Postcolonial Communication: Mediating Cyprus Partition

Maria Avraamidou

Research Fellow

PhD Candidate

Department of Communication and Internet Studies

Cyprus University of Technology

maria.avraamidou@cut.ac.cy

mariaavraamidou@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT: The paper examines the representations of editorials published in the Greek Cypriot press during the negotiations (November 2002 to April 2004) over a UN plan, the Anan Plan aiming in principle to reunite ethnically divided Cyprus under a federation. The paper focuses on how the press was calling the Greek Cypriots to imagine their national community mainly through examining how the ‘Us’ and ‘Others’ paradigm worked and how history and the state were represented. Based on preliminary findings it will be argued that, Cypriotness has taken new forms and that the 2002 to 2004 period played a crucial role in these transformations. It will also be argued that to approach contemporary forms and reproductions of nationalism in the context of Cyprus one needs to go beyond the hellenocentric/cyprocentrism antagonism and examine whether and how ‘others’ are excluded. Due to the routinization of the negotiation process nationalism is “embedded in routines of life” including the media therefore one needs not to look for fierce forms of nationalism but investigate how it has come to be naturalized and how it functions in a way that secures ‘how things must stay forever’. The holistic approaches and the historicity of postcolonialism ensure that media centeredness and ‘textualization’ are avoided. In this regard, the qualitative analysis of the press ‘texts’ is informed by the international/local context within which the negotiations took place and approaches the media as institutions mediating and also constructing reality.
Introduction

The main aim of my presentation is to offer some preliminary empirical results of the qualitative analysis of editorials of all the daily newspapers in Greek language, published between 2002 and 2004 in Cyprus. The study approaches the media as institutions which produce consensus and manufacture consent (Hall 1982). The period of concern includes the negotiations and the two referendums over a UN settlement plan, the Annan plan (the plan) aiming in principle to reunite ethnically divided Cyprus under a federation. The vast majority of Greek Cypriots rejected the plan (73, 58%), whereas the Turkish Cypriots accepted it (64, 91%). The debates over the plan represent a unique example of how after 1960 ‘intensification of interethnic conflict was fuelled by the domestic elites of both communities intent on perpetuating and/or assuming power and by the interests of foreign powers’ (Polis 1996:82). Almost, ten years after, Cyprus remains divided along ethnic lines whereas the role of the media in the conflict remains understudied. Notably, available literature, discusses how ‘the institutions relying on the print medium’ acted as a ‘prototype of the subsequent geographical separation of the two communities’ (Panayiotou 2006: 10) and that ‘newspapers may have contributed to the consolidation of ethnic differences’ (Christophorou 2010: 4) strengthening ‘nationalisms and fear of each other’ (Bailie & Azgın cited in Way 2010: 30). The paper focuses on how the press was calling the Greek Cypriots to imagine their national community mainly through elaborating how the ‘Us’ and ‘Others’ paradigm worked and how history and the state were represented.

Cyprocentrism Vs Hellenocentrism: Some general introductory reflections

‘What are you?’/Ti Eisai? is a question I rarely wanted to answer from the day I remember my self as a primary student in Cyprus. It felt like signing an oral conscience certificate: By replying that I was Greek Cypriot or Cypriot I would be presumed to being a left-winger. If I responded that I was Greek, I would be presumed a right-winger. The unofficial conscience certificate I talk about represents an aspect of what is identified as the struggle between hellenocentrism and cyprocentrism. In particular, it is argued that two antagonistic forms of nationalism developed within Greek Cypriots, the territorial/ civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism (Peristianis 2006: 105). In broad terms, territorial/ civic nationalism or cyprocentrism is identified with the state, whereas ethnic nationalism or hellenocentrism emphasizes the Greekness of the Greek Cypriots (Peristianis 2006; Vriikki 2005). Mavratsas also argued that Cypriotism ‘has largely developed in explicit opposition to Greek nationalism’ (1997: 722). To support any side would mean risking ‘of being identified with extreme positions and being accused of betraying the ethnos (antihellenism) or the state (anticypriotism)” (Peristianis 2006: 115). Arguably, cypriotism was also developed as a result of an understanding of Cyprus as a place where different communities coexisted (Panayiotou 2011; Papadopoulos 1964). Personally, I avoided as much as I could avoid, what I considered being a banal identity debate. Then why now return to identity politics? Is it because identity remains the ‘watchword of the times’ (Shotter cited in Billig 1995: 60)? Neither cyprocentrism nor hellenocentrism is static, and in the present day the answer to the above mentioned banal/ hot question is not interpreted in the same manner. Cypriotism has taken new forms and –as I will be arguing- the 2002 to 2004 period played a crucial role in these transformations. In relation to the Turkish Cypriots, it is argued that the rejection of the plan by the Greek Cypriots led to an increasing tendency ‘to express identity in terms of a separate Turkish Cypriotness’ (Ramm 2006 cited in Sahin 2010).
Loizides argues that in 2004, the Greek Cypriot President and his allies who rejected the plan won the battle of identity framing forming a Greek Cypriot nationalism ‘driven by isolationism and lack of trust for the international community’ (2007: 184). Panayiotou argued that Papadopoulos’ political opponents were also using cypriotness, but their cypriotness was related to the ‘unity of the space and internal pluralism’ (2011). At the end of Presidents’ Papadopoulos speech calling for a strong rejection of the plan, individuals celebrated ‘waving Cypriot flags, appropriating those as a symbol of Greek Cypriot identity and resistance to the foreign plots’ (Loizides 2007: 184). The leftist’s party General Secretary, presenting the decision to reject the plan, noted how those who used to consider the flying of the Cyprus flag a betrayal were now fortifying their nationalism behind it (Christofias, April 2004). In the past, former Greek Cypriot president, Clerides argued referring to the Cyprus flag that “no one would die for it” (Stearns cited in Loizides 2007:173).

These are only little evidence arguing that the hellenocentric/cyprocentric antagonism needs to be reappraised in light of the 2002 to 2004 era. In order to approach their contemporary form(s) one needs to go beyond whether they emphasize the state or the ethnos. By contrast, we need to investigate whether and under what requirements they include or exclude others but also whether this ‘imagining’ (Anderson 2006) leads to a reproduction of social-relations as merely ethnic ones (Miles 1989 cited in Kyriakides and Torres 2012).

Flagging Us and the Others

Billig is concerned with the banal reproduction of nationalism in the established nations (1995), however, there is a real contribution that his concept can make in studying nationalism and the media in postcolonial Cyprus1. The routinization of the negotiation process allowed nationalism to embed the routines of life, including the media. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into details regarding the long-lasting negotiations; suffice to note that since the de facto partition of Cyprus in 1974 to 2002 that the plan was presented, there were sequential rounds of negotiations—and stalemates- without reaching a settlement. The negotiations were taking place in a relatively calm environment despite the high militarization of both territories [north and south] and despite ruptures which threatened the ceasefire situation. This routinization, as Billig would argue lead to ‘thoughts, reactions and symbols become turned into routine habits and, thus, they [became] inhabited: It has always being ‘our’ will for a solution versus their non-will; ‘our’ nationalism was forgotten or justified, whereas ‘their’ nationalism was irrational and aggressive (Ibid.: 38). Phrases that were frequently repeated by politicians, teachers, journalists like ‘return of all the refugees [to their occupied houses], ‘our borders are at the coastline of Kyrenia’, ‘our borders are at the coastline of Kyrenia”, “No solution unless the last refugee goes to his/ her house” “These and all others he cried up (he even promised to impech the high level Agreements of ’77),

---

1 The concept of ‘banal nationalism’ is not used uncritically but in awareness that also this form of nationalism can be contested by individuals. Madianou has encountered for example, how Greek viewers, contested the banal nationalism of Greek TV channels (2005: 103).

2 The translation of the editorials from Greek to English is mine.
what were they? Where they lie? Were they misleading and deceptive?

Let us present some more examples from the editorials of the Us and the Other paradigm: It is Us who will need to ‘struggle hard […] to reach a fair and under the circumstances, a workable and viable solution’ (Alithia, 17 November 2002). It is Us who are called to say the big “yes” or the big “no” (Haravgi, 17 November 2002). It is our side which is fragile and vulnerable but which bears a historic responsibility (Fileleftheros, 17 November 2002) and it is Us who ‘for 40 years, we turn to the United Nations to find our rights’ (Simerini, February 15, 2004).

All editorials studied to greater or lesser extend use the term Cypriots or people/ laos to mean Greek Cypriots. For example Fileleftheros argues that, ‘even the last Cypriot’ recognizes Hellas’ [sic.] contribution to Cyprus EU access (Fileleftheros, 15 December 2002). This is somehow different from the findings of Papadakis’ on history books which ‘employ the term Cypriots (Kyprioi) as equivalent to Greeks’ (2008:7). The editorials seem to bend towards a more Cypriot-centric approach but still in an exclusive manner. The inclusion of Turkish Cypriots is explicitly done through references such as ‘the Cypriot people as a whole’ (Simerini 23 February, 2004), otherwise their presence is stimulated through their absence.

History and the State: Cyprocentric Codes and Greek fixity

Mavratsas argued that Cyprus historiography is ‘highly ideologized, with both the ethnonationalists and the Cypriotists utilizing arbitrary and selective strategies of historical interpretation’ as they are ‘perfectly aware that ideological hegemony over the present requires an appropriation of the past’ (1997:731). Papadakis has showed how history taught at Greek Cypriot schools is hellenocentric and is utilized ‘to propagate a narrative focusing on the ‘suffering of the nation and to legitimate its political goals’ (2008:1). The editorials confirm how selective historical narratives are used to underpin political choices. However, there is a shift in terms of which history is utilized. I Simerini (February 15, 2004), calls the Greek Cypriots to reject the plan based on the last 50 years of Cyprus history:

The people, however, and their real life do not go into diplomatic folders. This is what the history of all people says, especially the Cypriot history of the last 50 years...

Mahi, just before the referendums urged the Greek Cypriots to reject the plan based on a more prolonged history. The title of the editorial reads: “9000 years of history are staring at you” (17 April, 2004). The last fifty years are connected with the history of the Cyprus Republic whereas the 9000 years emphasize the ‘ethnos’ but they are not necessarily in contradiction as the aim of both is the rejection of plan. With Simerini’s editorial a version of the contemporary Cypriot history takes its place in the public sphere in a celebrated manner, though delayed. Why is this a shift? As discussed, the focus over Cypriotness instead of Greekness was considered anti-national. Notably, the shift concerns the use of Cypriotness in the public sphere and not the existence of a Cypriot conscious\(^3\).

---

\(^3\) Panayiotou has elaborated on the development of a Cypriot consciousness despite the hegemony of Greek and Turkish nationalism.
In another editorial, Simerini explicitly refers to three events of the last 50 years: the so-called Turkish mutiny/tourkoantarsya, the July 1974 Greek Hunta-instigated coup against the Greek Cypriot President and the Turkish invasion/occupation (28 March 2004): The Annan Plan leads to the dissolution of the Republic of Cyprus that withstood the Turkish mutiny the coup and the Turkish invasion and occupation.

These events, for Simerini challenged the existence of the state and the plan is their current equivalent. The use of the term ‘tourkoantarsia’ meaning Turkish mutiny is indicative as it is usually used to describe the 1963 intercommunal violence as an outcome of mainly Turkish Cypriots actions. Simerini’s (Ibid.) reference to history despite being Cypriot-centric, it still excludes the Turkish Cypriots. Mahi (17 April, 2004) adopts a premordial understanding of nations:

The Greek of Cyprus [first person singular] is not a nomad in this land. He did not come as a conqueror and grabber. He was here from the beginning of time and space. Therefore he has a "timeless historical consciousness." He feels 9,000 years of history staring at him!

There is no need to clearly identify who the others are; it is enough to note that they came as ‘occupants’, contrary to us, the Greeks of Cyprus who have been here eternally. However, the same editorial also uses Cypro-centric codes when glorifying Cypriots for resisting American pro-solution plots.

Alithia argued that the rejection of the plan by the Greek Cypriots would lead to the recognition of the ‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus’ (29 February, 2004). Simerini, consistently argued that the plan would lead to the dissolution of the State and presented the state as ‘the only weapon and rampart of an international struggle’. This coincides with President’s Papadopoulos statement, “I received a state internationally recognized and I will not deliver a community” (Tassos Papadopoulos, April 2004). By contrast, the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (‘TRNC’) was an ‘illegal regime’ (Alithia, 15 December 2002) which had to be obsolete. In the left wing rhetoric, the existence of two states cannot be tolerated also on the grounds of universalism: “I do not know if there is a leftist or progressive human who will accept the elevation of an apartheid wall that separates Christians and Muslims into two purely religious zones as Denktash claims” (Haravgi, 29 February 2004). The editorials are reproducing ‘the predominant discourses of state-government recognition’ (Constantinou and Papadakis, 2001) which ‘produce essentialist and totalizing visions of the other’ seeking as in the past ‘to demonise, marginalize’ them (Ibid.: 133)

‘The Republic of Cyprus, namely the Greeks and Turks of Cyprus’, says Simerini stressing the bicommmunality of the state (28 March, 2004). In principle there can be no Republic of Cyprus, without the Turks but in practice, for around 50 years the state functions, internally and externally without the Turkish Cypriots. The versions of history used, exterminate further the sincerity of the argument of a bicommmunal state. The state that was once characterized as a ‘strange mixture of a protectorate, condominium, and independent statehood’ (Constantinou and Papadakis 2001:127) was about to prove that it was more independent than a protectorate as Greek Cypriots were to reject a plan against the will of the international community. “The only weapon of Greek Cypriots against Turkey’s might”, the international recognition of the Republic of Cyprus (Peristianis, 2006:104) was now used
against an unwanted settlement. The argument for an eventual dissolution of the state was not only drawn in legalistic lines. Statehood represented a proof that the locals could be successfully self-rulled and it had offered – until that time- to Greek Cypriots, economic prosperity –despite its postcoloniality.

Beyond the Us/Other framework: Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots as the ‘other’?

The preliminary findings suggest that emphasis on the state and on a certain view of history naturalized further the division between Us and Them. Reference to Turkish Cypriots’ rights, as Barthes would argue, is not an alibi of Greek Cypriot’s [past and current] attitude towards their ‘other’ but the ‘very presence’ of such attitude (1972). The myth for the Greek Cypriot reader ‘is a story once true and unreal’ (Ibid.: 127). Suffice to note at this stage that the repetitions for a ‘viable and functional solution that will safeguard the interests of Greek and Turkish Cypriots’ (Mahi, 15 December 2002) are associated with past demands in relation to the conflict and their repetition in this context maintains the framework of Us and the Others. In addition, another absent-present category emerges along with the Turkish Cypriots, that is the Greek Cypriots and it refers to how the press represented the Greek Cypriots. For example, the editorials appear to reproduce the Cyprus issue as a responsibility of the elites:

[The people] left to the leadership the responsibility and the responsibilities to fulfill its promises and its declarations [in relation to the Cyprus Issue] (Mahi 17 November, 2002)

This reproduction is indicative not only of the presumed role of the people but also of how they must stay forever (Hall 1982). In April 2003 however, the masses of Cypriots queuing to cross from one side to the other of the partition line for the first time after 30 years were setting the limits of the public discourse, threatening to become the ‘gatekeepers’. This will be the focus of later research.

---

4 The Republic of Cyprus regardless of a solution to the Cyprus issue was also to become a member of the European Union some weeks after the April 2004 referendums. In other parts of this study the use of the EU prospect by the editorials in question is studied.

5 Attalides notes how before 1974 there was an economic prosperity which made Cypriots see Statehood – despite being contested- in a ‘sympathetic light’ (1979:59)

6 Demetriou has shown how the opening of the crossing points was presented in the overall understanding of the Cyprus issue as static and for which no surprises should be expected (Demetriou 2007).
Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Dr Olga Demetriou for her valuable comments on earlier versions of this paper which discreetly ‘pushed’ me to think more on the complexity of the issues of concern. Also, my gratitude goes to my advisor Dr Vicky Tringa whose assistance has been enormous particularly in refining the methodology of the analysis presented herein. Certainly, my great gratitude goes to my PhD supervisor, Dr Christopher Kyriakides whose intellectual influence is to be found in every word of this paper. Last, I would like to acknowledge. This work falls under the Cyprus Research Promotion Foundations Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Innovation 2009-2010 (DESMI 2009-2010), co-funded by the Republic of Cyprus and the European Regional Development Fund, and specifically under Grant PENEK/0311/10. More on the project, its funders and other contributors can be found here: http://postcolonialcommunication.blogspot.com/
References


