National Thinking in the Turkish Cypriot Community: A Political Pendulum?

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Abstract
The conflict-ridden state-building process in Cyprus, marked by Turkey's military involvement and the EU membership of Nicosia, has brought about fluctuations in national thinking in Northern Cyprus. The present study seeks to draw attention back to the Annan referendum in 2004, and its influences in the transformation of Turkish Cypriots' local identity. Although the so-called contribution of the former Annan Plan to the peaceful settlement in Cyprus has come under much scrutiny, little emphasis has been laid on how national thinking in the relevant community changed between interests and values. In fact, the terms before and after the Cypriot Annan Plan Referendum demonstrated how the way Turkish Cypriots identified themselves fluctuated between motherland nationalism and Cypriotism. Through a social constructivist approach, the study elaborates the empirical data and discusses the Turkish Cypriot local identity under changing conditions, and its influences in political behaviour.

It is perhaps best to start with a definition of local identity. Is there a clear definition? Is local identity different from nation state identities? Should we link local identities to territory or ethnicities? My subjective answer to these questions tends to be "no". Local identity, whatever the local refers to, is not distant from any other national or ethnic articulation. That is why I am inclined to see them as feelings attached to national zeal or awareness within the banal, or instantly changing praxis, of national articulations. Identities are attachments, anything against which we react in everyday life. Therefore, we might trace identities in articulations against the "other". Without going into theoretical detail, I would like to briefly mention here the contributions from social constructivism and banal nationalism that dwell upon social factors that bring about, instantly, the reactions of the "self" to the "other". Of course, a broad set of theoretical approaches, from social psychology (see "subject positions", persons/things that the "self" situates himself with or against (Davies and Harre, 1990)) to more linguistic advances (Reisigl and Wodak, 2011), highlight the link between the self-identification and the "other" through discourse. What we grasp here is but more like reflections of local identity in political behaviour. Therefore, I concern myself with social factors that change political behaviours of communities, the signs of their "self" and "other" articulations. Therefore, remember the assumptions raised within banal nationalism and social constructivism. Banal nationalism from Michael Billig simply argues that the sense of belonging in a nation fluctuates on daily basis, under the influence of political elites. Not waving flags, Billig adds, but ones atop public buildings have the function of reminding society of who they are (Billig, 1995, 10). Communities are "reminded" by social factors dominated by state elites and identity hence is apt to change in time.

The constructivist approach largely covers this claim. Through the concept the "logic of appropriateness", social constructivist approach point to a condition of mediation between the interests and norm-ridden motivations before a social decision (Sending, 2002: 447). Before a decision, human basically decides, under the influence of many factors, according to his most appropriate context. This view also finds airing in the study of ethics: the individual affected by his interests and beliefs takes a moment for a self-criticism and accordingly articulates himself and the "other" (Walzer, 1994: 84-91). Of course, a methodologically individualist argument seems to find shape here. But it might be useful for we deal with political behaviours of communities. Political behaviours, like the activities in elections and polls, exist at the individual level.
To wrap up the argument before orienting it into a case study: communities change their conceptualisations of themselves and “others”, in everyday life, under the sway of ideational and interest-ridden factors. There are some latest examples, like Greek and Turkish communities in Cyprus, and Russian, Ukrainian, and Tartar ethnic groups in Crimea. Should we consider their characteristics, we see that these groups are ethnically or religiously dense and likely to be of a perennial (historically continuing) nature. Third, these communities have historical ties with elsewhere they call motherland. Turkish Cypriots have a history from Ottomans; Greeks date from much earlier times. Crimea has hosted an ethnically heterogeneous population having attachments with Russia, Ukraine, and even Turkey. These ties with “motherlands” might form the historical constructions of communities. Before a political decision, nevertheless, historical constructions might be challenged by socioeconomic factors like interests.

After complicating it, the study might help better contextualise the conception of local identity with a case study. Through a historical approach, here I aim to remark on how the determinants of local identity change in time by reminding a conflict-ridden period in the history of North Cyprus. National thinking in Turkish Cypriot community has altered in time, within the period between 1974 and 2004, towards less excluding terms of conceptualising the Turkish “self” and Greek “other”. At the end of this period, some of the Turkish Cypriots questioned their affiliations with the motherland, Turkey, and put forth their new “self” and “other” categories mostly motivated by economic interests.

The Turkish Cypriot Community between 1976 and 2004

The Cyprus debate has long been a problematic issue between two guarantors, Turkey and Greece, in general, and locals, the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, in particular. The solution attempts on the island have failed due to conflict-ridden phases as well as strategic disputes. A shift in national thinking of Northern Cyprus marked with the post-2000 developments, however, has demonstrated ever-closer contacts within a potential rapprochement of two societies. The change in the course of Turkish part gained dominance rapidly, even comparing with the Southern Greek part, on the basis of the northern attitude towards the Annan referendum in 2004. At the end of the referenda simultaneously held in both sides, 64.90% of the Turkish Cypriot Community implied their clear statement in favour of unification whereas the Greek side fell quite short of this standing, with 24.17 (Chadipadelis, Andreadis, 2007).

It is emphasised here that the conceptualisations of the “self” and “other” within national thinking are assumed to take place on a banal, volatile ground between extreme categorisations. Within the Cypriot case, too, the shifts in national thinking are claimed to exist between two camps, motherland nationalism and Cypriotsim (Loizides, 2007: 173). These two concepts exert dichotomous influences by invoking Turkey-centrism in relation to the emphasis on the respective emergence of Cypriotness in construction of the local nationhood. Turkey-centrism, or motherland nationalism was the dominant side until 2004 giving the positioning of Rauf Denktas, the former president of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. Considering his commitment to Turkish nationalism evident in his discourse, it can be referred that President Denktas during his office reflected his nationalist view attached to Turkey. (Yashin, 2006: 86). He hence stated in 1995: “I am a child of Anatolia. I am a Turkish in every way and my roots go back to Central Asia. I am Turkish with my culture, my language, my history, and my whole being. I have a state as well as a motherland. The notions of Cypriot culture, Turkish Cypriot, Greek Cypriot, a shared-republic are all nonsense.”(Yashin, 2006: 85-86). On the contrary, a novel discourse of political initiative that was effective before the Annan referendum in Turkish Cypriots discharged this view. It hence would not be wrong to assume that the rapprochement phase invoked by the Northern Cyprus is a story of changing sentiments between motherland nationalism and Cypriotsim, under the everyday influence of norms and interests of the Community. I simply evoke this situation with the metaphor of pendulum.

The still-existing factors stimulating the conceptualisations in the Turkish community are claimed to vary in such manner, being linked to national thinking at the grassroots and elite levels. The socio-psychological, cultural-educational, and economic factors directly influenced over the society, whereas state elites and media also played a vibrant agent role in this process. Following what the constructivist approach suggests, that social norms and national interests clash and reconcile on a mode of appropriation before any social articulation, the issue of change in national thinking of the Turkish Cypriot Community has
been contingent upon such a dichotomy of cultural and economic motives while social actors catalysed this process.

History showed that the initial phase of this transformation was the subject of influence within the US-Soviet debate globally, and the Turkish-Greek bipolar rivalry regionally, during the fresh years before and after the Turkish intervention in 1974. While geopolitical claims were of international interest, national sentiments inside the Turkish community impacted by the traumatic years in the 1960s and early 1970s were also relevant to power politics amongst the local conditions of hatred and hostilities. The pathfinders of this process remained state elites under the influence of their connections with the mainstream policy of Turkey. Nevertheless, social factors such as economic discontent with isolation and bureaucratic fallacies mobilised the Turkish Cypriot society against Turkey-centric state elites. Eventually, the integrationist Republican Turkish Party (CTP) gained popular support by bringing into focus the side effects of the conflictual period, including the economic sanctions and isolation over the Turkish region (Kibris Gazetesi, 03.04.2004, 01.02.2004). During the manipulative propaganda process before the referendum, the turning pendulum of national thinking was maintained by the CTP government in the same regard with nationalists, in an instrumental social code spreading. The program of the new coalitionary government reflected its commitment to a potential unification with the Greek side, on the basis of the EU membership: “Instead of unilaterally declared EU membership of the Greek side in the name of entire Cyprus, the fundamental aim of our coalitionary government is joining the EU under unified Cypriot State, as one of equal partners maintaining our rights” (Kibris Gazetesi, 20.01.2004).

What were these social factors, being linked to norms and interests, which impacted the change in the Turkish Cypriot community? One of them has been the birth, rise, and fade of the national trauma. From the foundation of the EOKA, the Greek paramilitary organisation, in 1955, to Turkey’s military intervention in 1974, the Greek “other” was accordingly conceptualised with Greek aggression and sense of insecurity (Loizides, 2007: 174). For the Turkish Community the Greek had a fixed image between these years of conflict, adding that Turkey’s intervention in 1974 fed the impetus of constructing the “self” connected to Turkey’s “motherland” figure. The social disorder and traumatic effects in social life, marked with ethnic conflict that began in the middle of 1950s and became ever-turbulent with the dissolution of the Cypriot State in 1963, led to a community that conceptualised Turkey more than a cognate country. When Turkey, with the “saviour” image, remained the probable guarantor of their rights and safety in the national and international arena (based on the inherited rights of the London and Zurich Agreements of 1959 that settled the foundation of the Cypriot Federation), Cypriot Turks during and immediately after the crisis years felt strongly attached to the Turkish motherland nationalism rather than they performed a specific identity expression (Loizides 2007, 176).

The connection with Turkey has in fact (and so far) remained the greatest anchor of the pendulum between the Cypriotism and motherland nationalism. Cultural inputs of Turkism have penetrated the nationalist public discourse through the massive educational system and its intelligentsia linked to the “motherland”, as well as the media system and cultural organisations in maintenance of local language and other national tools. In general, cultural awareness and a limited “national awakening” became possible much before without structural incentives of Turkey; the former Ottoman Millet and later British administrative system based on autonomies in this regard deserve special references on their successive legacies over the Greek-Turkish co-existence. The British power established a dual education system constructed on Turkish and Greek autonomies, which developed their respective cultural values, in the end of the Ottoman age and religious segmentation of the Millet System (Persians, 1996: 64). In the meanwhile, the Turkish Cypriot Community during the British rule did not marginalise Greek Cypriots, as to an argument (Byrant, 2006: 60). Furthermore, Turkish people educated in Turkish schools could well adapt to Turkish identity as well as the republican ideological background of the motherland (Morag, 2004: 606-607). In the aftermath of the British rule, the Turkish Cypriot education since the 1960s has been provided with education materials and teachers recruited from Turkey (Crellin, 1981: 328). This had an influence on the identity construction over the society, by the means of elites who had particular ties and dependencies with Ankara, the connection through which the Turkish Cypriot identity was instrumentally forged and maintained on Turkey’s terms (Spyrou, 2002: 268-269). As a fundamental instance, the education books before and after 2003, the date of integrationist CTP’s takeover, reflect visible differences between official discourses of the two periods. The education materials of the period between 1974 and 2003 implied a narrative
periods. The education materials of the period between 19/4 and 2003 implied a narrative along with the image of motherland with definite significations of Turkism; post-2003 books, on the other hand, are more “Cypriot-centric”, depending on social history instead of the mythicized. These materials imply a homelands approach that entitles the Turkish and Greek communities the “Turkish Cypriot” and “Greek Cypriot”, rather than the mere ethnic terms of “Turks” and Greeks (Papadakis, 2008: 14-25). Considering the instrumental nature of nation-building, referring to the suggestions of “banal nationalism”, those books with their norm-spreading characteristics could have a say over the characterisation of national thinking in the Turkish Cypriot society.

Next to the revision at the elite-level, the Turkish Cypriot also projected a social change. Besides the gradual construction of the Northern Cypriot state autonomy, social norms in the community remained apt to change between motherland national thinking and Cypriotism, while further generations of the war-impacted population became more distant to traumas. In the age of limited interaction with the outer world due to political-economic sanctions, various channels such as universities in Northern Cyprus quickened the matter of questioning such conceptualisations. The Turkish youth had been quite active throughout the propaganda process before the referendum. During the discussion of the plan, a youth movement of 22,000 students from six universities of the Turkish Cypriot Community was in demonstration in favour of the solution (Pericleous, 2009: 167). Bigger protests from the grassroots were held: up to one third of the Turkish population on the island stood up with the emphasis on the “Solution and the EU membership” (The Guardian, 14.01.2003). It is thus justified to claim that economic factors and the issue of isolation mentioned below might have greater significance in this debate.

The solution debate at the civil level grew gradually. Though the constitutional referendum overshadowed by Turkey resulted with the approval in 1985, the end of the 1980s witnessed a vibrant challenge from Turkish civil society and political parties in opposition, which questioned the “unconditional” dependence with Ankara as well as the deteriorating economy and the situation of Turkish immigrants (Loizides, 2007: 177). Therefore, the early 1980s remained an era of the unquestioned allegiance, whereas further years led to new political identities in support of rapprochement with the Greek side. The talks with the Greek counterparts during the 1990s contributed to an alternate political attitude.

The immigrants from Turkey since 1974 have been a controversial issue for the North. These people of more than 115,000 departed from Turkey to Northern Cyprus and impacted the composition of the island. This resulted in a massive amount of local Turks that questioned the share of the “Turks of Turkey” more than ever, having considered the economic problems and rising unemployment (Christou, 2004: 100, Adali, 1996a). The turmoil eventuated in outmigration of Turkish Cypriots to western and commonwealth countries, especially Britain.

It was the age of economic relapse, thus, while the Turkish Cypriot community reacted. The Turkish society, especially younger generation questioning the isolation, found an “inner other” in the region. Massive existence of Turkish troops on the island along with the systemic settling of Turkish immigrants by Turkey had critical counterparts mostly in media, such as the columnnist Kutlu Adali, the investigative journalist in “Yeni Duzen”, before he was assassinated (Adali, 1996b). The media thus became an effective agent of facilitation for the re-articulation of national identity. The term “Cypriot-Turk”, for example, instead of the mere word “Turk”, was granted by Sevgul Uludag, journalist and opposition member (Loizides, 2007: 180, Uludag, 2004).

Within these circumstances marked by the increasing discontent with the economic backwardness and ill-governance, the political opposition through the 2004 Annan referendum dominated the national thinking with its promise of a potential solution to the Cypriot conflict and thereby set forth a novel conceptualisation of the “self” with a larger reference to Cypriotness on the motivational basis of escaping international isolationism (International Crisis Group, 2006: 12-14). The Annan Plan and civil society movement reactive to the dichotomy during the referendum of the North remained important indicators of this change. The bi-zonal Annan Plan with its high respect to territorial autonomies matched the geography-oriented national thinking of the Turkish Cypriot community and relevant expectations that were conditional with collocation with the Greek side (Vural, Peristianis, 2008: 57). Second, the EU membership as a source of “welfare” provided greatest stimulus to the popular movement in favour of unification (Lacher, Kaymak, 2005: 148). Integration with global markets promised with the Cyprus-EU unification showed the economic vision of instrumental change. This image was notched not only for electoral
economic vision of instrumental change. This image was pictured not only for electoral behaviour of the masses. A great number of the Turkish Cypriots applied for the Greek-issued passports before the EU membership of the South symbolised a practical reasoning of the Greek-Turkish cohabitation (Baruh, Popescu, 2008: 80).

In summary, the composition of the national identification in the Turkish Cypriot community altered in time, towards the Annan plan, with a bigger emphasis on Cypriotism. Signs of this change could be traced back to the December 2003 parliamentary elections. The nationalist Ulusal Birlik Partisi (UBP, National Unity Party) and Demokrat Parti (DP, Democratic Party) lost 10 % of their votes, comparing with their 1998 electoral success whereas the revisionist-integrationist Cumhuriyetci Turk Partisi (CTP, Republican Turkish Party) boosted its votes by 163 % (Kibris Gazetesi, 15.11.2003). In the end, idealism was attached to the CTP membership while UBP, the biggest party of the North, symbolised the status quo (Lordos, 2006). This shift on the social ground of political expression led to further expectations with 65 % approval in the 2004 Annan Referendum held on the Turkish side.

Various public polls in the aftermath of referenda sketched the intervening factors for the Greek and Turkish Cypriot electoral behaviours. In one experiment, the Turkish respondents were asked questions to reveal the reasons behind their positive votes; the composition of the “yes” votes was dominated by impetus of the EU perspective. Accordingly, the 69 % of the Turkish Cypriot population found the Annan Plan and related referendum the final step before the EU membership. This was rational interest, an indirect factor behind the “yes” votes. In parallel, “low family income” respondents were likely to accept the plan (67%) while all other conditions were regarded equal. In the light of the questionnaire, what remained was a set of stimuli in the sense of rational choice before the Turkish Cypriot social expression during the referendum in the North.

At the same time, the public poll showed that general norms played a lowering role before “yes” votes. For the questions measuring the advisability of “high-level community with Greeks” and “a possible marriage with a Greek”, 48 % and 42% of respondents respectively approved so, while in they sense projected that the economic opportunities of potential unification exceeded the norms (Lordos, 2006). Another public poll undertaken in cooperation with the KADEM Cyprus Social Research questioned the respondents’ further expectations and demonstrated similar results (Lordos, 2005). 44 % of entire voters in Northern Cyprus favoured “economic development”, while 67 % of this group voted “yes”. In contrast, the norm-led decisions were separate in that 34 % of the voters sided with “a pure Turkish state” with a rigid consideration of the Greek “other” while 40 % of them voted “yes” after all, and finally 23 % of the Turkish Cypriot voters followed an ideal of unconditional integration with no or less conceptualisation of the Greek “other” while 90 % of them voted “yes” in the referendum.

Keeping the respective notion that there is no clear separation between norms and interests, public polls suggest that the foregrounding factors of electoral behaviour within the Turkish community mostly seem oriented to interests. Depending on an appropriate mode between norms and interests, to elaborate the case on a theoretical ground, it is noteworthy that the majority of the Turkish Cypriot community during the Annan referendum acted in accordance with potential welfare, rather than social customs on inter-group dichotomy. This outcome renders the case of theoretical importance, considering the temporality of local identity apart from frozen constructions.

**Conclusion**

Election results and polls to which I allude above demonstrate limited results. The first is that local identity in the Turkish Cypriot community is claimed to take form among a variety of norms and interests. The traditional Turkish autonomy constructed in history, inter-group cleavages, conflicts and related trauma on the one hand, motivations mostly stemmed from the EU membership and reactions against the ill-governance and economic isolationism, on the other, provided the margins of conceptualising the Turkish Cypriot “self” and Greek “other”. Second, the dominant ideology of motherland nationalism felt during conflictual years was relatively replaced with national thinking forged with a reference to Cypriotism or Turkish Cypriotism. Of course, the post-referendum period in Cyprus, including the accession of the South or turbulent political situation in the North (the UBP and motherland-nationalistic factions restored some of their popular support afterwards), is a subject of further inquiry. My claim is either way maintained by various studies that there became a shift in Turkish Cypriot local identity to a community conceptualised with more minimalist terms, comparing with the earlier period. This change is explained by various factors including
Comparing with the earlier period. This change is explained by various factors including welfare, the EU perspectives, and dissolution from the mainstream Turkic ideology.

Bibliography

