

Southwark Cypriot Forum: Cypriotism

People, countries, cities and, on many occasions, city quarters have their identity. Where people live continuously together they form their own identity. Cypriotness is the identity of the people of Cyprus. It is that amalgam of traits and characteristics that distinguishes the people of Cyprus from other people, including the mainland Turks and Greeks.

There are basically two schools of thought pertaining to identity. The first one refers to a so-called inter temporal cultural system which transcends political realities and is rather the result of deliberate action or choice. The second relates to political systems, has its roots in the 20th century and revolves around the notion of State, rather than cultural background.

It has been argued that the founding of a country should be based on the cultural background and identity of the people. If that were the case, however, the political map of the world would look very different to what it is today and it would not have been possible for countries such as the United States, ^{the Soviet Union,} or Switzerland to exist. Pluralism is to-day the rule rather than the exception.

One may think that Cypriotism has its roots in the creation of the Cyprus State. However, this is not so, as the rudiments of Cypriotism were there long before the formation of the Cyprus State in 1960, and were the result of Cypriots living together, of their interaction, and of the historical process. Of course the formation of the Cyprus State could have helped in the moulding of Cypriotism, but it didn't as Cypriots themselves, more so the Greek Cypriots, with outside encouragement viewed the Cyprus State as a threat to their cultural heritage. Indeed, it is sometimes being incorrectly presented as something opposed to Hellenism or Turkism, and not as a set of characteristics, values and aspirations, common to all the people of Cyprus.

According to the constitution, there are two communities in Cyprus, the Greek and the Turkish. In essence, however, Cypriots are made up of five communities. The Greek and Turkish Cypriots, the Maronites, the Armenians, as well as those forming the

Scanned / Transcribed by
The Socialist Truth in Cyprus – London Bureaux

<http://www.st-cyprus.co.uk/intro.htm>

<http://www.st-cyprus.co.uk/english/home/index.php>



Latin Community ~~whom~~ are basically Catholics or of Western European extraction. The settlers brought from Turkey are not Cypriots.

The presence of these communities in Cyprus is not accidental but it is the outcome of historical development, as is the case with most other countries. It is perhaps interesting to recall that 3,200 years ago the scene in Cyprus was completely different with none of the present communities even remotely visible.

In fact from the year 6,000 B.C. till the 12th century BC, Cyprus was inhabited by Eteocyprians and the appearance of to-day's communities goes back to the year 1200 BC when the native population received and assimilated the Greek culture. Almost two thousand years later Cyprus witnessed the arrival of the Maronites from the nearby Lebanon who fled the country to avoid persecutions. Two centuries earlier on, as a result of a decision made by the Byzantine emperor Mauritius, of armenian extraction, the Armenians arrive in Cyprus. The roots of the Latin community are essentially to be found at the beginning of the frankish period whereas those of the Turkish community are traced in the occupation of Cyprus in 1571. These communities form to-day the Cypriot people.

As a rule, people living in a country share things and acquire common characteristics which distinguish them from people in other countries. Thus the British are distinct from the French and German people, and so are the Swedes from the Danes, and the Dutch from the Belgians. However, this does not seem to be so clear with us Cypriots, where Cypriotism is disputed, downgraded, or purposely ignored. Indeed, it is often argued that Cypriots are nothing more than mere offshoots of Turks and Greeks outside the respective countries, without any distinctive status of their own.

And the question arises: can there be no Cypriots, whereas there can be Dutch and Belgians, Australians and New Zealanders, Argentinians and Chileans?

It is an undeniable fact that the culture of Greek Cypriots is Greek and that of Turkish Cypriots turkish, but is that just so? It is not my intention to ignore the smallest ethnic groups in Cyprus but for simplicity's sake I will only deal with the two basic cultures of the country, around which revolve the basic reasons of the Cyprus Conflict, and where denial of Cypriotism primarily stems from.

We Cypriots were either born in Cyprus or lived sufficiently long in Cyprus to feel and call ourselves Cypriots. As in most countries, however culturally similar or different they may be, the mere cohabitation

in a country creates among its people a great deal of common sharing, even though differences may exist. This sharing forms the "Englishness", the "Frenchness", the "Turkishness", the "Greekness" which may be more or less pure, depending on circumstances. Having said this, I will try to focuss on what ought to be or, rather, is peculiar to Cypriots, Cypriotism.

If anybody were to argue that Cypriots have nothing in common with Turks or Greeks, that would be wrong, unscientific and not supported by facts. Indeed in Cyprus there are two distinct dominant cultures. Save for religion which differs, and, in the case of the armenian Cypriots, the language which is taught and spoken both at school and home, in the Greek culture one could prima facie include the three smaller communities as well.

By the same token it would be wrong to argue that in Cyprus there are Greeks and Turks, just as in Greece and Turkey and that there exist no Cypriots as such.

In a seminar recently organised by Turkish Cypriots in Nicosia, it was argued that people that are behind the same frontier, by definition belong to one and the same nation. I am not inclined to subscribe to this theory which seems to be a simplistic one.

As already mentioned, there are in Cyprus two basic cultures with two different languages and religions. It may well be that religion has never been very important in Cyprus and that it is becoming less and less important. It is also true that in the recent past most turkish cypriots spoke greek or could make themselves understood in greek. The fact remains however, that there are two basic cultures in Cyprus. Not only that, but for quite some time, as far as the greek Cypriot community is concerned, and more so for the last ~~forty~~^{thirty} years or so, as far as the turkish community is concerned, they both tried to maintain and strengthen their links with Greece and Turkey respectively. Thus it is clear to my mind that the argument that those living in Turkey are Turks, those living in Greece Greeks and therefore those living in Cyprus, just Cypriots, is not just so.

On the other hand it would be shortsided and unrealistic to assume that two communities that have lived side by side or rather intermingled in a small country like Cyprus, even under conditions of inequality at times, were unable to create something of their own or were completely untouched by each others presence.

As a result of the policies practiced since the 19th century by the Orthodox Church, which controlled Greek

Cypriot education, as well as the explicit policy for the last forty years or so on the part of Turkey, there was a tendency not only to obscure but also to deny any idea of Cypriotism in Cyprus. What contributed to this notion was the fact that the Greek Cypriot Community pursued for quite sometime a policy of union with Greece, whereas towards the end of the 50s, the Turkish Cypriot community aligned itself behind the slogan of partition. Independence was the outcome of a compromise imposed upon the two communities. Thus all the unifying elements emanating from the State or the country as a historical and geopolitical entity were either down-graded or purposely ignored.

It is perhaps worth mentioning that until this very moment there is still a circular in the files of the Cyprus Ministry of Education whereby teachers are required to teach the History of Cyprus in conjunction with the Greek History.

Having said that, I shall resort to some truisms.

- Despite the present occupation of part of the country, Cyprus is a State on its own with its own institutions.
- Living in Cyprus, undoubtedly implies that we are Cypriots.
- Cypriots are not only the Greek Cypriots but all five communities living in Cyprus.

In our times, people are named after the country they live in. In fact in the modern world it is the state that is dominant and not racial characteristics. That is true of Switzerland, Brazil or Belgium, in spite of the problems encountered by the latter.

Cyprus is probably the country par excellence where people spend so much time and effort on the question of identity, analysing, advancing theories on it and talking of an identity crisis at times. A very good friend of mine who happens to be a Turkish Cypriot argued recently that the people of Cyprus are the only people who want to be called something else than what their country implies they are. He also observed that only those people who feel weak try to identify themselves with something bigger, and wonders why these people feel the need to search so desperately for their identity.

During the Ottoman times, society in Cyprus was based on social class, rather than race and economic relations, and so were rituals and festivities. In spite of the fact that religion is not very developed societies can be a very powerful instrument of unifying

or separating people, It would not be legitimate to assume that this alone, prevented the two communities from getting together or from becoming interested in each other, although it certainly prevented intermarriage. One's roots are important, however, ~~and~~ in the course of history, as well as in every day contacts, changes take place and new realities emerge which are moulded through time and repetition.

This is the case in many countries such as the United States, Central America or Singapore, where there was no deliberate action to prevent the newly created identity from showing. In contrast, in Cyprus the Church in the case of Greek Cypriots and Turkey and part of the Turkish leadership went into pains to disprove the above realities in an effort to serve their own political expediencies.

The Cypriot identity is a three dimensional one, and it is made up of a cultural and a political arm as well as of a third one relating to living space.

Thus unlike Greece and Turkey, Cyprus, upon gaining its independence, allied itself with the non-aligned countries, and developed a different international orientation. Cyprus had also a different development of its Institutions. Indeed since 1191, when Cyprus was detached from Byzantine Hellenism, until to-day, Cypriot Institutions, with the exception of religious and educational ones, were never identified with the greek ones. In fact over a period of 82 years of british rule, Anglosaxon Institutions were introduced and are still in existence. Thus we have in Cyprus a civil service organised on the British pattern, as opposed to ~~the~~ the German organisational one of Greece and Turkey. Moreover unlike Greece, it has a very developed co-operative system and a more liberal political climate, a heritage from the British. Indeed political polarization between Left and Right was never as extreme and it never assumed the form it took in Greece or Turkey.

Independent Statehood also led to economic prosperity which differentiated both cypriot communities from Greece and Turkey, although for various reasons Turkish Cypriots shared less of this prosperity. Nevertheless, inspite of all these differentiations, Cypriot consciousness among Greek Cypriots was never expressed as a political ideology. By contrast it is manifest in Turkish Cypriot politics, gaining momentum in the last couple of years. Attalides observes in his book on Cyprus that "while the international and internal preconditions for the emergence of a Cypriot Consciousness were strongly present, the counsciousness itself, though widespread as individual opinion and though it was incorporated in many actions of the

Government, remained publicly unexpressed on any ideology which was binding on any political group".

Although it is unrealistic to argue that Cypriot culture is devoid of Greek and Turkish elements, it is equally unrealistic to say that Cypriot culture has nothing of its own, and is merely a replica of the Greek and Turkish cultures. Human history is a continuous process of interaction and of transmission of knowledge and experience. This being so, we should try to discover the degree of sharing within the context of Cyprus itself. What is not known perhaps to the average Greek Cypriot is that the majority of the Turkish Cypriots were brought ^{to Cyprus} here by the ruling class at that time, in an effort to impose their presence and consolidate their occupation of the country. As a result they identified themselves with the rest of the people and shared in their every day life. Elements of this sharing are to be found in the language, tradition, dancing, singing, poetry, etc. During the Ottoman times virtually all Greek Cypriots spoke turkish whereas later, when the Greek Cypriot community became the stronger of the two, a good number of Turkish Cypriots learnt greek. To-day in the dialect spoken by the Greek Cypriots there are hundreds of turkish words, whereas in the dialect spoken by the Turkish Cypriots scores of greek words are to be found. In the past, people in mixed villages used to take part in each others festivities and turkish music and singing were adopted by the greek cypriots and vice-versa.

I recently came across a peculiar mixture of greek and turkish poetry, coming from the two extremes of the country, the Karpass peninsula and Paphos which is characteristic of this interaction and reads as follows:

Βασιλιά ψιντρόφυλλη
Gel inciri yeyesin = έλα να φας το σύκον
Τα δικιά βιζιά του κόρφου σου
Şimdi bana veresin = τώρα να μου τα δώσεις

The second variation reads as follows:

Βασιλιά ψιντρόφυλλη
Yaprakları yeşildir = πράσινα είναι τα φύλλα σου
δος μου τζ'εσύ ένα φιλι
Paralarım peşindir = μετρητά είναι τα λεφτά μου

Εχτές, προχτές, αντίπροχτες
Ben duvardan bakardım = από τον τοίχο πέταξα
τζ'έθελα νά'ρω έσσω σου
Anasından korkardım = αλλά φοβόμουν απ'την μάνα σας.

Although with few exceptions, purely cypriot

literature is fairly new, Cypriotism is reflected in the writings of Pavlos Liassides, Azizoğlu, Costas Kleanthous, Yücel Hakki, Costas Graikos, Mehmet Yaşın, İbrahim Aziz Neşe Yaşın and others.

Thus, inspite^{of} their differences the two communities in Cyprus appear to share a lot. The realities of a similar environment and a common recent history under a foreign administration add to those qualities and characteristics that are common to both. As Cypriots living in the same country, we have certain inherent characteristics, which were instrumental in forming a certain mentality. This mentality is the result not only of the distinctive cultural characteristics but also of those which are typical of Cyprus' geographical position in the Middle East, as well as the influences it has been exposed to, during its centuries long history.

Indeed the Cypriot, Turk, Greek, Armenian or Maronite is the "owner" so to speak of the 8,000 year old history of Cyprus. A history which in many cases is not identical to that of Greece or Turkey, a fact that is an attribute of Cypriotism. Elements of Cypriotism are also the natural tendency of the two cypriot communities to identify themselves with and express their loyalty to Cyprus and feel more at ease in Cyprus rather than Greece or Turkey. Cypriotism also encompasses all those Institutions or features of the social environment, including the toponomy as it stood before it was changed. The hills, the beaches, the plains, the cities and the villages of Cyprus, cannot by definition be equally important to Cypriots as to Turks or Greeks. Details of every day life, the coffee shop, the football match the news bulletin and many other not so important perhaps events of every day life, are also part of Cypriotism.

Moreover, part of this Cypriotism was and will be the State that is going to come about as a result of the solution of the Cyprus problem, with all its ramifications.

Comparing the social structure of Cyprus, its traits and the Cypriot temperament and mental attitude, as opposed to that of the Greek and Turk, I find the Cypriot less cunning and more naïve, being at the same time more straight forward and fair. Moreover the Cypriot in his everyday life is less talkative, easy going, unpretentious, free of tension and ridiculously tolerant.

Talking on a social level, Cyprus has a bigger middle class than Turkey or Greece, a more even distribution of income, inspite of differences between the two Cypriot communities. Unlike Greece, Cyprus lacks

compared to both countries

completely a maritime tradition and has a relatively smaller class of business tycoons. Moreover, in spite of its island configuration, it has more exposure abroad. Also, the Cypriot is more receptive to influences from outside and as a result of the small size of the Country, differences between the countryside and the cities are much less pronounced than in Greece or Turkey.

Compared to the Greeks or Turks, Cypriots are less religious and certainly not devout. However, they are a lot more sentimental and except in business matters not very pragmatic. More so when it comes to politics.. Finally as far as the Greek Cypriot goes, the well known "individualism" of the Greeks was tempered in Cyprus by the imposition by the British of certain norms of co-operation and "citizenship".

Having accepted the cultural links of Cypriots to Greece and Turkey, I have tried to delve into the Cypriot style of behaviour and personality in an effort to shed some light on cypriotism, a pursuit that cypriots have been prevented from exploring and structuring.

Having said all that, the fact remains that the two communities do have cultural and other differences. However, Cypriotism does exist, Kibrislilik vardır, bir olgudur, ο Κυπριωτισμός υπάρχει..

Instead of over emphasizing however our differences and minimizing and downgrading the things we have in common, we should try to build on the things we share, trying to minimize our differences, some of which may never disappear. This is what pluralism implies and unlike what extremists on both sides used to proclaim, Cyprus is a pluralistic society belonging to its people. On the contrary adherence to the slogan of "Greek" or "Turk", one is creating the prerequisites for taksim or double enosis.

I will end up my exposition with some scattered thoughts as to what should be done in order to safeguard the future of Cyprus.

At the outset, we should gear our loyalty first and foremost toward Cyprus, our mother land. Without ignoring them, try not to stress those characteristics that divide the Cypriots, basically cultural, and try to emphasize those traits which are common to both communities, i.e. those relating to the country itself and hopefully soon to the State.

Maintain the Cypriot identity as something instinctive. The opposite would not be conducive to living under a federal umbrella, and the chance of a viable and

~~federal umbrella, and the chance of a visible and~~
lasting solution of our problem would be pretty slim if
non-existent. We should accept that our roots, are
essentially Greek or Turkish but must not deny our
Cypriotism, which is the result of living in ~~this~~ Cyprus
Country for centuries. Because of the analogies, 50
million Turks versus 100,000 Turkish Cypriots who are
not really self governed, vis a vis 10 million Greeks
versus 0.5 million Greek Cypriots who are self-
governed and economically strong, it is the Turkish
Cypriotism of Cyprus rather than the Greek that is more
at stake. Thus I can see the agony and the struggle of
our Turkish Cypriot compatriots to safeguard this and
feel the need to congratulate them for their
advanced and bold positions on the matter. At the same
time I have to admit that the notion of Cypriot
consciousness is almost taboo amongst Greek Cypriots
and those who dare touch it are earning the wrath of
the Establishment and certainly of the old if not of
all Intellectuals.

y Like Kemal Aktunc said in a recent speech of his, "the
struggle for the survival of a Greek and Turkish
Cypriot identity is the struggle for an independent
federal Cyprus. Notwithstanding their differences in
their identity they must hand in hand give the battle
for Cyprus, their common country and mother land".

The opposite, that is to say integration of the Greek
Cypriot community into Greece and of the Turkish
Cypriot community into Turkey implies nothing less than
partition and the elimination of Cyprus as a political
entity. I myself, am not prepared to accept it and I
hope you are not either.

We should try to rid ourselves of prejudices and
various syndromes that we have been plagued with for
ages. Unless we see each other face to face and accept
one another our future is bleak. Moreover, we should
try to create confidence and understand each other's
fears and insecurities, with a view to reaching a
settlement which is to the interest of Cyprus. It is
my contention that as time goes by, the solution of the
Cyprus problem more and more slips out of our own hands
and more and more gets entangled in other interests,
alien to the interests of Cyprus. It would be naive to
argue that the Cyprus problem is the result of our
mistakes, of the mistakes of Greek and Turkish
Cypriots alone, and that international politics has no
involvement whatsoever. In fact our mistakes and
short-sightedness have created many interested parties
instead of one party - us Cypriots - . The longer we
cannot come to grips with the Cyprus problem the more
we reduce our chances to reach an agreement which will
be fair for the people of Cyprus. Time is working
against both communities because it allows others to

have a stake as interested parties.

We should now gear our efforts not so much on the extent of the territory of Cyprus each community is going to control, but rather on how we will be able to come up with a really sovereign, independent federal state with no armies whatsoever and visible or invisible strings.

We should also try to rid the educational system of all chauvinistic overtones and the enmity and hostility that prevailed and poisoned the relations of Turkey and Greece for centuries. Moreover, Cyprus should have its own educational system which will neither rely on Islam nor on what is called grecochristian ideals but rather rely on worldwide humanistic ideals, such that will not only lead to the badly needed wound-healing between the two communities, but that will also enable the country to find its place in an ever changing and evolving world. More important, Cyprus should introduce a new educational system which will cater to its own social economic and political needs and will prepare the right and proper Cypriot citizen. Although it may sound utopian, it is my belief that the two communities should have one and the same educational system from the elementary school right through to the university.

Cyprus had more than its fair share of conquest blood and misfortune through the ages and our own generation had more than its fair share of misery, intolerance and insecurity. It is about time that we concentrate on the building up of confidence and understanding and of a peaceful and creative future for all Cypriots.

Much as I treasure Nese Yaşın's beautiful verses, I do not want ever to be faced with the dilemma, which of the two parts of my country to love..

"η δική μου η πατρίδα έχει μοιραστεί στα δύο
ποτά από τα δύο κομμάτια ποέσει ν' αγαπώ

.....
Benim yurdum ikiye bölünmüş ortasından
Hangi yarısını sevmeli insan?

Thank you