

**THE EFFECTS OF THE OPENING
OF THE GREEN LINE ON
YOUNG GREEK-CYPRIOTS AND
THEIR PERCEPTION OF
IDENTITY**

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Submitted by Zenon Severis

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Under the advisement of Professor Diana Chigas

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TUFTS UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The opening of the Green Line in April 2003 has given the opportunity to Greek-Cypriots to visit the north for the first time since the invasion of 1974. For Greek-Cypriots who were born after that time, this has been a particularly interesting experience, as it has been the first encounter with both the land in the north and with Turkish-Cypriots.

Through unstructured, informal interviews, I attempt to gauge the reaction of young Greek-Cypriots to the opening of the Green Line. Many have refused to cross, but those who have done so offer fascinating insights into the perception of Otherness, and more importantly, the process of formation of Cypriot identity (Cypriotism), the development of which, in my opinion, is a vital factor in securing a peaceful and viable solution to the Cyprus Problem.

Through noticing the great similarities between Turkish-Cypriots and themselves, appreciating that the dialectic of victimisation cannot be monopolised, and familiarising themselves with the land in the north of the island, the Greek-Cypriots' sense of Cypriotness appears strengthened. The ability to extend the imagined Cypriot community to include Turkish-Cypriots seems a distinct possibility. This effectively sends optimistic messages with regard to the situation that may arise when the two communities are called upon to live together in a bi-zonal, bi-communal, federal arrangement.

Introduction

One cannot deny the interdependence of the fields of social science and conflict resolution. The value of research at the micro-level is often underestimated, yet it can have very significant effect in informing political decision-making at the macro-level. It is in this light that I have conducted this study of the effects of the opening of the Green Line on Greek-Cypriots and their identity.

In Cyprus, the intractability of the conflict and the stand-still that has stretched to almost 30 years now, has allowed for the development of social tensions on either side that may prove dangerous in the event of a negotiated settlement to reunite the island under which the two communities would live side by side. Due to the separation of 30 years, new generations have been raised in environments that only include one half of the island's two-fold ethnic character. Subsequently, reuniting the two communities may prove more complex than initially expected. For these younger, separated generations, the word *reunification* is problematic in itself; the two communities were never united in their lifetime. Could this mean that, with regard to the younger, post-1974 generations, a settlement would marry two strangers? Not entirely. Each community has formed very complex opinions and vivid impressions of the Other through the official education system, through social memory, through the mass media, and through familial and social circles. This perception of the Other was directly challenged in 2003.

In April 2003, Turkish-Cypriot leader Rauf Denktash suddenly lifted the restrictions on movement across the Green Line, allowing Greek-Cypriots to visit the north, subject to passport control by the authorities of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The implications of this decision cannot be adequately described in words... For 29 years, the north had been out of reach. Since 1974, the Green Line had brutally divided the island, separating what used to be communities that lived together.¹ For some, this meant the opportunity to return, albeit momentarily, to their long-lost land, to visit it, to see it, to walk it and breathe its air. An old man, asked by a journalist from a TV station at a check-point whether he is comfortable with showing his passport to the authorities of the TRNC, which the Republic of Cyprus does not recognise, commented: “Son, all this is rubbish. I just want to see visit my father’s grave again.”² For some, it was that simple. For others, this opening of the ‘border’ had far-reaching and problematic implications. Many were adamant about not showing their passport to the “authorities of the pseudo-state”, while others refused to *visit* the north “as tourists in their own country”, and vowed only to go when a final and official settlement is reached. Others still, particularly people who had grown up on the land (those who are considered refugees today), expressed their reluctance to visit out of fear of the sentimental and emotional distress that the visit might arouse. For a certain age-group however, this development was ground-breaking. The younger, post-1974 generation had never seen the north. They had never lived with Turkish-Cypriots, nor for that matter, interacted with them. The sole

¹ I do not end this sentence with “in peace”, for one cannot deny the segregation of the 1960s and the violent clashes that marred the period. On the whole however, since the arrival of Turks on the island following its capture by the Ottomans in 1571, the co-existence has been peaceful, apart from this recent period.

² Information given by one of my interviewees who was present at the time the television crew were randomly asking people at the check-point.

form of interaction had come only in recent years as a result of the spread of the internet, which gave the opportunity to separated peoples to communicate in cyber-space.³

Tackling the question of the effects that the opening of the Green Line has had on the population as a whole would prove too vast for the present study. Thus my aim here is to focus on persons who were born *after 1974*. I am interested primarily in the reaction of the section of the population that did not grow up on in the north and to whom both the land and the Turkish-Cypriot population are essentially ‘unknown’, their impressions constructed only through imagination. The sentimental attachment to the land in the north, the sense of belonging, and most importantly, the effect this has on identity differs significantly in the experience of persons of this particular age group compared to other groups, and I believe that it offers a very important perspective since it is this group that constitutes the future of the island, and it is primarily this group that will have to build the island’s future under the terms of any negotiated settlement. Subsequently, gauging the perceptions and feelings of persons of this age-group may have implications on the feasibility of a proposed settlement.

That is not to say that this study and its participants offer a conclusive picture of the perceptions and opinions held by this age-group. Far from that, I posit only that this study constitutes an effort to gauge the reactions of a significant portion of this population, the make-up of which I will describe in more detail in my methodological analysis.

³ Gary Gumpert & Susan Drucker, “Communication Across Lands Divided: The Cypriot Communications Landscape” in Calotychos, Vangelis (ed.), *Cyprus and its People: Nation, Identity, and Experience in an Unimaginable Community, 1955-1997* (1998), p.237-251. On this note, I would add that bi-communal conflict resolution workshops have also brought youngsters from the two communities together (e.g. Seeds of Peace), but this has been limited in scope.

My main focus in this study is on identity, and particularly on the notion of Cypriotness, or Cypriotism. After outlining my methodology, I will offer a brief history of the concept of Cypriotism and the Cyprus Problem and also a short description of the general trends that arise from the interviews conducted. Then I shall look more carefully at the concept of Cypriotism and its role in a solution reunifying the island. Finally, drawing on various theoretical frameworks, I will attempt to highlight certain observations based on the input of the participant interviewees of this study and associate these with questions of identity and Cypriotism.

I

Methodology

This study was conducted primarily through informal, unstructured interviews. While there was obviously a theme and a topic for the interview, the aim was to allow the participants as much freedom as possible so that they could stress and elaborate issues which they felt were important. Having said that, certain basic questions were posed to all participants in order to maintain the general direction of the interview.⁴

The study is based on a sample of around 35 interviews conducted over the period of December 2003 to March 2004. The participants in this study were chosen partly at random, and partly selected in order to meet certain criteria. It was deemed important that the sample be as balanced as possible, representing as wide a range of opinions as possible, within the parameters set by the researcher. In this regard, certain criteria were set in forming the sample population, as follows:

- Age: Interviewees had to be born on a date later than 1974, and also to be older than 18 years of age.
- Gender: While this is not considered a critical factor with regard to opinions on identity and perception of the Other, it was deemed healthier to balance the sample, and so an active attempt was made to maintain a balance between the sexes.

⁴ See Appendix 1

- Visiting the north: A balance was sought between those who had visited the north and those who had not, in order to obtain a fair range of opinions on both issues and not become overly influenced by input from people of either group.
- Link to the north: An effort was made to maintain a balance between those who are not refugees and did not have significant possessions in the north on the one hand, and those who were either refugees or had significant possessions in the north on the other.
- Spatial division: It has been suggested that residents of Limassol and Paphos are less likely to hold a positive position on reunification, and less likely to be interested in visiting the north. This was reflected in the referendum of April 24th, where the two regions had the lowest acceptance percentages, reaching as low as 20% and 16% respectively. As a result, I attempted to vary the background of the sample, including both persons from Nicosia and Limassol.
- Political Affiliation: While the majority of the interviewees were not asked their political affiliation, an active effort was made to include a number who represented both the political left and the right.
- Education: All interviewees had completed at least secondary education.

The study focussed only on the Greek-Cypriot population for a number of reasons, not least restrictions of time and resources, as well as familiarity with the socio-political background of the sample's population. Beyond that however, there is also another issue to be considered. In any solution, the two communities will be called upon to live side by side, and, as I argue later, the concept of Cypriotism may well come to play a critical

role. Pronouncing Cypriot identity over their national identity (Greek or Turkish) seems to be something that Turkish-Cypriots engage in more readily in comparison to Greek-Cypriots. In a study conducted by Maria Hadjipavlou in the summer of 2000, this pronouncement of Cypriot identity on the part of the Turkish-Cypriots is clearly evident.⁵ The Greek-Cypriots, on the other hand, are caught between their Greek and Greek-Cypriot identities. It would thus be more interesting to look into the effects that the opening of the Green Line has had on *Greek-Cypriots*, for it is there that the concept of Cypriotism will need to be further strengthened in order to render a bi-communal solution more viable.

More specifically, Hadjipavlou shows that on the issue of collective identity, responding to the question “Which description is more representative of you?” a much higher percentage of Turkish-Cypriots (33.0%) than Greek-Cypriots (10.0%) responded that they feel “more Cypriot than Greek/Turk” while more Greek-Cypriots (35.7%) than Turkish-Cypriots (12.1%) felt that they were “as much Cypriot as Greek/Turk.”⁶ Only 4.5% of Greek-Cypriots said “I feel Greek/Turk”, while the respective Turkish-Cypriot figure was 14.2%. The latter percentage can be attributed to the presence of Turkish settlers who moved to the island since 1974. It is evident however, that overall, for Turkish-Cypriots things are much clearer: The Cypriotness in their identity is much more pronounced than in the case of Greek-Cypriots. Greek-Cypriots seem to have more mixed feelings.

⁵ Hadjipavlou, Maria, “Inter-Ethnic Stereotypes, Neighborliness, Separation:Paradoxes and Challenges in Cyprus.” *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, Volume 13, No2: 281-317. Page 8 of draft.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.8 of draft

It is important to recognise, at this point, that any such study, conducted by a Greek-Cypriot on a subject population of Greek-Cypriots, cannot be free from bias. While every effort has been made not to lead the participants through the questions and to tackle the topic with as much objectivity as is humanly possible, I do appreciate that a certain level of inherent bias is always present and cannot be overcome. However, it is my conviction that it is equally advantageous that this study be conducted by a Greek-Cypriot for a number of reasons. I would note primarily the familiarity with the topic at hand that a local can demonstrate, by virtue of being in a better position to fully appreciate the expression of opinion and sentiment by participants in the study, as well as having an inherent basic understanding of the workings of domestic socio-political paradigms. Also, I would argue that interviewees are more likely to engage more sincerely and openly in a discussion with a local, in Greek, rather than with a foreign researcher.

II

Historical Background and Nationalism in Cyprus

Cyprus has been colonised through the ages by various conquerors, but the island's two main communities can be traced to Greece and Turkey. Greek colonisers, from the city-state of Mycenae are believed to have first settled on the island around 1400 B.C., and the Greek language has since been the dominant one on the island. The island's Turkish population, which makes up a community that amounts to 20-22% of the island's total, dates back to the Ottoman era.⁷ The island was captured during the reign of Sultan Selim II by Lala Mustafa in 1571 and incorporated into the Ottoman Empire, whereupon the Ottoman practice of introduction of settlers to colonise new territories led to the emergence of a large Turkish minority on the island.⁸

In 1878, the administration of Cyprus was handed over to Britain, and in 1925 was officially declared a Crown colony. During this latest period of foreign rule, leading up to the independence of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960, nationalism began to brew for the first time, as it did, after all, all over the world. From a Greek-Cypriot perspective, the expression of Greek nationalism came in the doctrine of *Enosis*. That is, union with Greece. As Loizos describes, *Enosis* appealed to the urban elite because it reflected their inclusion as part of a distinguished and powerful culture.⁹ From 1931 onwards, this

⁷ The exact percentage is difficult to determine, since no island-wide census has been conducted since 1974, but it is certain that the Turkish-speaking population has grown in proportion from 18% in 1974.

⁸ It is important to note however that there were Turks, Armenians, Maronites and Arabs on the island ever since the raids of the Arab and Mameluk raids dating back to the 7th century.

⁹ Peter Loizos, "The Progress of Greek Nationalism in Cyprus, 1878-1970" in Davis, J., *Choice and Change: Essays in Honour of Lucy Mair*. (1974) p.128-129

sentiment began to attain political expression, particularly as the Civil War raged on in Greece in the 1940s, serving, amongst other things, to vilify the Communist Left.¹⁰

The concept of *Enosis*, however, really exploded onto the scene in the 1950s. During the period 1955-59, Greek-Cypriots mounted a guerrilla war against the British colonisers, culminating in the granting of independence to the island through the 1960 Treaties of Zurich and London. The insurgency against the British was motivated however, primarily by the aspirations for union with Greece and Cypriot nationalism espoused exactly that aim. In their efforts to quell the rebellion, the British implemented a divide-and-rule policy, stirring the Turkish section of the population and using them against the Greek-Cypriot rebels.¹¹ Turkey also expressed her dissatisfaction at the idea of Cyprus joining Greece and her soft-underbelly becoming exposed to her bitter rival. The resulting compromise, in Zurich-London, was the Republic of Cyprus, a unified state, but the two communities had by this time been turned against each other.

In 1963, President Makarios proposed 13 amendments to the Constitution, among which the removal of the veto enjoyed by the Turkish-Cypriot vice-president. The Turkish-Cypriots reacted strongly to these proposals by withdrawing from the government. During 1963-4 and again in 1967, inter-communal violence broke out. The two communities were thus locked in bitter opposition. It is almost impossible to express an accurate opinion on the level of enmity and violence in the period 1963-1974 due to the fact that relations and interpretations of the events differ greatly and are always tinted by

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Turkish Cypriots were, for example, recruited en masse into the police force used to quell Greek uprisings.

a political agenda. In terms of Cypriot nationalism however, there was a rift between the outright supporters of *Enosis*, which persisted throughout the period, and the pro-Makarios group which was caught between the concepts of Cypriotism, which it was obliged to adopt since the group itself was the governing power of the Cypriot state, and Hellenism, which still espoused *Enosis* as the ultimate objective.¹² In July 1974, “EOKA B”, a terrorist organisation, mounted a coup d’état against President (Archbishop) Makarios aimed at uniting the island with Greece.¹³ This prompted an immediate reaction from Turkey, who intervened militarily, and by August 1974 had occupied 37% of the island. In dividing the island, Turkey also divided the population, by demanding that all Turkish-Cypriots move to the north within 24 hours. Greek-Cypriots who lived in north, at the same time, fled their homes. About 10,000 Greeks remained in the north, but their numbers soon diminished. Today there are a mere few hundred. In this way, the two communities were separated and an impenetrable ceasefire line set up between them. Impenetrable, that is, until April 2003, when it was once again opened.

The events of 1974 have had a powerful effect on nationalism in Cyprus. It is perhaps curious that it should take the division of the island and the separation of its two communities for the concept of Cypriotism to begin to gain ground. The strong links with Greece were weakened and a sense of “betrayal” and increasing disenchantment with

¹² Yiannis Ioannou, “Language, Politics and Identity: An analysis of the Cypriot Dilemma” in *The Cyprus Review* 1991, vol.3, n.1, p.21

¹³ Perhaps this could be seen as the ultimate expression of Greek-Cypriot nationalism, although many have since attributed the organisation and instrumentation of the coup and the associated political beliefs to only a very small extremist minority of the population.

“mother-Greece” set in.¹⁴ The idea of *Enosis* faded, and, as Mavratsas describes, the concept of Cypriotism began to emerge more strongly.¹⁵ While Cypriot identity has always been present, it was not until after 1974 that it began to be espoused by a significant number of Cypriots. The left, since 1974, (particularly AKEL) has firmly supported the concept of Cypriotism¹⁶ arguing that “Cyprus belongs to its people” and supporters of *Enosis* are today, nowhere to be found. The rest of the population is caught in a problematic identity dilemma, where Cypriotism clashes with Greek nationalism. The latter is no doubt more dominant, but it is in my opinion, a stronger sense of Cypriotism that will be most beneficial for the co-existence of the two communities and the peaceful viability of any solution. But how exactly is Cypriotism defined, and how does its importance play out? I will address these questions in more detail in a later section.

¹⁴ Nicos Stamatakis, “History and Nationalism: The cultural reconstruction of modern Greek Cypriot identity” in *The Cyprus Review* vol.3 no.1, p. 69 – Though this concept of “betrayal” actually dates back to the 1960s.

¹⁵ Caesar Mavratsas, “Greek Cypriot Identity and Conflicting Interpretations of the Cyprus Problem” in Kerides, Dimitris and Dimitrios Triantaphyllou, *Greek-Turkish Relations in the Era of Globalisation*. (2001) p.156

¹⁶ Yiannis Papadakis, “Enosis and Turkish Expansionism: Real Myths or Mythical Realities?” In Calotychos, Vangelis (ed.), *Cyprus and its People: Nation, Identity, and Experience in an Unimaginable Community, 1955-1997* (1998), p. 77

III

Description of Interviews

Without going into quantitative detail, for this is not a study based on quantitative statistical research, I wish, at this point, to outline some of the major findings of the interviews. I will take a more detailed look and make particular references to interview material later, in the discussion of the effects of the opening of the Green Line on Cypriotism (Chapter 5). Here I wish to give a general overview for the reader to be in position to appreciate the overall picture drawn from the interviews.

As already mentioned, approximately half of the participants in this study had visited the north and half had not. Of those not having visited the north, the vast majority pointed out that they refused to show their passports to the unrecognised authorities of the TRNC. Two, both from Limassol, expressed little interest in visiting the north, while two others noted that they had not visited yet just because the opportunity had not presented itself.

The reasoning for objecting to visiting the north, almost across the board, was that they refused to submit themselves to the authority of the TRNC, which they *do not recognise*. Often this comment was made with emphatic oomph, as if to make a statement, indirectly inflicting sentiments of guilt on those who had visited the north. In more elaborate terms, one participant noted: “I refuse to recognise their authority. I refuse to abide by their speed limits!” Another noted interestingly that he felt that visiting the north would constitute “a violation of his ethical-code” for he would be indirectly accepting the status

quo, the de facto division of the island. Spending money in the occupied territories was another cause for concern; some participants visiting the north even made a point of not spending one cent (literally), sometimes taking water from the south, or small lunch-packs. One participant who had refused to show his passport and visit the north added that he felt that by doing so, and spending money in the north, “we were doing exactly what we have asked other countries not to do”, evoking the international embargo on northern Cyprus. Most, however, limited themselves to their objection to showing the passport to the authorities which they did not recognise.

Of those who had in fact visited the north, with only very few exceptions, everyone felt “thought-provoked”. The whole experience did not leave them unaffected, and many claimed that for a few days after their visit, they still found themselves “thinking about things”. Across the board, participants who visited the north tended to speak of Turkish-Cypriots in a more welcoming and friendly tone than their counterparts who refused to visit, although even most of the latter claimed to have “no problem with Turkish-Cypriots”. Any hostile comments came only from some who refused to visit the north.

In terms of links and association to the north, about one third of the sample population were refugees, one third lost some land or property, and one third had no links. Only two persons with no link decided to cross the Green Line. The rest refused to do so, raising the question of whether uncompromising persistence on principles of non-recognition is more prevalent where familial links to the north are absent. Interestingly, no participant expressed a burning desire to return to their family’s land. This may have implications for

a possible solution. A common perception was that the land was not lost by the participants, but by their parents or grandparents and subsequently they did not feel a powerful urge to have it returned. There was, in this sense, a detachment from the land. Compensation, however, was mentioned almost by all. Some also added that they would welcome the opportunity to have a second home, a beach-house in the north. This, of course, could have implications for a possible solution, in that this younger generation of Greek-Cypriots seems more willing to give up their 'possessions' and in fact do not share an undying desire of return that is presumed to pervade all refugee populations.

Another general comment would be with regard to gender. The make-up of the sample of participants in this study was roughly 3/5 male and 2/5 female. Three female participants noted that they were "disturbed" (two only slightly, the other very) by the sound of Turkish in Nicosia's streets. At the same time, the majority of the female participants seemed on the whole more fearful, wary and distrustful of Turkish-Cypriots. "I don't know if I could live with them" was a comment from one female interviewee, while another added that "I think it's better this way: they're over there and we're over here. Separate." This of course, raises questions as to the association between gender and perceptions of the Other. While I will not touch on this question in this study, I think it is pertinent to note at this point. Perhaps military service, compulsory for all men, has a moderating effect on men, rendering them less reluctant to accept change of this sort, and less frightened of Turks.

On the whole, all the participants who visited the north made the same comments about the dire economic situation there. In a sense, this may have been the opportunity to confirm a belief that they have had all these years. Greek-Cypriots are always proud to claim that their standard of living is significantly and visibly higher than that of Turkish-Cypriots and in visiting the north, no participants in this study failed to mention economic underdevelopment. For those visiting family homes and possessions, a tone of disappointment usually accompanied descriptions of the state of the family house. In most cases, the houses were run-down, not maintained, or altogether derelict. Participants described these dismal conditions often noting that they were saddened more by the pain that their parents felt. It is evident here that participants did not always share this sentiment of regret, pain, and distress, but did however sympathise with their parents.

In quite a few situations, only part of the house was being used by the Turkish-Cypriot or Turkish current occupants. This, in my opinion, is a very important point. It came as a very vivid illustration that the Turkish-Cypriots were also displaced persons. It indicated to visiting Greek-Cypriots that the current tenants of their homes are not altogether comfortable and settled in, thus breaking the monopoly on the dialectic of victimisation that young Greek-Cypriots tend to believe that they enjoy. This is a matter to which I shall return later in the paper. I wish now to turn to the concept of Cypriotism and relate it to these interviews. First I will define the term and discuss its relevance, and then I will look at the interviews and draw on them to highlight certain conclusions with regard to Cypriot identity.

IV

The concept of Cypriotism and its role in a solution

Cypriotism is a key concept in the Cyprus Problem. It is my conviction that the feasibility and viability of a solution will depend to a large extent on how the two sides view each other - their perception of the Other. While political decision-making is reserved for the select few, it is at the individual level that any solution will be played out on a day-to-day basis. The individual and his perceptions are thus of essence with regard to the feasibility of a political settlement. The development of 'Cypriotism', in my opinion, can play a decisive role in improving the relations between the two sides. I wish first to look briefly at a description of Cypriotism.

Greek nationalism grew particularly strong in Cyprus in the final stages of British colonialism, during which, after all, the calls for *Enosis* began to emerge. This movement grew in strength and persisted even beyond the departure of the British. In 1960, the island was granted independence, but the population was slow in espousing Cypriot identity. The drive for *Enosis* persisted well into the 1960s as Greek national identity was the dominant form of collective identity among Greek-Cypriots. It was only later that Cypriots, and particularly Greek-Cypriots began to slowly discover a separate identity. Caesar Mavratsas describes how, in his opinion, Cypriotism saw its rise only after the disaster of 1974. He defines Cypriotism as the idea that Cyprus has its own character, which contrasts sharply with the views that dominate nationalist ideologies that regard

the island as an extension of Greek or Turkish culture.¹⁷ Cypriotism, however, does not deny the Greek (or Turkish) ethnicity of the inhabitants of the island; it stresses that their ethnic identity – and on a more general level, their culture – has also acquired *sui generis* features that not only differentiates the Greek and Turkish Cypriots from the mainland Greeks and Turks, but also creates some common ground between the two communities of the island.¹⁸

Mavratsas refers to specific examples such as an “increasing emphasis on official symbolism” and the fact that “whereas the day of independence was hardly celebrated before 1974, when the stress was upon the national commemorations of the Greek state, it started to be seen officially as the most important commemorative ritual in Greek Cypriot political culture. And for the first time since 1960, the Cypriot flag began to be publicly displayed on a large scale.”¹⁹ Cypriotism made a slow start, and only began to emerge after 1974.

In my opinion, Cypriotism can be seen as an identity that, while not negating the national identity of either community, brings the two together by focussing on characteristics common to both communities. This draws on common heritage by stressing the island’s cultural heritage as opposed to the national one, common history (of the island as opposed to the respective nation), and common disposition, which plays out in the way the two communities have influenced each other and how they have both been influenced by British colonialism.

¹⁷ Mavratsas, p.158

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.157

The Cypriotist doctrine, however, is difficult to adopt effectively in the absence of basic elements of its character. Even though official symbolism is present, and the state has attempted at the political level to promote a sense of Cypriot identity, I feel that, while necessary, this is not sufficient. Many interviewees expressed much stronger feelings towards the Greek flag rather than the flag of the Republic of Cyprus, which was described as “lacking symbolism and depth.” In this respect, the opening of the Green Line has given the opportunity for Cypriots to familiarise themselves (albeit briefly) with some of the essential elements making up their identity.

It would be very beneficial for both sides if Cypriots could be drawn together by the similarities in their identities rather than be polarised by national discourses on either side. Looking at the population group under 30 years of age, I believe that the concept of Cypriotness is not very developed. The physical separation of the two communities is such that, in the absence of Turkish-Cypriots and the detachment from the northern half of the island, the Greek national identity cannot but become dominant in the south. In an ideal solution, the two communities would feel secure in their quest to retain their national identity, but also espouse a Cypriot identity, which would bring them together, comprising of their similarities in cultural and physical terms, and appealing to their common heritage and shared history. This Cypriot identity is something that, in my opinion, younger Cypriots have not been able to experience in the flesh due primarily to the separation of the two communities since 1974, before their birth, which has rendered them particularly vulnerable to the nationalistic doctrines that draw them apart. Leonard

Doob reiterates this point by noting that “the almost complete separation of the two communities for more than two decades probably weakened their sense of identity with Cyprus...”²⁰ Among young Greek-Cypriots, the development of any form of Cypriotness has included only half the island and only one of its two ethnic communities. This fact has been significantly challenged by the opening of the Green Line.²¹

Embracing Cypriotism, a Cypriot identity, especially now that the strong national movement of Enosis has died down and the independence of the island has been solidified, can be pivotal in bringing the two communities together peacefully under the rubric of a comprehensive political settlement. Mavratsas highlights the importance of Cypriot identity and Cypriotism in concluding that “a sincere acceptance of a truly independent Cypriot polity... along with a systematic effort to legitimize this polity in the minds of all Cypriots, constitute rational, as well as moral, imperatives for the political leadership of the island.”²²

²⁰ Doob, Leonard W., “Cypriot Patriotism and Nationalism.” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Volume 30, Issue 2 (June 1986), p.393.

²¹ I will return to this in my analysis at a later stage.

²² Mavratsas, p. 179

V

The role of Education

One of the complications associated with the adoption of the Cypriotist doctrine by Greek Cypriots is the role played by education. The system of public education is tailored in such a way that it promotes Greek nationalism while simultaneously vilifying Turks and Turkey. Maria Hadjipavlou-Trigeorgis describes how each side's educational system is laden with political agenda. Turks are described as "barbarians who conquered our lands, occupied our towns and villages, killed our people, raped our women, uprooted people, confiscated our properties..."²³ Loizos, at the same time, notes how both sides tend to generalise, adopting such totalising discourses to legitimate killings.²⁴

In another analysis of this phenomenon, Heracles Mellas draws on a number of studies to indicate how in Greek school-books, the Other (Turks) is described and characterised always in a very negative manner, associated with killings, tyranny, barbarous and fanatic behaviour, aggressive instincts, murder, looting and unheard of crimes, with constant references to things like 'the Ottoman yolk' and 'the enemy of the (Greek) nation'.²⁵

These school-books are the same ones used in Cyprus, for with the occasional exception

²³ Maria Hadjipavlou-Trigeorgis, "Different Relationships to the Land". In Vangelis Calotychos (ed.), *Cyprus and its People: Nation, Identity, and Experience in an Unimaginable Community, 1955-1997*. (1998) p.266

²⁴ Peter Loizos, "How might Turkish and Greek Cypriots see each other Other more clearly?" In Vangelis Calotychos (ed.), *Cyprus and its People: Nation, Identity, and Experience in an Unimaginable Community, 1955-1997*. (1998) p.35-52

²⁵ Mellas, Heracles, *Eikones Hellenon kai Tourkon*. (2001) p.289-310. Mellas does however note that since 1990, a toning down of historical text books has occurred, although reference to the Other in positive terms remains absent, as a more neutral description is often preferred. He adds that ideas such as the return to Constantinople are still present ("pali me xronia me kairous, pali dika mas tha'nai" – meaning that "with time, it will be ours again").

of text-books for Geography, the Greek-Cypriot education system relies heavily on the same publications used in the schooling system of the Greek state.

Looking more closely at the education system in Cyprus, Rebecca Bryant describes how methods of education help to redefine the relation of individual and state, noting that “the advent of modernity has not been accompanied by the subjective individualism that has defined it elsewhere”.²⁶ Bryant even notes how social scientists “often observe with wonder and bafflement the manner in which personal narratives appear to conform to official ones.”²⁷ National fervour and a sense of victimisation are instilled in Greek-Cypriots from a young age, often demonizing the Other in the process, without ever having met or seen them.²⁸ This process of bias against the Other through the education system is something reflected also in Hadjipavlou’s study, where she indicates that both Greek and Turkish-Cypriots believe, in the overwhelming majority, that “the education system of the other side teaches hate against us”.²⁹

With the demonisation of the Other from an early age, and in the most respected of realms (the school), it can be expected that Greek-Cypriots form a very negative and hostile perception of Turks. In the absence of any visible evidence indicating otherwise, this perception is logically extended to Turkish-Cypriots. Inasmuch as young Greek-Cypriots consider themselves to be Greek (they are, after all, being taught the same

²⁶ Rebecca Bryant, “An Education in Honour”. In Vangelis Calotychos (ed.), *Cyprus and its People: Nation, Identity, and Experience in an Unimaginable Community, 1955-1997*. (1998) p.66

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Sant Cassia, Paul, “Absences and Losses: Psychoanalysis, anthropology and the cultural construction of emotions.” In *AJEC (Anthropological Journal on European Cultures)* 10 143-163

²⁹ Hadjipavlou, Maria, “Inter-Ethnic Stereotypes, Neighborliness, Separation:Paradoxes and Challenges in Cyprus.” p.14-17 of draft.

history taught to mainland Greeks), they can assume that young Turkish-Cypriots similarly espouse their Turkish identity, thus lumping them into the same category as Turks and tagging them with the same negative, hostile stereotypes.

This trend evident in the educational system can constitute a significant obstacle in the development of Cypriotism, and could also have a potentially disastrous influence on relations between the two communities on the island, pursuant to a solution.³⁰ It has the effect of polarising the two peoples, drawing them closer to their national identities, and away from any unifying characteristics by pronouncing the historic hostility among them. The Other, absent from everyday life due to the separation of the two communities since 1974, and thus unable to mount any sort of defence against negative characterisation, is incessantly demonised and vilified. In this respect, I would argue that, with regard to Greek-Cypriots, the indoctrination from the educational system has a much more powerful effect on those who have never lived beside Turkish-Cypriots and thus have not had any of these powerful stereotypes dispelled.

The opening of the Green Line can do exactly that. It can serve to demystify the Other and dispel hatred and contempt picked up from the educational system or society at large, by putting people of either side in touch with each other, even if it is only to this limited degree. The encounter instigated by the opening of the Green Line comes as a direct challenge to the totalising discourses that have their roots in the educational system. It

³⁰ Though it must be noted that since the rapprochement efforts that followed what has been called the “earthquake diplomacy”, it has been agreed by both Turkey and Greece to reform the books of instruction at the primary and secondary level in an effort towards further improving relations and sowing the seeds for more amicable relations in the future.

brings the discourse to an individual level, humanising Turkish-Cypriots and giving flesh and form to these imagined characters. In the following section I will illustrate exactly how this has been reflected in the interviews conducted.

VI

Cypriotism and the Opening of the Green Line

Looking more specifically at the interviews, I would draw on a number of issues that seem to indicate a strengthening of the Cypriotist doctrine or of Cypriot identity as a result of the opening of the Green Line. This message was not visible in all interviews, but it was certainly a theme that appeared on a large number of occasions. First of all however, I would reiterate that an association was apparent between those who espoused more nationalistic views and the refusal to visit the north. It seemed that the vast majority of those who had chosen, as a matter of principle, *not to visit* the north, were on the whole more avid followers of Greek nationalism, distancing themselves from Turks and Turkish-Cypriots, and thus *not* strong followers of the Cypriotist doctrine, whether that be consciously or subconsciously.

A common response was that “I refuse to be a tourist in my own country”. The majority of those who shared these opinions and refused to visit the north also spoke with more hostility about Turkish-Cypriots. Severe hostility was, admittedly, absent altogether, but there was a discernible sympathetic and more welcoming tone from those who had visited the north, versus those who had preferred to avoid doing so. I am not at this stage drawing any causal links. Rather, I am merely noting that in analysing the effect that a visit to the north might have on one’s idea of Cypriotness, it must be borne in mind that it appears that those who in principle are more nationalistic and less conscious of their

Cypriot identity, were more likely to face a moral barrier and decide *not* to visit the north in the first place. The sample, in this respect, is skewed.

Physical Characteristics

One of the main elements of Cypriotness, in my opinion, is that of physical characteristics. Without attempting to describe them, I believe that Cypriots recognise in each other distinct *common* physical characteristics. One of the comments that almost all those who visited the north expressed was that “the Turkish-Cypriots look just like us. You can hardly tell if someone is Greek-Cypriot or Turkish-Cypriot.” This is critical. Recognising characteristics in Turkish-Cypriots that are identical to one’s own serves to bring the two communities together and demystify the Other. For Greek-Cypriots who were born after 1974, this carries an added significance for the Other has been but a construct of the imagination, easily demonised and vilified. Its apparent appearance as so similar to oneself thus comes as quite a powerful message.

A common anecdote regarded taxi-drivers. On crossing at the Ledra Palace checkpoint, and coming out onto a street on the Turkish side, one finds oneself in front of a row of taxis, the drivers of which tend to be lounging around aimlessly, waiting for a customer (in typical Cypriot manner I would add!). Many interviewees shared the feeling of confusion upon seeing the taxi-drivers, explaining that they found themselves thinking for a moment that the taxis and drivers were in fact Greek-Cypriot, and it was only upon closer inspection of the number plates, and upon hearing their spoken language that they

realised that they were in fact Turkish-Cypriot. Intense similarity of this kind cannot but bring younger Greek-Cypriots to feel closer to Turkish-Cypriots, and this was noted in exactly those terms by various interviewees. Some of them, however, also added that even though their opinion of Turkish-Cypriots has improved, they still retain some fear and reservation.

This improvement in perception of the Other also came from the fact that Turkish-Cypriots have been visiting the south as well. While Greek-Cypriot visits to the north are much more numerous than vice-versa, Turkish-Cypriot presence in the south has also been noted. Beyond the number plates visible on Turkish-Cypriot cars, the Turkish language is now occasionally heard in cafés and on the street in downtown Nicosia. One interviewee even related his experience of running into Turkish-Cypriot skiers on Troodos and speaking to them in Greek before they pointed out that they were Turkish-Cypriot. At the same time, many participants noted that a fair number of (older) Turkish-Cypriots in the north were quite adept in the use of the Greek language. This too acts as an indicator of similarity.

On the whole, this encounter has been remarkably peaceful and eye-opening for Greek-Cypriots in pointing out, beyond the physical similarity, also common cultural traits and identical behaviour. One interviewee noted that he saw Turkish-Cypriots as “like us, just a few years behind.” This, of course, could be interpreted as lending itself to the paradigm that had the Turkish-Cypriots feeling that they were treated as second-class citizens before 1974, but I will prefer to interpret it as an attempt by the specific

interviewee to marry the similarities that he saw between himself and Turkish-Cypriots with the differences, the most prominent and striking of which is the difference in standard of living. Another noted that, although he had not visited the north himself, (not because he refuses to show his passport, but because he had not had the opportunity yet) he felt that the largely peaceful interaction between the two communities “indicates that we can live together.”

Of essence here is not whether or not Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots look alike and do indeed share physical characteristics. What is critical here is the *perception* of this similarity which, as I have explained, was expressed by the large majority of those who visited the north. It is this perception that has the ability, in my opinion, to act towards promoting the concept of Cypriot identity. Through this interaction between the two communities, the first for the members of this age-group, negative stereotypes built up by the educational system and other social circles are directly challenged. How can a person who is so similar to oneself personify all these negative characteristics? Seeing, talking to and interacting with Turkish-Cypriots has given Greek-Cypriots the opportunity to question their stereotypical perceptions of the Other in a very dramatic fashion.

I would also add another physical aspect that plays a role in indirectly promoting Cypriot identity – that of physical geography. This aspect is often neglected, its effect not really appreciated, but it is my opinion that it can have a very powerful, symbolic effect on identity. Crossing into the north of Cyprus by car can only take place at one specific checkpoint - that of Agios Dometios. From there, heading north out of Nicosia, to cross

the Pentadaktylos mountain range, one has to take one of three natural crossings. The most commonly used one is at Pogazi, directly north of the capital. The scenery at Pogazi is admittedly spectacular... A road leading up the mountain very suddenly turns a corner, revealing, quite abruptly, the town of Kyrenia below and the sea of the northern coast. This is a very powerful image, for the northern coast is something that Greek-Cypriots born after 1974 and growing up only in the south, had never seen. The idea of 'an island' is only really complete when one can trace the coast all around it. That is not to say that one cannot perceive of one's space as being an island unless one sees the entirety of the coastline, but doing so, or at least, being able to delimit its northern and southern, eastern and western boundaries, certainly gives the individual a more concrete perception of his home, thus reinforcing his sense of belonging.

With the Green Line running across the middle of the island, the perceived and imagined area of the island is distorted. Some participants did not fail to note this symbolic effect:

"Seeing the sea after Pogazi felt very weird. I really realised Cyprus is an island."

Another female participant noted that reaching the peak of St. Hilarion and looking beyond the mountain range was something she could not describe in words. She added that "I finally saw for the first time what was beyond Pentadaktylos... The map of Cyprus was completed in my mind!" She then continued, explaining in great detail how from St. Hilarion she could see all the bays along the coast and even (it was a clear day) the Karpas peninsula curving northwards in the distance.

The power of images and space cannot be underestimated here, and in this, not only the northern coastline, but the Pentadaktylos mountain range also plays an important role. The three castles atop the mountain range, St. Hilarion, Buffavento and Kantara, as well as Bellapais Abbey all offer very spectacular and far-reaching views. The mountain range is physically so steep and elongated that it allows the eye to travel uninterrupted for miles along the coast. It is, after all, for this reason that the castles were built there in the Middle Ages! These landmarks are sites popular amongst Greek-Cypriot visitors, not least because of their views, and so many visitors to the north had the opportunity to view the island's coastline from atop the mountain range, an image which is much more reminiscent of the actual map of the island than any view from the Troodos mountain range, which is for the most part relatively distant from the sea. The view all along the top of the Pentadaktylos range can serve to marry reality with imagery, solidifying the image of the island and making it much more tangible and *real*. This, I believe, contributes towards the rooting of identity in the land, on the island, and can thus act towards promoting Cypriotism.

Historical and Cultural Heritage

Moreover, these castles, abbeys and churches are part of Cyprus' cultural heritage, and are debatably much more spectacular than any historical or cultural heritage site in the south. A common saying amongst Greek-Cypriots, referring to the 1974 invasion says that "they took the best part of Cyprus".

History is an integral part of identity. The perception of continuity through historical memory is very important in defining the self and at times, the Other. Buffavento, St. Hilarion, Kantara, the castle of Kyrenia, Bellapais, are all remnants of Cyprus' past. Whereas Greek nationalism will draw on historical events and places such as Marathon, Salamina, Thermopylae, Navarino and the Acropolis, the aforementioned sites constitute historical monuments *specific to Cyprus*. They offer young Cypriots the opportunity to associate themselves historically with the island. This is not to say that historical monuments and remnants do not exist in the south through which Greek-Cypriots can associate themselves with the island's past, but as I have already explained, those in the north are both particularly impressive, and more importantly, 'new' to young Greek-Cypriots. By virtue of their addition to the historical legacy of the island, they serve to reinforce one's sense of pride in one's history, and particularly the history of the island itself, thus strengthening the sense of belonging to Cyprus. Historical sites such as Buffavento exist because of the nature of the island's geography. Their architecture and location is such because of the geographical setting. They are built as a product of the specific landscape, and this further serves to marry geography with history and, through these two mediums, to tap into the individual's historical sense of belonging in Cypriot identity.

Beyond the physical characteristics, however, both human and geographical, or the perception thereof, and also the historical and cultural heritage, the idea of perception of the Other and questions relating to Otherness also emerge from the interviews and play an equally important role in the development of Cypriotism.

Otherness – Totalising versus Individualising Discourses

Perceptions of the Other are believed to greatly affect one's sense of identity. The Other is often used as a point of reference against which one identifies oneself, and national identities in Cyprus are no exception. The Other serves to delimit the boundaries of the self, particularly in terms of collective identity. Being Greek is often seen as what is *not* Turkish. By characterising Turks as barbaric, uncivilised and aggressive, a Greek is implicitly stating that he is *not* characterised by those adjectives. Rather, he is sophisticated, civilised and peace-loving. By defining what the Other is, a better understanding of 'who we are' emerges. But for the construction of the self or the Other to occur, the process of social categorisation must precede it. James Waller offers an interesting analysis in which he breaks down this process of social categorisation. It is perceived as simplifying an incredibly complex task by filtering the amount of data that one must actively process.³¹ This process, he argues, is universal and pervasive across mankind, as natural to our minds as breathing is to our lungs. He notes that social categorisation in assigning people in-groups and out-groups (self and Other) has four important effects: assumed similarity, out-group homogeneity, accentuation and in-group bias.

Looking more closely at these effects, I feel that they are not far from processes at work in Cyprus. Assumed similarity attributes similar characteristics to all the members of the in-group. Other members of the group are supposed to be more similar to us than to any

³¹ Waller, James, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary people commit genocide and mass killing*. (2002) p. 239

member of the out-group. In much the same way, out-group homogeneity occurs in tandem. Members of the out-group are presumed to be similar in the same manner. Stereotyping then, becomes a handy tool “to quickly interpret an individual out-group member’s behaviour.”³² I would even move further and note that out-group homogeneity can be assumed *even when* in-group assumed similarity is not expected. Out-group homogeneity, or the perception of the Other, particularly when the Other is only imagined through history books, through story-telling, through newspaper articles and without any real personal contact, can be a very powerful force.

Solidifying the assumed similarity of the in-group and out-group homogeneity comes in the form of accentuation of the differences. This third effect of social categorisation serves to draw ever deeper lines between the two groups by exaggerating the differences between them. In effect, Waller argues that we become biased towards information that enhances the differences between our group and the out-group, and less attentive to information about similarities between members of different social categories.³³ Finally, Waller describes a number of experiments that show that in-group bias then follows. Drawing on this research, he posits that “in short, complete strangers arbitrarily assigned to groups, having no interaction of conflict with one another, and not competing against another group behaved as if those who shared their meaningless label were their dearest friends or closest relatives.”³⁴ He also notes that such findings have been confirmed in several different countries using a wide range of experiment participants. In the words of British social psychologist Henri Tajfel, “the mere perception of belonging to two distinct

³² Ibid, p.240

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, p.241

groups – that is, social categorisation per se – is sufficient to trigger inter-group discrimination favouring the in-group. In other words, the mere awareness of the presence of an out-group is sufficient to provoke inter-group competitive or discriminatory responses on the part of the in-group.”³⁵

Thinking in terms of ‘us and them’, ‘self and the Other’ then, is nothing unusual. However, I would argue that, in the absence of the Other, one’s imagination is free to roam wild. Facing the Other in everyday life on a daily basis would undoubtedly act as a check for some of the stereotypes that might form. Maintaining these stereotypes, particularly if they are negative and powerful (such as “barbarian”, “uncivilised” and “evil”) would become a very difficult task (unless of course they were precisely accurate). On the other hand, if interaction does not occur in close proximity on a daily basis, in the absence of any ‘living examples’ to check and challenge the stereotypes, such stereotypes can become exaggerated indefinitely. This process is, in my opinion, one that is taking place in Cyprus.

For Greek-Cypriots, interaction with Turks and Turkish-Cypriots has been minimal, if not non-existent altogether. The only reference to their character and behaviour is through the medium of history books, through the education system, and through social and family ‘teachings’.³⁶ Given that the recent history of the island has been marred by a war, invasion and occupation, one can only expect that the construction of Turks and Turkish-Cypriots (even though a differentiation between the two is usually made) in the

³⁵ Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” in W. Austin and S. Worchel, (eds.) *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. (1979).

³⁶ And only more recently, as already mentioned, through the internet.

minds of Greek-Cypriots born after 1974 will *not* be of the most amicable type. In this respect, the influence of the educational system has already been discussed. The study conducted by Maria Hadjipavlou in the summer of 2000, (that is, *before* the Green Line was opened) is very informative vis-à-vis this question of stereotypes and Otherness. She indicates that the most common stereotypes that Greek-Cypriots chose with regard to Turkish-Cypriots were *lazy, backward, and deceitful*.³⁷ It is in this respect that many have stressed the urgency in pursuing a solution to the Cyprus Problem before the two communities form such distorted and negative impressions of one another that peaceful co-existence be jeopardized.³⁸

The opening of the Green Line, in my opinion, has served to dispel many constructs of the Other. While the distance and lack of interaction may well have allowed for social categorisation to flourish, the opening of the Green Line, as indicated from the feedback from the participants in this study (see below), appears to have acted as a check, halting, in a sense, the totalising discourses that lump all Turkish-Cypriots or Turks under certain categories. An individualising discourse has started to take its place. This is not to say that all beliefs, perceptions and constructions have been completely shattered, but that they have been challenged. And this challenge can but improve the promotion of Cypriotism.

³⁷ Hadjipavlou, Maria, "Inter-Ethnic Stereotypes, Neighborliness, Separation: Paradoxes and Challenges in Cyprus." *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, Volume 13, No2: Reference from draft copy. Page number not available.

³⁸ Although admittedly, others have voiced the opinion that while those who lived the events of 1963-1974 are still alive, coming to terms with the other side and thus peaceful co-existence will not be problem-free, arguing therefore that it is only after a few generations have elapsed that such a solution can be implemented effectively.

More concretely, almost all the participants that visited the north noted that they were well received by the Turkish-Cypriots. On the whole, they were characterised as “friendly” and “welcoming”. Many were invited into the homes and offered tea, and no one recorded any enmity or aggression.³⁹ Most went a step further and interpreted this friendly encounter as a positive omen for a possible solution: “I don’t think we would have problems living with these people.” One participant spoke about the elderly Turkish-Cypriot couple who currently inhabit his family home in Kyrenia. The Turkish-Cypriot lady, (in very decent Greek) in greeting the interviewee when he visited the family house with his parents, her eyes watering, lifted her arms and then let them drop to her side in a gesture of despair, asking “What can we do?” These examples come as a direct challenge to the stereotypical image of the Other that has been forming all these years in the minds of young Greek-Cypriots. Granted, it appears that no Greek-Cypriot expected to be greeted at gunpoint, but one cannot underestimate the powerful effect that this amicable personal interaction can have on the average person. Having said that, it should also be noted that most of the participants also noted the difference between Turkish settlers (mainland Turks) and Turkish-Cypriots. A few even claimed that they could tell them apart and that the former were of visibly lower social status. While many said that their impression of Turkish-Cypriots was now more favourable, the same was not noted about mainland Turks. A clear distinction was made in most cases.

These interactions indicate that the aforementioned process of social categorisation has been challenged. Ideas of in-group versus out-group, us versus them, self versus Other

³⁹ Interestingly, the most hostile of responses came at a house in Bellapais village, where a participant and her family tried to visit their family home. They were greeted at the door by an Englishman, who, to their request to see the house, responded that “we are having dinner right now.”

have come under fire. The similarities noted among Greek and Turkish-Cypriots (as described earlier) serve to dispel perceptions of difference. The old Turkish-Cypriot lady's desperate lament comes as a severe contradiction to the oft held perception that Greek-Cypriots are the victims. Victimisation ceases to be monopolised by the Greek-Cypriot community and becomes a concept that is shared by both Cypriot communities, thus weakening the dividing lines and perceived differences and strengthening the Cypriotism. The boundaries of the in-group and the out-group cease to be so readily definable and a murking of the waters of separate identity occurs as a result.

Extending the Imagined Community

When the Other can no longer be so easily identifiable, questions of self-identification arise. Bringing the Turkish-Cypriots closer to one's own identity rather than using them as a point of reference in terms of the Other, or the limits of the group, can have quite substantial effects on one's sense of one's own identity. In particular, I would draw on Benedict Anderson's concept of *imagined community* here. Anderson defines a nation as an imagined political community.⁴⁰ It is important to reiterate here that one cannot deny the inclusion of Greek-Cypriots in the imagined Greek nation, or of Turkish-Cypriots in the imagined Turkish nation. But, along the lines of Cypriotism, the two together constitute an 'imagined Cypriot nation'. It is this imagination that I wish to address here.

⁴⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. (1991) p.6-7

For Greek-Cypriots growing up in the south of the island after 1974, and never experiencing the land in the north or interaction with Turkish-Cypriots, their *imagined Cypriot community* could only be made up of the elements which their imagination was able to draw together. Anderson explains that a community is ‘imagined’ because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”⁴¹ Turkish-Cypriots and the northern part of the island, I believe, only figured weakly in the imagined community of Greek-Cypriots. While society and the educational system may note that Turkish-Cypriots are also part of the Cypriot community⁴², in reality, with the only spoken language being Greek, and the only culture being the Greek one, it becomes very difficult for Greek-Cypriots to incorporate Turkish-Cypriots into their imagined community. Visiting the north, however, seeing the similarity with Turkish-Cypriots and appreciating the closeness fundamentally affects the imagined community by urging the individual to extend the “deep horizontal comradeship”⁴³ to include them. The imagined community is extended to include the north of the island and Turkish Cypriots as a result of their being perceived less as the Other and closer to the self.

Turkish-Cypriots versus Turkish settlers

The question, of course, arises: What about the Turkish settlers? Turkish settlers currently account for about half the population of the north of Cyprus and it appears that the

⁴¹ Ibid, p.6, drawing on a reference from Seton-Watson, *Nations and States*, p.5

⁴² Note: They may well not do that.

⁴³ Anderson, p.6

intentions of the United Nations, judging by their latest Comprehensive Settlement to the Cyprus Problem, are such that the majority of the Turkish settlers will not leave the island in the event of a solution. This then poses questions as to the construction of Cypriot identity. Is the imagined community to include Turkish settlers? The participants in the interviews indicated overwhelmingly that they differentiated between settlers and Turkish-Cypriots. Many, as I have already mentioned, did not fail to note the friendly and welcoming character of Turkish-Cypriots. Some added “and the settlers were ok” at the end, but others avoided extending the positive characterisations to them. A very common comment was that while Turkish-Cypriots were perceived as being so remarkably similar to Greek-Cypriots, settlers were considered to feature distinctive foreign traits. They were oft described as being more Anatolian-looking, with more “Mongol” features, “rounded faces, smaller eyes,” while the women typically wear the *feredje* (head-scarf), unlike Turkish-Cypriot women, who do not.

These distinctions are not without effect on identity construction. Turkish-Cypriots are seen as more ‘civilised’ while Turkish settlers were characterised by one participant as “kkilintziroi.” (translates roughly as “uncivilised tramps”) Does this constitute a form of racism? Perhaps. It may even be a way of maintaining certain stereotypes by redirecting them. More interestingly however, I believe it is a way of redirecting sentiments of victimisation and injustice. For young Greek-Cypriots, the Turkish-Cypriots constituted a sort of mystery. While they were said to be “our brothers”, at the same time, their Turkish ancestry inevitably associated them with the motherland and this touched on sentiments of enmity and hatred. Crossing the Green Line and visiting the north, as I have described,

has been a moderating experience, bringing the perception of Turkish-Cypriots closer to that of the self. In this process, the Turkish-Cypriots have been, at least partly, cleansed of their perceived sins (some of which were attributed only by virtue of their being associated to Turkey). They become incorporated into the imagined community of Cypriots. But strong sentiments of injustice, victimisation, mal-doing and the associated vengeance, hatred and anger can not be done away with so easily. While to a fair degree, the experience of visiting the north has served to moderate many Greek-Cypriots and quell such anger by individualising a very abstract and totalising discourse and by sharing the concept of victimisation, one must appreciate that they cannot be erased altogether. This, I believe, is where the Turkish settlers come in. The finger is pointed squarely at them when Turkish-Cypriots are perceived as closer to the self. This sense of injustice and enmity, is, in essence, redirected.

I would argue that in bringing Turkish-Cypriots closer to the self, the construction of identity is upset since the ingredients of the Other have been changed. Equilibrium is only achieved when a new Other is found, against which these sentiments of victimisation and injustice can be channelled. This new Other is constituted by the Turkish settlers. It is in this respect, to a large degree, that Kofi Annan's proposals were criticised so heavily by Greek-Cypriots. The Annan Plan allows the majority of Turkish settlers to remain on the island and gain Cypriot citizenship. This, I believe struck a problematic chord in Greek-Cypriots as the settlers were perceived (perhaps even subconsciously) as having no place in the imagined Cypriot community *even if* that were extended to include Turkish-Cypriots.

This of course, does not come to challenge the concept of the Cypriot imagined community as I have described it above. Cypriotism is reinforced by the experience of crossing the Green Line regardless of the role of Turkish settlers.

Individual Adaptation – a parallel with Pathan Identity

In a very interesting article on border identities, Fredrick Barth offers an insight which I believe is also relevant to this discussion.⁴⁴ Barth describes the construction of identity among the Pathans, a “highly self-aware ethnic group inhabiting adjoining areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan.”⁴⁵ Pathans must meet certain unambiguous criteria for ascription to the ethnic group. Namely, patrilineal descent, orthodox Islamic faith and Pathan custom, which includes the Pashto language and living by the complex Pashto code. The most characteristic feature of Pathan values lies, however, in giving primary emphasis to autonomy: in politics, in one’s relations to material objects, and in one’s escape from influence and vulnerability through kin relations.⁴⁶ Social organisation among the Pathans is very complex and certain types of behaviour could result in exclusion and isolation among the clan. This, Barth explains, occurs frequently along the geographic and social boundaries where Pathans meet other ethnic groups. One example is landholding. On the eastern margins of Pathan country, the hills in which they reside meet the populous and rich Indus plain, and Pathans have historically often descended

⁴⁴ Fredrik Barth “Pathan Identity and its maintenance.” In Barth, Fredrik (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Culture Difference*. (1969)

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.117

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.132

and conquered tracts of land. The plains however, have always been under the control of centralised governments (non-Pathan) for purely geographical and tactical reasons. Consequently, any landholding dominant group will be forced to come to terms with these centres of power, or run the risk of being destroyed. Pathan landlords, however, can only come to terms with such centres of power by directly contradicting the bases for the maintenance of their own identity: Pathan identity entails the defence of honour, corporation through acephalous councils, and ultimately, individual autonomy that constitutes the basis for Pathan self-respect.⁴⁷ Pathan landlords then, are caught in a social system where the pursuit of Pathan virtues is consistently punished (by the centres of power in the plains), whereas compromise, submission and accommodation are rewarded (by the clan). Under such circumstances, Barth explains, Pathan descent may be remembered but the distinctive behaviour associated with the identity is discontinued. The Pathan landholders will essentially *modify* their identity to accommodate the circumstances. Similar tensions play out where the Pathan area meets areas occupied by Hazara, Baluchi, Kafir, Panjabi and Kohistani tribes, where the members of the tribe find themselves in a position where they are forced to either adapt their identity accordingly, or reject it altogether.

Barth shows that “in most situations it is to the advantage of the actors themselves to change their label so as to avoid the costs of failure; and so, where there is an alternative identity within reach the effect is a flow of personnel from one identity to another and *no* change in the conventional characteristics of the status.”⁴⁸ In concluding, Barth writes

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.128-129

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.133

that “the identity retains its character because *many* change their ethnic label, and only *few* are in a position where they cling to it under adverse circumstances.”⁴⁹

This theory can be applied to the case of Cyprus. The development of Cypriotism is, in my opinion, not necessarily in a mutually exclusive relationship with the maintenance of Greek identity. The two can co-exist. On occasion however, they may be perceived as clashing. Barth’s analysis however, raises the possibility that the two can co-exist, as members of one group essentially adapt on an individual basis, without challenging the roots of the group identity. Where actors espousing nationalist Greek identity, predominant as I have discussed already among young Greek-Cypriots, might face a dilemma in the adoption of Cypriot identity, seeing it as a challenge to their perceived Greekness, the example of Pathan identity offers an indication that two clashing identities can in fact be accommodated as the individual adapts accordingly.

Incorporating Turkish-Cypriots into the sphere of the imagined community does not necessarily detract from one’s Greekness. It is, in my opinion, quite possible to maintain the two in tandem. Since the end of the movement for political union with Greece, this has become significantly more tangible, yet at the individual level, the level of imagination, the elements of either identity have yet to be clearly arranged. Many participants in this study commented that “visiting the north definitely made me think.” One female participant added that “The Cyprus Problem was always in the back of my mind, but crossing the Green Line really brought it to the forefront.” She further extended this question to issues of identity, concluding that she was on the whole very confused.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 133-134

This is not a clear-cut issue. On the contrary, it is quite complicated. My point is that the opening of the Green Line has offered the opportunity, albeit only to a small degree, to Greek-Cypriots to strengthen (both consciously and subconsciously) their Cypriotness and this acts towards promoting Cypriot identity.

VII

Conclusion

“Social scientists have considered the shared lived experience of the two communities; political psychologists have sought to explain the effect of traumas on the images of self and Other in both communities; while scholars from the field of conflict resolution have tried to facilitate meetings between the members of the two communities. In all these efforts, there dwells the issue of identity and the role that its dialectical construction and renegotiation will have on this land and its people.”⁵⁰

The role of identity cannot be understated. While it is necessary to consider how the state and official institutions promote a national identity, it is also imperative that the people at the individual level begin to *imagine* their community in this way. In any given solution to the Cyprus Problem, the two communities will be called upon to live side by side in a bi-communal, bi-zonal federation.⁵¹ The perception of self and the Other at the individual level will be critical in making any such arrangement feasible, peaceful and viable.

I have attempted to show from the interviews I conducted, that on the whole, the experience of crossing the Green Line has been a moderating one, bringing those who cross closer to Turkish-Cypriots and subsequently the two communities closer to each

⁵⁰ Vangelis Calotychos, “Interdisciplinary Perspectives: Difference at the Heart of Cypriot Identity and its Study”. In Calotychos, Vangelis (ed.), *Cyprus and its People: Nation, Identity, and Experience in an Unimaginable Community, 1955-1997*. (1998) p.13

⁵¹ I am not considering the option of two separate states a ‘solution’.

other. Cypriotism is a concept that needs to be promoted if co-existence based on a political arrangement is to be successful. Mavratsas has indicated that it is a sine qua non and I cannot agree more.⁵²

The process of interaction with Turkish-Cypriots and visiting the land in the north, as evident from the interviews conducted, serves to demystify and humanise the Other, dispelling myths of difference. It comes as a direct challenge to the dialectical demonisation of the Other by individualising an otherwise totalising discourse. At the same time, in the eyes of Greek-Cypriots, the imagined Cypriot community of becomes extended to incorporate Turkish-Cypriots. Meeting the Turkish-Cypriots, noticing the great similarities, seeing and walking the land in the north and the coastline that delineates Cyprus as an island gives the Cypriotist paradigm a visible, tangible core on which to build. Further, the encounter with so many elements of the island's cultural and historical heritage helps to build up the historical element on which a uniquely Cypriot identity can rest.

For older generations of Greek-Cypriots, these occurrences may be nothing new. But for the younger generations, they are somewhat of a revelation. As far as the development of Cypriotism is concerned, they are essential. The shocking effect that these realisations have may even serve to give Cypriotism a much-needed surge. These powerful physical and geographical effects give young Greek-Cypriots something *real*, rather than solely imaginary, on which to build their Cypriot identity.

⁵² Mavratsas, p.178-179

The opening of the Green Line has thus served to strengthen the Cypriotist paradigm by reinforcing a Cypriot sense of identity and belonging, whether consciously or subconsciously, in the multitude of ways that I have described above. This effect, along with the smooth character of the encounter that has followed the opening of the Green Line lends itself to an optimistic outlook, for it indicates that, to a certain extent, the younger populations that may have been separated 'at birth', are not altogether alien.

Appendix 1

Interview Questions

1. Are you a refugee? Are your parents refugees? Do you have any links with the north? Do you own land there?

Participants were encouraged to elaborate on their responses, in order to establish their degree of association with the north and how they felt about it, with reference to ancestral ties, roots, and sense of belonging.

2. Have you visited the north?

3. If not, why not?

Participants were asked to explain their reasoning. The interview then proceeded with question 7.

4. If yes, what urged you to visit the north? Can you please describe your visit in detail?

Participants usually took a few minutes to describe the circumstances under which they visited the north, including details of who accompanied them, where they went, what they saw and why. Any reference to Turkish-Cypriots or Turkish settlers, or the population in the north in general was used as a pretext for further questions.

5. (If yes,) how would you describe your encounter with the population in the north?

Participants were asked to speak both about the encounter in practical terms and about the emotions it might have stirred.

6. (If yes,) how did you feel about everything you saw? What emotions did it stir?

7. Have you encountered any Turkish-Cypriots in Nicosia (south) or anywhere else in southern Cyprus since the Green Line opened?

Participants were encouraged to describe the circumstances and talk about their reactions to these events.

8. Since the opening of the Green Line, has your opinion of Turkish-Cypriots changed at all? If so, how?

9. How has the opening of the Green Line affected you in general?

Participants were encouraged to elaborate in any way they saw fit, be that on a political, social or personal level, and draw on their own discussions of the topic, and views of family and friends.

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