Humanities in a "Postmodernist" Cyprus[1]

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Abstract
This paper explores the role of the humanities in Northern Cyprus. The enquiry takes as its starting point the crisis in the humanities of the 1920s – 1940s and the subsequent transformation of the humanities in the 1970s under the rubric of postmodernism. While the way the humanities function in Northern Cypriot society—both in terms of education and civil society—is of immense interest and has determined its trajectory, this paper is not an empirical study. Rather it sets out to place theoretical representations of the humanities in general in relation to theoretical characterizations of identity structures in Northern Cyprus.
Keywords: humanities, humanism, legitimation, sciences, narrative, paradox, paralogy, identity, postmodernism.

Özet
Bu makale Kuzey Kıbrıs'da beşeri bilimlerin rolünü incelemektedir. Başlangıç noktası olarak 1920-ve 40'lardaki krizi ve bunu takiben beşeri bilimlerin 1970 lerde postmodernizm başlığı altında geçirdiği dönüşümü almaktadır. Bu çalışma, Kuzey Kıbrıs toplumunda – hem eğitim hem sivil toplum anlamında - beşeri bilimlerin işleyişini kendisine bir yörünge olarak belirlemekle ve son derece önemli bulmakla beraber, bu konuda empirik bir inceleme ortaya koymaktan uzaktır. Bu anlamda bu daha çok, beşeri bilimlerin çok genel bir teorik temsilini, Kuzey Kıbrıs'daki kimlik yapılarının nitelendirilmesi ile ilişkilendirmektedir.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Beşeri bilimler, hümanizm, meşru kılma, bilimler, anlatı, paradoks, paraloji, kimlik, postmodernism, Kuzey Kıbrıs.

> *My village is paradise! One wakes in the morning looking through the trees out over the plains to the sea below. There is no need to do much; everything has already been done. There is no need to think; everything has already been thought. My village is hell!*
> Halil Karapaşaoğlu, Unpublished Essay

In *The Order of Things* Michel Foucault takes up the old idealist thesis that the world we find ourselves in has no (knowable) reality in itself, but

exists for us as the representation of cognitive, sensuous and imaginative faculties. It is a position that has found expression in many cultures both ancient and modern. As far as contemporary intellectual culture is concerned the most exhaustive treatment of this notion comes from Immanuel Kant in the late eighteenth century with the argument that our representations of the world are determined by certain categories of knowledge like cause and effect, quality and quantity, categories derived from Aristotelian logic. Supplementing this thesis with materialist insights, Foucault, influenced by the "linguistic turn" in philosophy, argued that representational knowledge is determined not only by certain logical conditions, but also by historical, economic and linguistic conditions, all of which, embedded deeply in the psyche, come to determine the a priori character of knowledge at any given time. Moreover, in a rhetorical flourish towards the end of his seminal work, Foucault asserts, without argument, that the representational nature of knowledge applies not just to objects—things we might think about or things in the world—but also to the subject of knowledge; that is, the individual human being considered in the abstract: "As the archeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end."[2] The claim is that the knowing subject, the one that represents a world to itself is itself a representation structured according to the same processes as objects of knowledge. The individual with its psychological variability and epistemological prowess is then, according to Foucault, just a bundle of concepts, metaphors and words, tricked out, of course, with a body.

Foucault's comments have become emblematic of a crisis in the humanities. If the subject of knowledge is itself the "effect" of a linguistic and cultural process, if "man" is a symbol like any other symbol, then the humanities, based as it is on notions like liberty, understanding and ethics, must forgo the very agency that validates it in its own eyes. The crisis of course does not emerge with Foucault's claims. In the first half of the twentieth century Ludwig Wittgenstein argued that philosophy no longer possessed the authority to make truth statements as they had come to be defined by the natural sciences, considered to be "discourses of truth". Anything falling outside the natural sciences was strictly speaking unknowable and therefore was to be "passed over in silence."[3] This leaves out of consideration, as Wittgenstein pointed out, ethics, religion and aesthetics, all of which encompass the vast bulk of what is of real

significance to society and individuals. Neither positivism nor the scientific models of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were able to provide a basis for the human or social sciences. But as the sciences themselves were solving their legitimation problems by reference to linguistic pragmatics so too the humanities turned towards linguistic analysis to gain self understanding. In a similar way in the 1940s Martin Heidegger argued that it was an historical mistake to orient philosophical discourse to the discovery of essential qualities in phenomena that may be said to remain the same throughout change. Moreover, it is a mistake to suppose that the subject of knowledge, the "knower", somehow constituted a receptacle for the laws that governed knowledge. Rather, the question of the being of knowledge must be posed in terms of an impersonal force—so-called *Dasein*—which later came to be construed as language.[4] Again, the central defining category of the humanities, as defined by the historical humanist movement, simply dissolved. René Descartes in the seventeenth century supposed the (skeptical) subject of knowledge—the *cogito*—to be the indubitable point upon which modern scientific knowledge was to be based. He supposed too, in a paranoid fantasy, that this self-certainty might be an illusion devised by some evil demon out there somewhere in metaphysical space. With the crisis in the sciences and humanities of the twentieth century the fable comes full circle; now the evil demon of deception has become identical with the much heralded subjective principle of the *cogito.*

Under discussion in this essay are the strategies that have been deployed to staunch this gap at the heart of the human sciences in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I propose an historical analysis of the legitimation crisis that has come to afflict both the sciences and the humanities. Pertinent to this debate is the concept of "postmodernism", a much maligned and equally much celebrated concept that defines for some the *zeitgeist*, for others a method, and still for others an aberration. My argument will be that however this concept is defined, what is important are the questions its proponents put forward concerning the nature of linguistic, cognitive and political-social agency. I will argue that the humanities is as little tied to one form and one set of assumptions (those of classical humanism) as the sciences are, and that its validation in general emerges from the exploration of social agency, which of course aligns it with the social sciences, the differences being a matter of method, content and historical contingency.

It is the aim of this paper to localize this rather general debate in the context of cultural life of Northern Cyprus, exploring, at the pedagogical level, the way in which a so-called international curriculum functions within the cultural and educational parameters of this society. The majority of universities in Northern Cyprus offer humanities curricula drawn, directly or indirectly, from an international body of literature. Curricula largely, but not entirely, are generated by intellectual events that occur in centres where the bulk of the world's research resources are located; namely, North America and Europe. However, the debates that surround intellectual crises and revolutions in these cultures do no exist in a vacuum. The unbridgeable schisms that opened up between the sciences and the humanities in the twentieth century were intricately linked with changing political, social and economic conditions in Europe and the USA. The extension of these crises, debates and consequent models to cultures outside these concentrations of international power involves intricate processes of selection and interpretation and integration into already existing educational and societal practices. At worst of course the dissemination of a revised body of knowledge may involve a kind of cultural imperialism or worse still the kind of strategies characterized by Edward Said as "orientalism".

The self-image of the humanities, especially the form in which they operated in the early to late twentieth century, is normally expressed in abstract principles such as universalism of knowledge, reason, and the necessity of emancipation, principles as will be discussed below, that have come in for critical treatment in recent times. However, the humanities are also intimately bound up with cultural identity, most often at the level of the nation state. This is the case mainly with disciplines like literature, history and archeology. The same applies in contemporary practice despite the multiculturalist claims of postmodernism; the humanities constitue a space of discussion, contestation, interpretation, repository and experiment. Also, in one way or another, the dissemination of knowledge aims to produce a certain kind of citizen, whether critical or compliant. At the same time, the contemporary humanities channel diverse forces and currents: economic, social, sexual, political, all of which operate according to conditions that extend far beyond the parameters of the nation state. Just as the crises in the sciences and humanities do not take place in a vacuum in cultures where international power is concentrated, so elsewhere the cultural and cognitive mappings

that take place as part of the dissemination of knowledge bring about, often profound, social and psychological transformations, often desired, equally as often resisted in culture.

Regarding questions of justice, desire, desire, knowledge and identity, the humanities appear then to be in a state of constant upheaval, by contrast at least with the backward glance, which as will be discussed below, is often as not mediated through the proverbial rose-tinted spectacles. What will be argued in this paper is that this apparent upheaval simply exhibits the openly contested nature of the contemporary humanities and that, to use an unfashionable term, is their essential quality.

The university environment in Northern Cyprus is unique. In the past, national revolutions have been followed by a flurry of university-building activity, thus cementing the status of nation state, as well as fulfilling the economic, scientific, political and psychological demands of modernity. Moreover, these newly established or newly nationalized institutions consolidate exclusive social-economic structures of elitism. In Northern Cyprus the same was the case. The university building of the past 20 years corresponds to a period of intense nation building. The difference from other such projects elsewhere is that the capacity of the universities in Northern Cyprus far outstrips the demand coming from within the local population. Universities draw of course the bulk of the student population from abroad. From the outset of their educational history, universities in this country have found themselves firmly ensconced in the market place, one of the consequences of which, is that fragile institutions experience the full blast of the contradictions that rise up between globalising market forces and the conflicting trajectories implicit in the sciences and humanities. While it is not my intention to enter into a discussion of these contradictions, it is enough to point out the conflict inherent in the demands for the rationalization of learning according to an input/output model on the one hand, with the perceived imperatives of humanistic and scientific pedagogy and research on the other hand. Thus the university in Northern Cyprus is the preeminent point of convergence for all the forces that shape, consolidate and disrupt the national culture. It is then of the utmost importance that the university forge not only ways of "managing" such convergence, but devise strategies whereby the "life" of the university devotes itself to social transformation by harnessing these forces. Moreover, it may not be

assumed that the aim of the university within both national and international parameters is oriented exclusively towards the term "transformative" model. The contest, if the term be permitted, also involves an orientation towards social reproduction. Implicit in the debates taking place at present is at least a modicum of dialectics, which need not necessarily refer to the life and death struggles of the Hegelian and Marxian dialectic. There need neither be a winner in this struggle nor an eventual consensus, but the consolidation of a creative "parliamentary" form, where discussion is infused with all the creativity, rigour and accumulated knowledge of the intellectual disciplines themselves.

What follows is an attempt to open a discussion on the provision of a conceptual model for this "parliamentary" form, the latter deriving from the gerund form of *parler*—to speak. Ostensibly this paper is concerned with the humanities component of this modeling process. However, it must be noted that the key concept of "paralogy" put forward by Jean-François Lyotard as a legitimation strategy for the humanities derives, according to his analysis, from the sciences and so may equally apply across the disciplines. Furthermore, the paralogical discourse is not necessarily one of consensus, but rather the open ended constestation of categories.

The term "humanities" functions primarily as a distinction in educational institutions. By contrast, at a broader social level the subject matter of the humanities is covered by the designation "culture". In the university curriculum, departments that teach something called the humanities normally teach histories, literature, philosophy, languages and variations thereof. In much of the postmodernist literature on the transformation of contemporary humanities there is expressed a rejection of humanist values, a term which may mean anything from the Enlightenment values of emancipation to an education based on the reading of "the classics", an educational approach that hasn't really been a contender since the collapse of European empires in the early twentieth century.

"Humanities" derives from the "humanism" of the Renaissance, where, most notably in Italy, scholars looked to ancient Greece and Rome for what may termed a secular literature. Scholars like Petrarch revived an interest in the methodologies of history and moral philosophy as well as the techniques of lyrical poetry of the ancient period. In this backward glance there thus emerged a distinction between *studia humanitatis* and

studia divinitatis.[5] This period saw the inauguration of philological studies and a revival of rhetoric, which directly involved studies of ancient Greek and Latin and also Hebrew, where the old Testament was read as a piece of literary and linguistic history. In a limited way, mainly through scientific and economic developments, a certain set of values came to be associated with Renaissance humanism; namely those of the homocentric or man-centred world where individual psychology came to be seen as part of the larger configuration of forces of creation and destruction; Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is a tragedy wherein the acute and irresolvable contradictions of the political and psychological subject lead to insanity and death. By contrast, the tragedy of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* occurs in a space between the gods and the social institutions which in a rough and ready way they preside over. Oedipus may be the victim of tragedy, but as a symbolic and not psychological subject.

Thus humanism comes to be associated with a system of knowledge that has at its centre the psychological and epistemological subject. However, this position is not fully theorized until the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is only at this time that humanism comes to be thought of in terms of humane values and the orientation towards emancipation.[6] During this period, especially in Britain, France and Germany, humanist values became linked with "culture". In Britain under the influence of thinkers like S. T. Coleridge and the Romantics the culture of the arts arraigned itself against what were perceived as the ravages of industrial capitalism, wherein economic and technological advancement were being promulgated as indicators of moral progress. This oppositional determination of culture continued on, albeit in various forms, into the twentieth century in the guise of the avant garde. In addition to this, humanist values came to be associated with the ambitions of the Enlightenment project of emancipation, to be achieved through the organization of society along rational lines, a project opposed by the English Romantics. At the same time, cultural achievement in the late eighteenth century was used as an instrument in the imperialist projects, spreading what they deemed to be the values of "civilisation", and so humanism landed itself in a contradictory state wherein liberation was experienced by its beneficiaries as oppression.[7]

It was during this period that science was gradually decoupled from the notion of practical knowledge and came to be seen as a desirable model for the organization of society as well as a model for knowledge.

This development, ironically, came about through the qualification of science by the humanities. Scientific propositions on their own make no prescriptive or evaluative statements. They do not on their own tell us how to live or what is desirable. According to French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard the sciences came to occupy a position of prominence, both socially and epistemologically, in part through the endorsement of humanist values. On the one hand, and particularly in Germany, science was seen as an historical unfolding of the self-consciousness of the "Spirit" (*Geist*); not exclusively the human spirit, but the spirit of life itself viewed as the evolution of a system of knowledge that would combine, without overt divine agency, the scientific, the ethical and the metaphysical. Thus the individual in this epochal flowering, considered in the abstract as a subject of knowledge, could consider him or herself as the point of synthesis in the dialectic of knowing and willing, denotation and prescription, is and ought—the embodiment of the zenith of historical development. Knowledge came to be seen as a self-legitimating practice and being so, reflected back onto the self and society the imperatives of being:

> In this perspective, knowledge first finds legitimacy within itself, and it is knowledge that is entitled to say what the State and what Society are. But it can only play this role by changing levels, by ceasing to be simply the positive knowledge of its referent (nature, society, the State, etc.), becoming in addition to that the knowledge of the knowledge of the referent—that is, by becoming speculative. In the names "Life" and "Spirit," Knowledge names itself.[8]

It was a powerful prescription wherein the pursuit of knowledge in educational and research institutions could be equated with the "meaning of life"—a source of unmatched arrogance but also extraordinary intellectual achievement. A second and related legitimating discourse was related directly to humanism, wherein the pursuit of science was seen to lead to the emancipation of humanity from the shackles of superstition and religious belief. Hence would be brought about a situation where all citizens of a society could be considered equal and political mechanisms could be put in place, or not put in place, to optimize liberty.[9] In a later development Max Weber extended the rationalization project to the

individual subject laying the foundation for contemporary legalistic concepts of right and equality.

Although it is science that is championed here, it is important to note that the legitimating discourses themselves are not scientific but philosophical: science can not speak of itself scientifically, but only its object, a fact that allowed Hegel gleefully to describe science as the "handmaiden" of philosophy and the nonspeculative sciences as "dismal", a state of affairs that many philosophers today look back on with wondrous but qualified nostalgia. The humanistic discourse continued well into the twentieth century with the Marxists, liberals and conservatives alike adumbrating the capacity of literary and philosophical studies, augmented by science, to bring about a state of personal and social emancipation. Historically it was on the back of humanist and philosophical discourses that science came to be associated with "freedom." There is implicit in this a deep irony; science predicates itself on observation and the controlled experiment as well as certain rational processes. It rejects the kind of knowledge that is based on narrative, narratives that are not amenable to empirical verification at each stage. Psychoanalysis, for example, is such a narrative and is emphatically rejected by science. Yet, because science can never be entirely self legitimating, because its propositions cannot address the philosophical nature of propositions, it is always reliant on some form of narrative to render it into a form by which its value may be conceived and disseminated.

The causes of the collapse of the grand historical narratives of humanism and "the life of the spirit" in relation to the sciences were manifold. Lyotard cites the end of Keynesian economics with its distributive and protectionist ethos and controlled economic development. He also cites conditions that emerge from within science itself. The grand historical meta-narratives of philosophy and the humanities come into conflict with the pragmatics of the sciences' self understanding. The sciences found themselves legitimated and justified according to a discourse that was not amenable to their own methods of verification. Combined with the imperatives of specialisation, sciences, most notably in the early twentieth century, loosened themselves from the "encyclopedic net" of the traditional metanarratives and there took place a proliferation of disciplines and institutions.[10]

In the course of the twentieth century, according to Lyotard, several discourses vied to fill the gap of scientific legitimation. On the one hand, with the privatization of funding in the late twentieth century, "efficiency" came to determine the kind of directions research projects would pursue. Under this model it is imperative that it be known in advance whether or not the outcomes are going to conform to a particular set of economic circumstances. The technological revolution stipulates that research be oriented towards the market place. In a similar vein, political power comes to determine the kind of propositions that find their way into the public sphere.[11] This may be seen in the relation between political institutions and scientists on the vexed subject of climate change, for example.

Undoubtedly such forces certainly place constraints on the sciences and push research in unfavourable directions and block off other avenues. It is often said that the "pure" sciences suffer under this regime. Lyotard does not share this pessimism and disagrees that political and economic forces constitute a viable and lasting legitimating narrative. Rather, he believes legitimating narratives emerge from the sciences themselves, from the pragmatics of scientific language and discovery. They might be called micro-narratives as befits the fragmented state of scientific research. The decisive point in contemporary science, the feature that differentiates it from the practices of the nineteenth century, is "uncertainty". Science no longer makes things known, but also, unknown. He cites the centrality of undecidables, variable and open systems, and paradox to contemporary science. Werner Heisenberg's paradox whereby the observer is always part of the observed comes to mind.[12] Likewise Schrödinger's experiment where a cat may be said to be dead and alive at the same time or the claims of parallel universes in modern physics, claims which are not amenable to empirical observation, but are nonetheless accepted as "true" in the community of sciences.[13] Lyotard characterizes these developments as "paralogy", that is, logical form that extends beyond the logic of reason with its insistence on the law of the excluded middle. This is to say, contemporary sciences operate at the outer limits of reason and amongst other things extend knowledge into the unknown through what Lyotard sees as genuinely radical acts of imagination.

These are by no means claims that are accepted across the sciences. In a sense it is a provocation awaiting argumentation, which of course has

come in the arguments of Alan Sokal and Jean Bricomont who accuse French and North American philosophers and literary theorists of playing fast and loose with scientific concepts.[14] If it is the case that Lyotard's science is bogus then indeed his claims of a legitimation crisis must be questioned. But it must also be noted that Lyotard's claims for science are not themselves scientific. If anything they concern philosophical and social theory as applied to the sciences—a small victory for the humanities and cause for satisfaction on Lyotard's part.

Certainly what cannot be disputed is the historical falling off of the influence of the humanities over the sciences and indeed a diminishing of influence of the traditional domain of the humanities: politics, education, social identity and justice. This was first remarked by Wittgenstein in the 1920s. Moreover, the claim that knowledge, whether scientific or "narrative", is no longer seen to serve the utopian ideal of emancipation is not controversial. The evident vulnerability of humanities departments in many countries is enough to convince many that the humanities are in terminal decline.

What I would like to argue here is that Lyotard's notion of "paralogy" has the potential to reorient the humanities in a dramatic and radical way. In fact it has already done so; Lyotard's arguments are thirty years old. But before following up on the paralogical component of the humanities, I would like to explore briefly the options open to the humanities since the 1970s, the advent of so-called postmodernism.

The best known of the (self-avowed) conservative remedies for the malaise afflicting the humanities comes from North American thinker Alan Bloom, who argues for the return of the classical curriculum. Bloom believes that the postmodernist insistence on the political nature of knowledge has destroyed the historical project of liberal arts education in the United States and, by implication, everywhere else. The situation would be remedied by reinstating Plato, Aristotle and the canon of received literary works.[15] In addition, students and scholars would rediscover the virtues of a kind of close reading of the text and a few approved influences. The most obvious criticism of Bloom's position is that the classical canon has not departed from humanities curricula. It is the case that material has been introduced that was not traditionally considered eligible for university studies; for example, detective novels, local histories and "non-literary" narratives. Moreover, given the critical spirit of the liberal arts model, a critical approach to the classics should be

welcomed. It is hard to imagine that the reinstatement of a curriculum from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would have the desired effect of exciting and educating young minds, let alone those of the professorial profession. To be sure, the contribution of classical literature, philosophy and languages to contemporary society is invaluable and in dire need of vindication. But at the same time the contribution of North American "Slave Narratives", Carlo Ginsberg's study of the unorthodox religious practices of fourteenth-century cheese-makers in Italy, E. P. Thompson's localized and working-class histories in Britain, or Mehmet Yashin's Turkish-Greek, Greek-Turkish folksongs of Cyprus detract not at all from knowledge of self and society. On the contrary, the fragmented and localized nature of the humanities holds out the possibility of a critical "other-centred" grasp of cultures, as opposed, for example, to a self-centred abstract universalist understanding. The demands placed by society on young people, intellectuals and university educated professionals is today of a greater internationalization, creativity and moral awareness than that of the generations of 1950s North America. It thereby remains uncertain how narrowing the curriculum would help.

A more serious contender is that of the self-styled pragmatists. Here the humanities would spread out and join with the sciences and professional training faculties, like law and education, for example. Thus literary and historical studies would become an adjunct of the natural sciences and help train more Richard Dawkinses and Stephen Jay Goulds. Philosophy and literature would attach itself to medicine and the neuro-psychological sciences addressing ethical issues and hopefully spawning a new generation of writers like Oliver Sacks. The stated idea behind such a proposal is that the humanities never at any time fulfilled its humanist vocation to create a better and egalitarian society. The political claims of left leaning academics are considered particularly deceitful and pretentious in this view. Elitism is entrenched in the universities and may be addressed by dispersal through a radical interdisciplinarity driven by the market: "The humanities must become service providers in a free market climate…Our problem is precisely that the view from above is too blurry and too dark, and that no one below can hear us, or could understand us if they did."[16] For Kurt Spellmeyer, the antidote to intense specialisation of the humanities is the shift to a technical vocation. Students would no longer be trained in literature, history or philosophy

but in developing analytical skills applied to texts. Such skills once learned would be transferable from academic contexts to bureaucratic, pedagogical and commercial functions elsewhere in the university and the economy.

Over-specialisation is a questionable pretext for dispersing the humanities. It is the case generally and has been since the nineteenth century that individual intellectuals are not able to master fields other than their own. The reasons for this derive not just from the imperative of in-depth knowledge but also from the proliferation and complexity of knowledge, disciplines and innovation. It is also said that the development of specialised languages within a discipline precludes interest from the outside. Certainly, tendencies towards conceptual jargon limit the scope for a discipline, both within and without, but jargon should not become shorthand for the activity and drive that generate concepts that address real empirical, theoretical, philosophical or historical problems arising in environments of intensive study. For example, the average layperson, whoever that is, may understand a lecture on the use of clay bricks and mortar in neo-lithic architecture, but theses on such a topic are never purely empirical. At some stage archeology—the preeminent inventor of narratives in the humanities—must reflect on the nature of language and narrative meaning, and while this is indeed likely to alienate the interested layperson as well as the practioner, it in no way entitles them to a veto. The charge of elitism is important and must be taken seriously in the light of its implicit injustice. However, specialised training in the humanities is not in itself elitist. If popular cultural artifacts and performances are going to be considered viable cultural expressions, part of a discursive and political reality, then it is well to train intellectuals in the art of subtle hermeneutics, deconstruction and conceptual analysis. And humanities departments, with their histories of autonomous development, are well placed to perform this task. The argument for a technical revolution in the humanities seems, from this perspective, self defeating and even bloody-minded.

It is possible to argue that in fact it is the much maligned but widely practiced postmodernist project that has been most successful in reorienting the humanities in the wake of the crises identified in the 1920s by Wittgenstein, the 1940s by Heidegger and the 1970s by Lyotard. As well as a specialised deepening of analytical and interpretative

instruments in the form of theoretical reflection, there has taken place a proliferation of knowledge in the humanities. Literary studies, drawing on philosophy, linguistics, psychoanalysis and sociology have developed theoretical understandings of the language of literature that has allowed it to extend its models not only to cultural artifacts in general but also to various cultural practices. Semiotic theory, derived from theories of language, posits social meanings and practices as "signification", a field which is amenable to linguistic form; thus the world may be read as if it were a text.[17] History, gender and the demarcations that organize society may, according to semiotic theory, be elaborated according to the "language games" through which they are represented. Hence the proliferation of cultural studies, a phenomenon which has both energized literary studies from within and also introduced new possibilities across the humanities.[18]

Lyotard's concept of "paralogy" is descriptive and not prescriptive, meaning that it may be used to characterize certain theoretical developments in the humanities. Lyotard also intends that such characterization performs a legitimating function. In the fields of semiotics, cultural studies and literary studies the key development of the last thirty to forty years involves the elaboration of the paradoxical nature of the epistemological and moral subject. It is said that the traditions emanating from the Enlightenment presuppose the unified subject of knowledge and action. This is evident in the philosophy of Kant where what may be called the point of convergence of knowledge is the transcendental (abstract) subject. Simply the question of knowledge becomes that of "how do I (we) know this? how should I (we) act in such and such a situation? Language-based philosophies like semiotics propose that the question of knowledge, or signification in its parlance, begin with the field of language, where language is seen as the symbolic element out of which reality is structured. This view may be opposed to one that would see language as a communicative medium for already formed ideas and thoughts. In the semiotic view, it is in fact language that structures the subject of knowledge, where the latter is seen as an effect of language. Thus arises a paradox; the subject is both produced by the symbolic structures of society, while at the same time, it is believed that the subject produces meaning or, for a weaker formulation, is a nexus of meaning. This paradox has had enormous influence on the activities the humanities as well as the raging polemics that pit calls for a return to an idealized

liberal past against calls for an idealized future where suffering has magically disappeared because of the emancipation of the libido, for example. Indeed, Michel Foucault's proclamation that "man is an [disappearing] invention of recent date", with which this essay began, serves as a kind of "gospel" for the claims that the humanities now find themselves in a "posthumanist" world. In fact, as mentioned at the outset, Foucault's claim is largely rhetorical, but at the same time, the paradox of subjectivity warrants careful consideration.

It may be asked then how in fact a modern humanities curriculum largely developed on the international stage according to the parameters of the above debate fits into the intellectual life of Cyprus. Here, however I would like to limit the discussion to the relation between identity—personal and social—and the paralogic legitimation discourse that I have argued drives much of the humanities.

In the context of Northern Cyprus, students often rightly point out that what is being taught them is culturally specific and that it does not immediately match their way of thinking. Yet, there are also problems with this claim, despite its validity. Or at least, it opens up the question as to the nature of thought in Turkish Cypriot society; is it homogenous? if so, whence the consensus and who presided over it and when? Ironically enough, such questions provide a timely opening to an international curriculum insofar as their pursuit implies something like intellectual agency, a concept that is not well developed amongst postmodernist writers. On the other hand, there is a tendency to embrace postmodernist discourse with enthusiasm. Very often this may be due to the fact that, despite the concentration of resources in Europe and the North America, many key authors in the field come from diverse ethnic, national, intellectual and gender orientations, especially in the context of postcolonial studies. However, this uptake of the radical elements in postmodernism, directed towards a critique of the way ideas follow the economic and political concentration of power, may often be accompanied by the reluctance to direct critical apparatuses inwardly towards one's own society. As a paradigm, in fact, this is quite normal in liberal culture, where the liberal self's complicity in the exercise of power remains problematic. It is not the aim of this paper to the force the resolution of this contradiction, but rather to suggest that it contains critical and creative tensions that characterize the field of involvement of the humanities in contemporary culture.

Greek Cypriot anthroplogist, Vassos Avgyrou, has even, in a limited way, defended the existence of such a contradiction, while at the same time providing a way out of it. In a discussion of the way relatively small communities like Greek Cypriots and Greeks fit into the international discourse of anthropology, Avgyrou perceives a kind of unconscious imperialism in the postmodernist claim that subjectivity exists in a paradoxical and decentred state. He notes that while it may in fact be quite exhilarating for Europeans and North Americans to speak of identity as decentred, contingent on all manner of power interests and "fictions", there are significant differences for cultures susceptible to the whims of the major powers. While an American can thrive on the deconstruction of national identity, the story is different for a culture of few and hard-won cultural resources. So, for example, when the eighteenth century European romanticisation of Greek identity is revealed by deconstruction to be a projection of European interests rather than the true origins of European culture, Greeks and Greek Cypriots might be slow to climb onboard due to the fact that these more of less vulnerable cultures do not really have that much to pin their identities on. The psychological consequences of relinquishing national identity in a region with malleable national borders may in fact be debilitating, whereas for the cosmopolitan New Yorker there is much else to attach one's sense of personal and collective self to.[19] Avgyrou's response is that while such discourses may indeed be traceable to the major centres of power, in fact they function in a genuinely international environment through participation and not decree. As such local cultures must augment their sense of identity with elements from within the culture while at the same time taking the international discourse seriously, which for them is an instrument of the critique of power and not only self critique.[20]

I would like now to present a similar example taken from Turkish Cypriot society. The example is taken from an interview with Turkish Cypriot psychiatrist and writer Vamık Volkan by Yael Navaro-Yashin. In response to Navaro-Yashin's probing the relative nature of collective identity Volkan acknowledges that myth is a key component of collective identity:

> What makes a large group's identity specific depends on the large group's history. But history per se is not exactly correct in this sense. It is not historical facts, but the mental representation

> of historical events that are used to define a large group's identity. A group's history is often as much myth as fact, and the representation of historical events that are shared by all members of the group are passed down from generation to generation.[21]

In the follow up question Navaro-Yashin probes Volkan's response by pointing to a current theoretical position in anthropology that traces out the agencies by which the "discursive constructions" of identity established. Volkan replies by pointing out that

> Every group has horrible things happen to it, and sometimes the group can successfully adapt and mourn a great loss, but sometimes it cannot, so the mental representation of the tragedy is passed down over generations in hope that somewhere down the line the feelings of loss, helplessness and humiliation can be reversed and overcome.[22]

It is an instructive conversation, mainly because it involves two discourses that in a sense speak past each other, while at the same time speaking directly to each other, if such a contradiction is permitted. Volkan speaks of the necessity that history vindicate identity and that identity strive to maintain its unity. In cases where it has been injured in a way that is unbearable, the necessity of the preservation of the unity of identity becomes even more acute than it normally would, so that, in the future, the injury might in some way be attenuated. Navaro-Yashin, on the other hand, seems to be driving at a different point. Her discourse implies that the mental representation is not just something that is passed down through history but that it is constructed through the historical dynamic of being passed down. Underlying her question is the thesis that identity is a narrative, and narrative is the logic of the mental representation. It exists in a different temporal continuum to the mental representation passed from generation to generation. Narrative is constructed from any point in the continuum; often events of the past are constructed from the present in a retroactive glance. And the job of the narrative is to ensure that competing narratives fall by the way and the main narrative is one of unity. Navaro-Yashin's discourse is that of deconstruction, while Volkan's is that of phenomenological psychology

and Freudian psychoanalysis. And at the intellectual level, this fascinating discussion between the psychiatrist and the anthropologist plays out the formative and preservative dynamics of identity: deconstruction the threat; phenomenology the compounding of identity.

There is no intention here to stage a dialectical competition. It must be added too that I am in no position to comment on clinical aspects of the psychology of identity. What becomes apparent, in my opinion, is the paradoxical logic of identity. On the one hand, identity is formed through competing interests, selective narratives and by concealing in the narrative it contingency; that is, the fact that it is symbolic. On the other hand, identity functions by congealing around a central ideal or a set of more or less coherent ideas. It functions, as Volkan says, by expunging extraneous elements. Thus identity is hinged on a double logic: that of being (fixed identity) and that of becoming (the process of identity).

It is the same logic that drives innovation in the contemporary humanities. The subject of knowledge produces meaning in his or her utterances, yet, of course, that meaning has always already been established. Rebecca Bryant argues that education during the British period in Cyprus was seen by Turkish Cypriots as the transformation of the self and society from the traditional to the modern: "The cultural type to be molded in Turkish schools was the 'enlightened' individual, and the aesthetics of self-fashioning was one of 'enlightenment,'" where enlightenment (*aydınlatmak)* referred to a kind of clarificatory knowledge suitable for a ruling class. [23] In this context the values of enlightenment and progress were bound up with the introjection of a universlist discourse into ethnic identity. By contrast, the central discourse of the humanities now concerns the symbolic construction of meaning, which encompasses the cognitive, social, linguistic and psychological tensions that construct signification, whether the object of the study is literature, history, philosophy, science and technology or popular culture. With the collapse of the universalist legitimation strategies of both the sciences and the humanities, and of course, the development of computer technology, there is no support for such a thing as "correct' knowledge of the type that would provide a social paradigm, from which might be derived moral prescriptions. More accurately stated, it is no longer viable to characterize "correct" knowledge according to a fixed and noncontingent paradigm. Lyotard even envisages that the "professor" as a repository of received knowledge is an endangered species. What is certain is that any claim that

the humanities is the accumulation of knowledge towards a utopian goal has become redundant. Any computer can to that. And utopia it seems has become a commodity.

Contemporary humanities study the construction of meaning—its logic of becoming in addition to its logic of being. This characterizes the humanities in Cyprus as well as places as far apart as New York and Delhi. It is also, it must be conceded, one amongst a variety of competing discourses. Yet it is flexible enough to avoid the pitfalls of the universalism of the classical humanist inspired humanities, chiefly I would argue, because of the formal flexibility of the open logic of paralogy.

By way of postscript I would like to say a few words on the rhetorical excesses of postmodernism. It is often claimed that postmodernism is an epochal phenomenon; we have moved into a new era free of the neurotic certainties of the past. In cultural studies there is talk of "posthumanist" humanities.[24] Indeed, Lyotard speaks of postmodernism as the sloughing off of the grand narrative of the humanities, of the centred subject.[25] But others have pleaded for its reinstatement. Jean-Paul Sartre in the 1960s spoke of the necessity of a reformed humanistic orientation:

> We have no right to believe that humanity is something to which we could set up a cult, after the manner of Auguste Compte. The cult of humanity ends in Comptian humanism…in Fascism. We do not want a humanism like that. But there is another sense of the word, of which the fundamental meaning is this: Man is all the time outside of himself: it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that he makes man to exist.[26]

In a similar vein but a different kind of language, Edward Said pleads that contemporary theoretical ideas in the humanities are meaningless unless accompanied by a humanistic project:

> I have called what I try to do "humanism", a word I continue t use stubbornly despite the scornful dismissal of the term by sophisticated post-modern critics. By humanism I mean first of all attempting to dissolve [William] Blake's "mind-forg'd manacles" so as to be able to use one's mind historically and

> rationally for the purposes of reflective understanding. Moreover, humanism is sustained by a sense of community with other interpreters and other societies and periods: strictly speaking, therefore, there is no such thing as an isolated humanist.[27]

Said maintains that the postmodernist concern with contingency has been misinterpreted by large numbers of postmodernists. There is a kind of triumphantism in the way structures of meaning are deconstructed and simply left at that. From other of Said's comments, this triumphantism many also be seen as a variety of "hooliganism". There is no concern to articulate the nature of political and psychological agency in the face of the deconstructionist claim that all signification is a fiction. Politics continues to oppress people with violence and injustice and postmodernism does not seem to be able to respond to that in Said's view. He advocates a reformed humanism, one that uses the paralogical strategies of the postmodern to further the cause of justice.

On this subject, Lyotard has something to say. He does not claim that postmodernism is the expression of an epochal change. Postmodernism, according to this view, is not the time that comes after modernism. Rather, it comes before. He argues for a return to the well springs of modernism, the pivotal notions of justice and the desire to understand the unknown. The difference is, in his case, that the dynamism of the paralogic strategy prevents knowledge from hardening into ossified and dogmatic forms. His is a project not just of permanent critique, but of enquiry into the permanent change of phenomena, a model that finally does justice to Hereclitus's assertion that the world exists in a state of flux: "Postmodernism … is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant." [28] The humanities are gradually coming to be based on the analysis and interpretation of the construction of reality by symbolic systems like language; that is, the contingency of human life and its variable values. At the same time, and I personally feel that this is where intellectual and ethical challenges lie, that systems of meaning are constructed by societies does not render them arbitrary; such constructions come into existence through some kind of agency in some kind of material environment: often that of brute power; sometimes that of dialectical processes that involve disturbances to the preeminence of instrumental reason; and often accident. To insist that only power has the

force necessary to cement the bond between signifier and signified, a word and its meaning, is immediately self-defeating. The humanities have been struggling with this contingency for at least one hundred and fifty years in the works of thinkers like Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Said, amongst (many) others, in addition to the work of a host of contemporary thinkers, even Kant if one accepts that he never tied his thought to natural or historical necessity. This is the empirical basis for Lyotard's claims that postmodernism involves a return to modernism. Postmodernism, ironically, turns out to have a history after all.

Endnotes

[1] This article is dedicated to the memory of William Kimbrel, my close friend and confidante, in discussion with whom the thoughts laid out here were originally conceived:

Cast a cold eye
On life, on death.
Horseman, pass on!
(W. B. Yeats)

[2] M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archæology of the Human Sciences* (London, 1994), 387.

[3] L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London, 1961), 5.

[4] M. Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. By J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson (Oxford, 1962).

[5] N. Mann, "The Origins of Humanism," *Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism,* edited by Jill Kraye (Cambridge, 1996), 1-2.

[6] Mann, *Ibid.,* 2.

[7] These variations on the term "humanism" as they applied in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries more or less conform to contemporary usage: "There is an ethical sense of the word, meaning the belief that human beings should be accorded compassion and respect; a sociological sense, meaning that social structures are best viewed as the products of human agents; and an historical sense, denoting periods such as the Renaissance in which 'man' becomes the centre of scholarly attention." T. Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford, 1996), 128-29.

[8] J. F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* Trans. Brian Massumi (Manchester, 1984), 34-35.

[9] *Ibid.,* 35-36.
[10] *Ibid.,* 39.
[11] *Ibid.,* 44 – 47.
[12] W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: the Revolution in Modern Science* (Harmondworth, 2000), 114–128.
[13] P. C. W. Davies & J. R. Brown, *The Ghost in the Atom: Discussion of the Mysteries of Quantum Physics* (Cambridge, 1999), 28-31 & 83-106.
[14] A. Sokal and J. Bricomont, *Intellectual Impostures: Postmodern Philosophers' Abuse of Science,* trans. Sokal and Bricomont (London, 1999).
[15] A. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York, 1987), 13 -21.
[16] K. Spellmeyer, *Arts of Living: Reinventing the Humanities for the Twenty-first Century* (New York, 3003), 20.
[17] This is of course an overstatement and one that many self-professed postmodernists make. The claim that reality is symbolically constructed is one thing, but that all symbolic construction occurs according to the order of language is another and leads to unsupportable claims by individuals about on subjects about which they have no knowledge or experience, The seminal texts in semiotics are U. Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (London, 1984); J. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language,* trans. M. Waller (New York, 1984); R. Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Mythologies,* trans. A. Lavers (London, 1972); and J. Derrida, *On Grammatology,* trans. by G. Chakravorty Spivak (London, 1974).
[18] P. Fluery and N. Mansfield, *Cultural Studies and the New Humanities* (Oxford, 1998), 47-55.
[19] V. Avgyrou, "Postscript," *Divided Cyprus,* edited by Y. Papadakis, N. Peristianis & G. Welz (Bloomington, 2006), 222-23.
[20] *Ibid.,* 223.
[21] Y. Navaro-Yashin, "Layer upon Layer: Politics, Psychology and Language in a Changing World," *Step-MotherTongue: From Nationalism to Multiculturalism,* edited by Mehmet Yashin (London, 2000), 184.
[22] *Ibid.,* 185.
[23] R. Bryant, *Imagining the Modern: the Cultures of Nationalism in Cyprus* (London, 2004) 152.
[24] Fluery & Mansfield, *Cultural Studies and the New Humanities,* 16.
[25] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition,* 37, 41.
[26] J. P. Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* (Harmondsworth, 1973), 28.

[27] E. Said, "Preface to *Orientalism*," reprinted in *Al-Ahram Weekly* 4th – 13th August, 2003, No. 650.

[28] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition,* 79.