical race studies, decolonial studies, and hybridity theory. The historical backdrop of Cyprus as a colonized entity emerges as a key actor contributing to the enduring binary construct of racial identity, which continues to reverberate among Cypriots in the UK. This colonial impact extends to the realm of knowledge production, shaping educational content and perpetuating stereotypes and hierarchies (Bowker and Star, 2008).

Furthermore, this study emphasizes the role of hybridity mechanisms, such as food blending and intergenerational exchange, involving in open discussions in countering the colonial legacy. These mechanisms embrace the multifaceted dimensions of identity, softening the impact of colonial history. By endorsing diverse identities and challenging binary conceptions, the Cypriot diaspora holds the potential to reshape prevailing cultural norms. By doing so, they can actively contribute to the process of decolonization, particularly by dismantling entrenched colonial consciousness that permeates identity discussions. In this context, the historical narratives of Greek and Turkish identities within Cyprus have traditionally fostered distinct communal identities. However, hybridity theory contends that these identities are fluid and ever-evolving (Bhabha, 1994; Bowker and Star, 2008). The hybridization of cultures and narratives in the contemporary United Kingdom has led to the emergence of hybrid identities that incorporate elements from both historical narratives, as well as other cultural influences.

For instance, if the Cypriots residing in the UK can recognize and accept that colonial narratives regarding culture and identity, which endorse a hierarchical perspective legitimized by a specific cultural paradigm (e.g., British), the diaspora could also acknowledge that the cultural and identity conflict—such as the one between Greek and Turkish identities—emanates not from their ingrained historical evaluations but is rather a reflection of their colonial past. Consequently, embracing each other's distinct ethnic and cultural identities could become more achievable by appreciating the diversity of Cypriot culture and the multitude of ethnicities coexisting both on the island and in the UK. Bhabra's (2014) notion of challenging modernity by establishing alternate historical sites and modes of enunciation offers insight into the potential of postcolonial citizens to actively shape cultural norms and identity processes, countering the colonial hegemony of monocultural perspectives. By contesting this hegemony, individuals can engage in shaping cultural norms, allowing a deviation from the legitimized binary identities.

This research underscores the necessity of acknowledging the deep-seated influence of colonialism and colonial discourse on identity formation. Participants' experiences and perspectives expose a critical gap in knowledge and an absence of exposure to diverse narratives, particularly within educational systems. The selective history taught in schools, often accentuating specific Greek and Turkish identities while sidelining the broader Cypriot identity, contributes to a sense of confusion and an identity crisis. The incongruence between the narratives presented in education and the lived experiences of participants becomes evident.

This synthesis of theories not only ascribes how colonialism gave rise to the binary comprehension of identity but also unveils its pervasive impact on historical knowledge. Additionally, it illustrates how

this binary identity construction is closely tied to power dynamics based on racial hierarchies. The potential for the Cypriot diaspora's identity to evolve is articulated through the lens of hybridity theory, advocating for the establishment of novel cultural expressions that celebrate and encompass their Cypriot and colonial experiences. By linking these theoretical mechanisms, this study proposes an answer to the complexities of the identity formation process, wherein citizens of Cyprus become active agents in the construction and reproduction of identity, acknowledging the reality of colonialism on the island and its intertwined relationship with the formation of cultures and identities (Bhambra, 2004).

Therefore, hybridity theory serves as a valuable framework to investigate how the Cypriot diaspora's identity has been shaped by the intersection of British colonialism and traditional Cypriot culture. It also provides a lens to assess how colonialism perpetuated systems of racial oppression and influenced perceptions of colonial narratives, thereby shaping identity, all of which are concurrently analyzed through the lenses of critical race theory and decolonial studies. Ultimately, this study illuminates how a nuanced understanding of these dynamics can contribute to the formation of a more inclusive, informed, and harmonious collective identity for the Cypriot diaspora.

Limitations

Despite the valuable insights gained from the research on identity within the UK diaspora, several limitations should be acknowledged.

Firstly, the focus on categorization of races may overlook other forms of social categorization and their implications. For instance, the research indicates that categorization also affects women from different minority communities, creating stronger bonds and attachments among them. By solely concentrating on race, the study fails to capture the multifaceted nature of social identities and their interconnectedness.

Secondly, the researcher's personal background as a member of the Turkish-speaking Cypriot community introduces a bias in participant selection. The inability to find diverse range of participants from the Greek-speaking Cypriot community in the UK diaspora compromises the objectivity of the research.

Additionally, conducting the investigation online poses challenges, particularly when targeting older members of the diaspora. The limited accessibility of technology and digital literacy among older

individuals hinders their participation. Consequently, the research sample might be skewed toward younger and more technologically adept participants, potentially undermining the generalizability of the findings to the broader diaspora population.

In summary, while the research sheds light on the categorization of races within the UK diaspora community, it has limitations that should be acknowledged. These include the overlooking of other forms of social categorization, the bias introduced by the researcher's background, the challenges in accessing older members of the diaspora. Recognizing these limitations helps contextualize the findings and emphasizes the need for further research to address these gaps in knowledge.

Recommendations

The findings of this research have important implications for understanding the impact of colonialism on identity formation and for fostering more inclusive and nuanced approaches to identity. The selective history taught in schools and the lack of exposure to diverse perspectives perpetuate narrow and inaccurate views about identity. The study highlights the need for comprehensive education that challenges dominant colonial narratives and includes diverse perspectives. Also, this study demonstrates that colonial narratives, categorization of races, and power relations influenced by colonial norms have shaped the formation of identities among the diasporas. It recognizes the challenges faced by individuals in reconciling their ancestral country and present location, and the difficulty in recognizing and challenging the colonial narratives that perpetuate hierarchies and stereotypes. By integrating, the thesis offers possibilities for overcoming these challenges. It suggests that by embracing diverse cultural backgrounds and actively participating in the construction of cultural norms, the Cypriot diaspora can reshape their identities and challenge the binary conceptions imposed by colonial legacies. This process requires acknowledging the impact of colonialism.

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