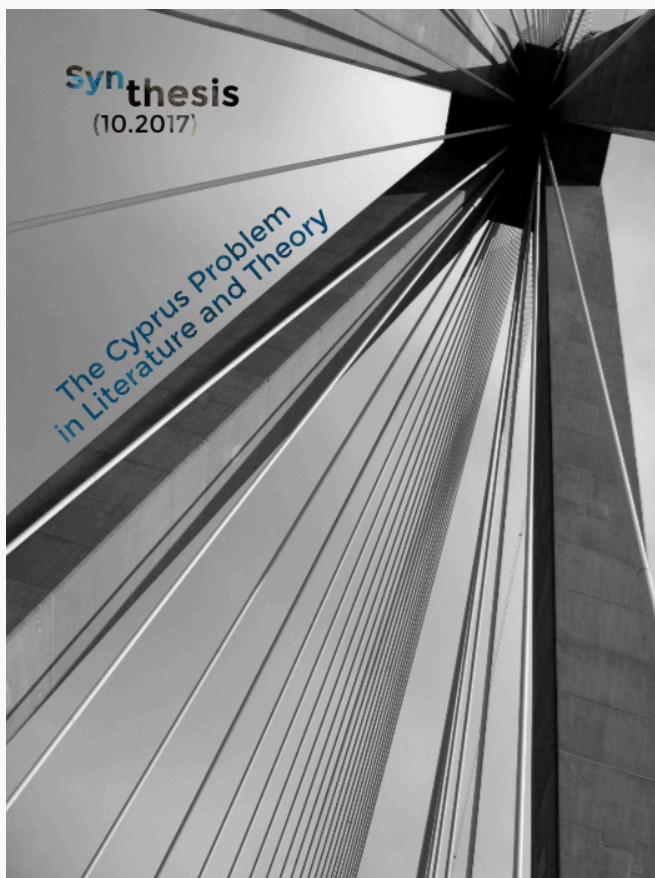


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Turkish Cypriot identity after 1974: Turkish Cypriots, Turks of Cyprus or Cypriots?

Ioannis Moutsis

Abstract

The hopes created by the unexpected triumph of Mustafa Akıncı in the Turkish Cypriot parliamentary elections in 2015 opened once again the debate about Turkish Cypriot identity. Despite the various works on the issue since the opening of the borders in 2003, the issue of identity in the Turkish Cypriot community still remains under-researched. The hope of the Turkish Cypriots for reunification and an end to political isolation was replaced by skepticism after the rejection of the 2004 Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriots in a national referendum. Nevertheless the election of Mustafa Akıncı with an overwhelming sixty percent proves that the Turkish Cypriots should not be considered as loyal to the AKP-controlled Turkish political order as perhaps they were once thought to be. This article will attempt to examine the various aspects of Turkish Cypriot identity, as this has been formed by the Cyprus issue, their fifty-year-long isolation and the hope for an end of the present status quo that will open a window to the outside world forty-one years after the 1974 war and eleven years after the Annan Plan referenda.

Until recently Greek Cypriot historiography and to a certain extent international historiography too often neglected the Turkish Cypriot community when dealing with the history and politics of Cyprus. This was especially true in the case of Greek Cypriot scholars, who, when referring to Cyprus, usually meant the Greek Cypriot community. Since the opening of the borders in 2003 and the Annan Plan referenda in 2004, the Turkish Cypriot community have attracted the interest of academics and journalists in an attempt to explain and analyse the structure of the community that has lived in Cyprus for centuries but has not been researched in detail due to political and ideological reasons.¹ While Greek Cypriot scholars are expected to write extensively about their own community, international scholars also ignored the Turkish Cypriots for reasons that include their marginalisation until the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960 and the relatively small size of the community. In order to better understand the evolution of communal identity, this paper will look at the transition from the Ottoman era to the British

colonial period. Furthermore, the paper will look at the relations between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots in order to demonstrate how elements of Turkish Cypriot identity evolved in relation to, and as a reaction to, the Greek Cypriot aspiration for *enosis* with Greece.²

The Ottoman legacy and the British Colonial administration

After the Ottoman–Venetian war of 1570–1573 that ended with the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus in 1571 and the a peace treaty of 1573 that made Cyprus an Ottoman province, until 1878, when Cyprus was ceded to Britain, the Turkish Cypriots were the *millet-i hakime*, the dominant element.³ It is estimated that about 8000 families from Anatolia were settled in Cyprus and were given fiefs (Gazioğlu 78). There are no references to mass Islamisation although some Greek Cypriots converted to Islam for tax purposes. Following the pattern of the *millet* system as it was implemented in other Ottoman provinces, the Orthodox church was granted significant autonomy and the archbishop of Cyprus was recognized as the *millet başı*, the head of the Christian Orthodox population of the island. The administration and the army were reserved for the Turkish Cypriots but many Turkish Cypriots were farmers and craftsmen. The Greek Cypriot elite were engaged in trade although wealthy Greek Cypriots were also landowners. The relations between the two communities were mostly positive throughout the three hundred years of Ottoman rule, but there were occasional uprisings recorded, mainly due to financial issues such as heavy taxation.⁴ When the Greek revolution erupted in the Balkans, the Greek Cypriots revolted too but the rebellion was suppressed by the Ottoman forces.

During the Ottoman rule the wealth of the Turkish Cypriot community was safeguarded through the *evkâf* system, the Muslim religious endowments that controlled the agricultural lands and immovable property and funded communal institutions such as hospitals, poor-houses, schools, mosques and baths.⁵ The Turkish Cypriots amounted to between twenty and forty percent of the total population of the island throughout this period, but the Ottoman presence secured the privileges of the Turkish Cypriot population. As far as bicomunal relations were concerned, Turkish Cypriots coexisted with Greek Cypriots and in many cases, due to the greater number of Greek Cypriots, Greek was the *lingua franca*. Intermarriages were limited and, after the establishment of the Greek kingdom, the spread of Greek nationalism led to the gradual alienation of the two communities.

It should be stated that Turkish nationalism in Cyprus emerged later, as it did in other Ottoman provinces, due to the dominant position of Muslims in the Empire.

The advent of British rule in 1878 altered the balance of power against the Turkish Cypriots. Although the British administration was neutral and did not favour any of the two communities, the end of the Ottoman presence meant that the Turkish Cypriots had to compete with the Greek Cypriots for administrative positions and positions of power. With the end of Ottoman rule, though, the Turkish Cypriots found themselves in a disadvantageous position for two reasons: firstly, the Greek Cypriots constituted the majority of the population and secondly the Turkish Cypriots lacked the resources and leadership that would enable them to respond to Greek Cypriot demands for autonomy. Soon after the launch of British rule, the Turkish Cypriots were obliged to defend their position and privileges in what they considered to be a hostile environment. The British introduced a system of political representation, the Legislative Council. It was presided over by the British governor of the island and comprised twelve elected and six appointed members. Nine of the elected members were “non Mohammedan” and three were “Mohammedan.” The three Turkish Cypriot members voted almost always with the six appointed members hence blocking all Greek Cypriot proposals. To avoid a stalemate the governor's vote was necessary. In this way, the legislative council divided Greek and Turkish Cypriot elites from the early stages of British rule.

As far as the relations between Turkish Cypriots and the colonial government were concerned, the decision of the British to bring Muslim religious endowments under state control caused resentment in the Turkish Cypriot community because it curtailed the autonomy of the community, but more importantly because it was considered a direct intervention in their communal affairs. Controversial though this was, the British policy was tolerated by Turkish Cypriots because the preservation of good relations with the government was of utmost importance in the community's struggle to answer Greek Cypriot demands for *enosis*. The decision to side with the colonial government was a consequence of another factor that also played an important role in the late emergence of Turkish nationalism on the island: the lack of a dynamic, entrepreneurial elite that could lead the Turkish Cypriots and respond to Greek Cypriot demands.

The gradual collapse of the Ottoman Empire caused concern for the Turkish Cypriots, especially as Anatolia endured multiple military occupations after the end of the First World War. During the inter-war period various Turkish Cypriots

voiced their concern about the community's lack of progress in trade and education, outlining the community's need for modernisation in order to compete with the Greek Cypriot community (An, 79). The transition from an Ottoman-Muslim identity to an ethnic, secular Turkish identity in the 1920s was accelerated by the fear of the Greek Cypriot plans for *enosis*. After the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the notion of Turkishness, as this was envisioned by the Kemalist regime, became popular among Turkish Cypriots and Turkish national identity was consolidated. The rise of Greek and Turkish nationalism on the island hindered the development of *Cypriotness*, a joint Cypriot identity, as both Greek and Turkish Cypriot students were educated in schools that were ran according to the curricula of the Greek and Turkish ministry of education.⁶ Towards the end of the 1920s, though, the rise of Turkish nationalism caused a short but fierce debate in the Turkish Cypriot elite. The new, pro-Kemalist elite questioned the predominance of the old guard, the *İngilizci*, or pro-English as they were called, due to their affiliation with the colonial government. The policy of the old elite to side with the colonial government in order to safeguard Turkish Cypriot rights against Greek Cypriot demands was questioned by the Kemalists, who claimed that government intervention did not necessarily respect Turkish Cypriot interests. For Turkish Cypriots, Kemal Atatürk represented the hope of a brighter future after decades of the Ottoman state's disintegration. Despite the fact that Cyprus was not included in *misak-i milli*, the national pact that determined which provinces of the Ottoman Empire were to be included in the future Turkish state, the Turkish Cypriots saw in Kemal Atatürk a leader who would unite all Turks and support them in their struggle for survival. This explains the rapid and smooth implementation of Kemalist reforms in Cyprus. Unlike other Turkish communities that remained outside the borders of the Turkish state, opponents of the Kemalist regime did not settle in Cyprus and hence their influence on Turkish Cypriots was limited.

It is worth mentioning that from the beginning of British rule, and especially after Cyprus was declared a crown colony in 1925, the Turkish Cypriot elite, regardless of political affiliation, rejected the minority status of their community and demanded to be treated as a distinct community instead. The disadvantageous position of the community vis-à-vis the wealthier and more politically active Greek Cypriots was discussed extensively in the Turkish Cypriot press of the time.⁷ For example, in an article published in the weekly *Ankebut* (*Spider*) under the title

“Sloth in commerce is the reason for the collapse,” the author expressed his worries in the following words:

After it has been determined that the Turkish Cypriot community lives in poverty because of not engaging with trade, and that poverty causes political casualties, the Turkish youth stays away from enterprising, understanding that after a short period they are not going to be successful, so they show laziness and they abandon their jobs (my translation).⁸

Similar worries were expressed regarding education. When in 1920 it became known that a Greek Cypriot middle school was going to open in Famagusta, the chief editor of *Doğru Yol (True Path)* expressed his concerns about the condition of Turkish education: “Against the interest that our Christian fellow citizens show in education, the insufficiency and the miserable conditions of our schools is a sign of our ignorance.”⁹

After the end of the Second World War, the further radicalisation of Greek Cypriot nationalism provoked a reaction from Turkish Cypriots. Towards the end of the 1940s, the first Turkish Cypriot party, KATAK (*Kıbrıs Adası Türk Azınlık Kurumu*, The Turkish Minority Association of the Island of Cyprus) was formed, led by Fazıl Küçük, a young doctor who later became vice president in the first government of an independent Cyprus. When Greek Cypriot EOKA (Εθνική Οργάνωσις Κυπρίων Αγωνιστών, The National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters) started a guerilla war against the British in 1955, the Turkish Cypriots formed TMT (*Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı*, Turkish Resistance Organisation). The Turkish Cypriots regarded the *enosis* movement as a threat to their existence on the island. The memory of those Turks who had to flee Crete after it was incorporated into Greece in 1913 was alarming for the Turkish Cypriots. Turkey responded to *enosis* with the political ideology of *taksim* (partition). Since the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, no Turkish government had laid any claims in regard to the future of the island. The Turkish government of Adnan Menderes orchestrated a pogrom against the Greek minority of Istanbul as a means of pressure against the Greek government on the Cyprus issue. The prospect of Cyprus coming under Greek control awoke the *Sèvres syndrome* in Turkey.¹⁰ The EOKA struggle was not directed against Turkish Cypriots, at least in its early stages. Therefore, we cannot be sure about the popularity of the idea of partition among the Turkish Cypriots. As Greek and Turkish nationalisms dominated the public agenda, the voices that called for a peaceful settlement were neglected and that led to the escalation of violence. From 1958 onwards the five major Cypriot cities obtained separate

municipal councils in order for the Turkish Cypriot communities to safeguard their autonomy. The London-Zurich agreements that established the Republic of Cyprus in 1960 were the product of a long and difficult process of negotiation between the British, Greek and Turkish governments, yet even before the island gained its independence the Greek Cypriots complained that Turkish Cypriot representation in the Republic of Cyprus was disproportionately high given that, as a minority of eighteen percent of the population, they controlled thirty percent of the state apparatus and forty percent of the police force. From the Turkish Cypriot perspective these provisions were necessary in order to safeguard the rights of the community against the Greek Cypriot majority's aspirations to unite the island with Greece.

The reluctant acceptance by both communities of a solution neither had fought for nor desired undermined the fate of the young state. The intercommunal violence during the EOKA struggle created mutual suspicion. Some Greek Cypriots, on the one hand, resented the privileges granted to the Turkish Cypriots by the constitution and did not embrace independence. Instead, they considered the 1960 agreements a betrayal of the *enosis* ideal and the Turkish Cypriots an obstacle to the realisation of this goal. The Turkish Cypriots, on the other hand, considered these privileges their only defence. The republic was also considered by many Turkish Cypriots a compromise, given the campaign for partition of the island. When intercommunal violence erupted again in 1963-1964, as the president of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios, proceeded to a unilateral amendment of the constitution in order to curtail Turkish Cypriot autonomy, the Turkish Cypriots withdrew from the administration. To protect themselves from the attacks of EOKA B, a Greek Cypriot guerilla group that aimed to dismantle the republic and unite the island with Greece, many Turkish Cypriots left their houses and settled in enclaves across the island that were under the armed protection of TMT. During this period, many Turkish Cypriots lived a life of fear and deprivation. The years from the eruption of violence in 1963-1964 until Turkish military intervention in 1974 occupy a central point in the Turkish Cypriot collective memory. It is described as a time of suffering, martyrdom and a lack of support from the international community and even Turkey itself, with all of these contributing to a feeling of abandonment and isolation. At the same time, a common Turkish Cypriot identity was constructed and consolidated during this period of life in the enclaves as many Turkish Cypriots from different areas and backgrounds were thrown together. Under these circumstances, pro-solution voices were silenced and the

often violent suppression of opposition to TMT was tolerated. At the same time, Greek Cypriot intransigence, fueled by the fact that they now controlled almost the whole island, exacerbated Turkish Cypriot isolation.

The Turkish military intervention on the 20 July 1974, five days after the unsuccessful attempt of the Greek military regime to overthrow President Makarios, is a decisive point in Cypriot history. For the Turkish Cypriots, the Turkish military intervention was popularly thought of as a long overdue peace operation that saved them from Greek Cypriot aggression and ended a decade of hardship and isolation. The segregation of the two communities in ethnically homogeneous areas was considered the only solution that would put an end to violence and provide for the Turkish Cypriots both self-determination and the safety of which they had been deprived for more than ten years. In this framework, there was no space for understanding the suffering of Greek Cypriots. Within a few months of the Turkish intervention about 65000 Turkish Cypriots were moved to northern Cyprus, which had been cleansed of its Greek Cypriot population.

1974 and afterwards: Coping with new realities

The Turkish military intervention provided a “homeland” in the north of Cyprus for Turkish Cypriots. In the following years almost all the Turkish Cypriots who had remained in Greek Cypriot-controlled territory were transferred to the north. There was a widespread feeling of relief as it was hoped that Turkish Cypriots would now be able to live in safety, in an area that was ethnically cleansed of Greek Cypriots and under the protection of the Turkish army. In the years leading up to 1974, many Turkish Cypriots had fallen victims to guerilla attacks by EOKA B and during the war there were many acts of retaliation by Greek Cypriots. Nevertheless, fleeing their houses to safety in the north was not easy for Turkish Cypriots. The provisional Turkish Cypriot administration settled the refugees in properties formerly occupied by Greek Cypriots. The trauma created by war and adaptation to a new life, away from their houses and the life they had lived in the south, was expressed, in certain cases, by burning blankets and breaking windows in houses left by Greek Cypriots and allocated to refugees (Volkan, 1979). It was an act of catharsis by the refugees, as they were trying, on the one hand, to cope with the guilt they felt for occupying the houses of Greek Cypriot refugees, and, on the other hand, to cleanse the houses of the presence of previous owners.

On the political front, the Turkish Cypriot Federated State was founded in 1975 and emphasised the will of the community to seek a solution that would secure their territorial and administrative autonomy. As the negotiations failed to produce a solution, the Turkish Cypriot political elite, under the leadership of Rauf Denktaş, founded the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in 1983, which was, and still is, only recognised by Turkey. The international isolation of the Turkish Cypriot state had two major consequences: first, the self-proclaimed TRNC became entirely dependent on Turkey; and second, Turkish Cypriot public life came under the influence of Turkish nationalism. The continuation of the status quo was deemed preferable by the Turkish Cypriot leadership as it was hoped that, with the course of time, their independence would be recognised. At the same time, the migration of many Turkish Cypriots, mainly to Turkey and Britain, and the arrival of settlers from Anatolia, altered the demographic character of the fledgling Turkish Cypriot state. For the Turkish Cypriot leadership, the decrease of the Turkish Cypriot population was not problematic since the official view was there was no difference between mainland Turks and Cypriot Turks. This was eloquently expressed by president Rauf Denktaş' words: "*gelen Türk, giden Türk*" – "those who leave are Turks, those who come are Turks" (Kizilyurek, 80).

As a result of the 1974 war, Turkish Cypriots acquired a long-expected political sovereignty but came under the strict guidance of Turkey and the presence of a significant Turkish military force. The arrival of settlers, often from rural Anatolian villages, provided a cheap labour force but altered the demography and the sociopolitical landscape in northern Cyprus. While negotiations with the Greek Cypriots failed to deliver a solution, the memories of intercommunal violence and the political and financial dependence on Turkey created a paradoxical reality for the Turkish Cypriots: Turkey was seen as the liberator but its decisions often disregarded the will of the liberated Turkish Cypriots (Özkaleli, 41). Under these circumstances, Turkish nationalism became a focal point in Turkish Cypriot society. This relationship with Turkey, however, had an ambivalent influence on Turkish Cypriot identity. During the process of the Turkification of public life, many Turkish Cypriots felt the need to emphasise their own identity.

Promoting Turkish Cypriot identity was not an easy task given both the predominance of Turkish nationalists and a concomitant distrust of Greek Cypriot intentions. As mentioned earlier, the Turkish Cypriot leadership did not want a solution and, with the help of an equally nationalist and maximalist Greek Cypriot leadership, led the negotiations to a dead end. This, together with the intimidation

and persecution of leftist and pro-Cypriot Turkish Cypriots, was a significant reason for the domination of Rauf Denktaş in Turkish Cypriot politics. Supported by the centre-right UBP (*Ulusal Birlik Partisi*, National Unity Party), Denktaş was elected president of the Turkish Cypriot Federated State in 1976 and 1981 and then president of the TRNC in 1985, then reelected in three consecutive elections. In total, Denktaş remained in office for 30 years, from 1976 until 2005. In 2005 Denktaş, at 81, did not run for president. Instead, the UBP supported the candidacy of Derviş Eroğlu, head of the party and prime minister in Denktaş's governments. Eroğlu, however, was defeated by Mehmet Ali Talat, who was supported by the centre-left CTP (*Cumhuriyetçi Türk Partisi*, Republican Turkish Party). For the first time in the history of the TRNC, the Turkish Cypriots elected a centre-left president. The electorate's shift from centre-right to centre-left can be traced to the discontent with economic conditions and the events of 2003 and 2004, namely the opening of the borders that separated the Republic of Cyprus and the TRNC in April 2003 and the referenda on the Annan Plan that took place in both parts of the island in 2004.

The opening of the borders and the Annan plan referenda: Coping with new realities

From the end of 2002 and in early 2003, as negotiations for Cyprus's accession to the EU were well under way and president Denktaş was undermining negotiations for a solution, Turkish Cypriots took to the streets, protesting against the Denktaş government and demanding a more flexible stance in negotiations that would bring the prospect of a solution closer. Such demonstrations were not common in Cyprus, north or south. Given the autocratic nature of the Denktaş regime in particular in northern Cyprus, as well as the tight control over local politics exercised by the Turkish government, the sight of Turkish Cypriots questioning the government and its intransigent policy on the Cyprus issue was, for many, unexpected. How, then, can we explain this attempt of a significant part of Turkish Cypriot society to defy the status quo? The 1974 war ended a period of suffering for the Turkish Cypriots and secured the self-rule of the community, at the expense of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Due to the lack of a solution, the Turkish Cypriots found themselves isolated from the international community and governed by a political elite that had very good relations with successive Turkish governments. Although isolation was blamed on the Greek Cypriots, the social and financial realities for the Turkish Cypriots were still dire. Corruption and financial stagnation coupled with

cronyism caused discontent, but all internal issues were set aside due to the predominance of the national issue. When, in 2002, the solution to the Cyprus issue was connected to the accession of a united Republic of Cyprus to the EU, there was hope that the long period of isolation would come to an end. At the same time, the consequences of the financial crisis that had hit Turkey in 1999 were felt in Northern Cyprus too. The demonstrators hoped that a solution to the Cyprus problem would provide them with better financial conditions. As was to be expected, President Denktaş adopted a negative stance. Contrary to the Greek Cypriots, who since 1974 enjoyed relative prosperity and were thus less enthusiastic for a solution, the Turkish Cypriots were eager to embrace a solution that would offer them an end to isolation and years of underdevelopment. In the 2002-2003 demonstrations, the notion of Cypriotness gradually became popular, especially among young Turkish Cypriots. In the demonstrations, the Turkish Cypriots sent a message to the political elite that they were tired of decades of political stalemate, oppression—especially of leftist and liberal voices—and corruption. It was also a clear message to Turkey to allow the island's accession to the EU as a united federal state.

The demonstrations by Turkish Cypriots and the determination of EU leaders to admit the Republic of Cyprus to the EU led the government of the TRNC to open the border that separates the Republic of Cyprus from the TRNC, a border which had remained closed since 1974. Consequent communication between the two communities helped towards the establishment of a positive atmosphere, and, in these circumstances, Turkish Cypriots voted en masse in favour of the Annan Plan for reunification in simultaneous referenda organised on both sides of the border in 2004. The plan was turned down by Greek Cypriot voters but the opening of the borders and the prospect of a solution paved the way for the election of Mehmet Ali Talat to the presidency of the TRNC in 2005. The stalemate in the negotiations between Mehmet Ali Talat and Greek Cypriot president Dimitris Christofias, and the disappointment among Turkish Cypriots, was expressed in the election of centre-right candidate Derviş Eroğlu in the 2010 presidential elections. Nevertheless, since 2002 there has been greater popular resistance to Turkey's influence, even though the TRNC is still funded by Turkey. Conditions in Northern Cyprus have improved since 2003 but the policy of the EU towards the Greek Cypriots caused disappointment amongst Turkish Cypriots, who were expecting the Republic of Cyprus's EU membership to have the added effect of ending their international isolation. In addition, economic growth in Turkey was reflected in

Northern Cyprus too, a factor in Eroğlu's election. Five years later, the 2015 election of Mustafa Akıncı, head of the TKP (*Tophumcu Kurtuluş Partisi*, Communal Liberation Party) and ex-mayor of the Turkish municipality of Nicosia, demonstrated the Turkish Cypriot will for a solution despite an apprehensive political discourse in Greek Cypriot society and hesitation by the then Turkish government.

Notwithstanding the forty-year-long separation of the two communities, a common trend can be observed in Cyprus. Greek and Turkish nationalisms are now competing with Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot nationalism. As far as the Greek Cypriots are concerned, this process began after the 1974 war, a consequence of Greek intervention in the coup d'état against President Makarios. Hence, Greek nationalism has evolved into a Greek Cypriot nationalism that emphasises control of the Republic of Cyprus by Greek Cypriots. The Turkish Cypriots, alternatively, have responded to the tight control of successive Turkish governments and their attempts to *turkify* the population in northern Cyprus with the evolution of a Turkish Cypriot nationalism that emphasises the Cypriot character of Turkish Cypriots while resisting, at the same time, the process of *Turkification*. This is evident in the Turkish Cypriot approach to Islam. Due to a history of coexistence with a Christian majority, Turkish Cypriot Islam has traditionally been latitudinarian and hence less fanatical than in mainland Turkey. Thus, contrary to what has been happening in Turkey in the last ten years, religion has not become pivotal in public life despite the attempts of Turkey's governing AKP and its followers in Cyprus to build more mosques and introduce religious secondary education schools (İmam Hatip okulları) (Moudouros, 2013). The resistance of the Turkish Cypriot population to the tight control of the Turkish state is also evident in recent election results, where it is estimated that Turkish settlers, who are expected to be more conservative than Turkish Cypriots, also voted in favour of pro-solution Akıncı. Finally, it should be noted that the issue of Turkish Cypriot identity is also demonstrated in the term used by the administration and in the press. The left prefers the term *Kıbrıslı Türkler* (Turkish Cypriots) while the right prefers to use to term *Kıbrıs Türkü* (Turks of Cyprus) (Erhürman, 2011). The first term emphasises the Cypriot origin of the Turkish Cypriots while the second puts more emphasis on a Turkish origin. Similar to the trend among Greek Cypriots to identify with the idea of Cypriotness, a common Cypriot identity is being increasingly discussed by Turkish Cypriots too. Although the emergence of Cypriotness has been pivotal in the rhetoric of the Left, both Turkish and Greek

Cypriot, as well as the successful implementation of any future federal solution, Turkish and Greek nationalisms are still strong on the island and the political powers have not embraced the need for a common Cypriot identity. Of course, the decades of separation mean that time, alongside the genuine effort of the political elites of both communities, is required to develop the idea of Cypriotness. There is also the ongoing danger of a Turkish Cypriot nationalism that excludes Greek Cypriots, just as a persistent Greek Cypriot nationalism that excludes Turkish Cypriots has evolved in the last decades.¹¹

Turkish Cypriots, Turks or Turks of Cyprus

Turkish Cypriot identity has been shaped by the Ottoman presence in Cyprus and the political events that have taken place in the last hundred and forty years, beginning with the end of the Ottoman era and arrival of the British in 1878 and the launch of the Greek Cypriot campaign for *enosis*. As a response to the rise of Greek nationalism on the island, Turkish nationalism evolved too. The lack of an entrepreneurial Turkish Cypriot elite delayed the emancipation of the community that remained attached to the British colonial government in order to secure their rights and privileges. The experience of other Ottoman populations that were obliged to immigrate to Anatolia as the Ottoman Empire disintegrated deeply affected the Turkish Cypriots and mobilised them to secure their position on the island. The need for good relations with the British colonial government should therefore be evaluated as an attempt to safeguard the community's position on the island against the threat of *enosis*. The emergence of Turkish nationalism on the island took longer than the emergence of Greek nationalism, but by the mid-twentieth century it can be argued that a significant part of the Turkish Cypriot population were ready to actively stand against any attempt by the Greek Cypriots to unite the island with Greece. Under these circumstances, Turkish Cypriots rejected their status as a minority community and fought for the recognition of their communal rights. The 1963-1964 intercommunal violence provided the excuse for the withdrawal from the Republic of Cyprus and the preparations for establishing a separate state. Although the decision to abandon their villages and gather in enclaves supported by the TMT was largely imposed by hard-liners among Turkish Cypriot leaders, it was often deemed the only solution that could secure Turkish Cypriot security. The trauma caused by the 1963-1974 period consolidated the idea among Turkish Cypriots that the only solution was the

creation of a separate state where they could live in security. The 1974 Turkish intervention gave the Turkish Cypriots their own state in the north of Cyprus, but they did not achieve full sovereignty due to international isolation and the tight control of their self-proclaimed republic by Turkey. The status quo that was established in Cyprus after 1974 did offer Turkish Cypriots the long-awaited security and self-governance they desired, but the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus became, as a result of its unrecognised status in the international community, totally dependent on Turkey. The predominance of the Turkish army in Northern Cyprus, perceived as necessary for the security of the community, and the political and financial dependence on Turkey, caused frustration for many Turkish Cypriots. Despite the arrival of many settlers from Anatolia, a distinct Turkish Cypriot identity persisted, something which can be seen in the will of the Turkish Cypriot community to reach a solution that will end their dependence on Turkey and their isolation. Without denouncing their Turkish identity, the Turkish Cypriots have struggled to preserve their *Cypriotness*. After years of tight control from Turkey, the Turkish Cypriots continue to demonstrate their wish for a solution by bringing to power on more than one occasion presidents who believe in reunification.

¹ Some of the most distinguished publications on the history of the Turkish Cypriot community in the early twentieth century include Altay Nevzat's *Nationalism Amongst the Turks of Cyprus: The First Wave* and Elena Bouleti's *The English Policy Towards the Turkish Cypriot Community 1878-1950*.

² *Enosis* or union with Greece was the Greek Cypriot facet of the *Megali Idea*, the aspiration of Greek nationalists to unite the Greek-speaking populations of the Balkans and Anatolia under Greek rule. It was first expressed in the mid-nineteenth century and the result of the Greco-Turkish war in Anatolia in 1922 signified its end. Despite the unwillingness of Greek governments to support the *enosis* movement after 1922, the Greek Cypriot elite continued the campaign that in 1955 was escalated with the beginning of the EOKA guerilla war against the British.

³ The Ottoman administration divided the Empire's population according to their faith. This was the *millet* system, from the plural of the Arabic word *millah*, that means nation. It provided for a Christian, a Jewish, an Armenian and later a Catholic millet. These communities were administered according to their own canonical laws. The Muslims of the Empire were members of the *millet-i hakime*, the dominant element.

⁴ Members of both communities participated in some of the revolts. For example, both Greek and Turkish Cypriots took part in the 1764 revolt against Cil Osman, the new governor of

Cyprus who was murdered by a mob. The reasons behind this unrest can be attributed to socio-economic issues. The 1821 revolt, though, was a spill-over of the uprising in mainland Greece against the Ottomans. Greek Cypriots, led by the clergy, revolted against the Ottoman authorities in Cyprus, but the uprising was suppressed and the archbishop, together with other members of the clergy, were hanged. For more information on the coexistence of the two communities under the Ottomans see Dietzel.

⁵ *Evkâf*, the plural of the Arabic word *wakf*, is the movable and immovable property that is used for religious purposes in Muslim communities. In Cyprus, from the beginning of Ottoman rule, the wealth of the Turkish Cypriot community was administered by the *evkâf*. After the British took over the administration of the island, the government attempted to take control of the *evkâf* by appointing a British and a Turkish Cypriot delegate who, in essence, were state officials.

⁶ Cypriotness (*Kıbrıslılık* in Turkish, *Κυπριότητα* in Greek) is a term used to describe a common Cypriot identity. It came on the agenda gradually after 1974 in an attempt to forge loyalty to the Cypriot state surpassing Greek and Turkish nationalisms. It emphasized the experience of peaceful coexistence between the two communities before the war. The idea of a common Cypriot identity was pivotal in the discussions that preceded the Annan Plan referenda in 2004.

⁷ The first Turkish Cypriot newspapers began their publication a few years after the arrival of the British. Until the end of the Second World War, most newspapers were short lived. In the 1920s, the press was actively engaged in the campaign for the implementation of the Kemalist reforms. The nationalist elite was supported by *Söz* (*Statement*) while the pro-British elite voiced their opinion through *Hakikat* (*Truth*).

⁸ Ankebut, 2 April 1921 quoted in An, *Kıbrıs Türk Toplumunun* 32.

⁹ Doğru Yol, 10 October 1920, quoted in An, *Kıbrıs Türk Toplumunu* 9. For more information on the Turkish Cypriot press on the conditions of the Turkish Cypriot community in the 1920s see Moutsis.

¹⁰ The Sèvres Syndrome is a popular belief in Turkey that a plot exists to weaken and undermine the integrity of the Turkish state. It is based on the legacy of the treaty of Sèvres in the 1920s that provided for the occupation of various provinces of Anatolia by British, French, Italian and Greek forces, leaving only a small part of central Anatolia for the Turks. Although the treaty of Sèvres was annulled in 1923 in the aftermath of the Turkish War of Independence and replaced with the treaty of Lausanne, Turkish foreign policy, in its more paranoiac moments, still bears the mark of the Sèvres syndrome.

¹¹ On the Greek Cypriot nationalism see Mavratsa.

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