

# Open borders, closed minds: The discursive construction of national identity in North Cyprus

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## Abstract

The article investigates the discursive construction of a Turkish Cypriot national identity by the newspapers in North Cyprus. It questions the representation and reconstruction processes of national identity within the press and examines the various practices employed to mobilize readers around certain national imaginings. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, the article analyses news reports of the opening of border crossings in Cyprus in 2003, based on their content, the strategies used in the production of national identity and the linguistic means employed in the process. In this way, the nationalist tendencies embedded in news discourses, as well as discriminatory and exclusive practices, are sought out.

## Keywords

border, Cyprus, national identity, news discourse, Turkish Cypriot identity, Turkish Cypriot media

Five months after the border of a divided Cyprus was opened to public crossings in April 2003, a protest took place at the main checkpoint in Nicosia. A donkey appeared at the Turkish Cypriot checkpoint with a fake passport that identified it as ‘Mr Cyprus’. The Turkish Cypriot police arrested three people, two Greek Cypriots and a Turkish Cypriot in relation to the protest. *Afrika*, a Turkish Cypriot daily, reported the incident with the headline ‘2 Greeks, 1 Turk and 1 true Cypriot were arrested’ (*Afrika*, 2003: 1). By calling the donkey ‘the true Cypriot’, *Afrika* did not insult Cypriots but mocked the nationalist idea that there were no Cypriots but only Turks and Greeks. The idea had found expression in Rauf Denktaş, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) president at the

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time, who, it was claimed, asserted that 'there's only one living Cypriot in Cyprus and that is the Cypriot donkey' (Çağlar, 1995).<sup>1</sup>

The protest and its coverage by *Afrika* are good examples of how problematic the self-identification of Turkish Cypriots has been. They indicate the ongoing struggle between different concepts of national identity such as Turkish, Turkish Cypriot and Cypriot, as well as revealing Turkish Cypriots' search for an identity. Each of these terms signifies a particular conception of nation and national belonging that the person or the group identifies with. For example, one nationalism, which developed during the years of inter-communal struggle, sees Turkish Cypriots as part of the Turkish nation, making no distinction between Turks and Turkish Cypriots. Another nationalism, developed in reaction to Turkish nationalism, asserts cultural differences from Turks to maintain a distinctive and separate identity as Cypriots. This version of Cypriot nationalism is constructed mainly in opposition to Turks rather than Greek Cypriots. Today, 'located between Turkish nationalism and expressions of Cypriotism' (Ramm, 2006: 523), both the 'Turkish' and 'Cypriot' identities are trying to establish their legitimacy and the media are the sites where the struggle has been taking place.

The TRNC, a new state founded in the north of the island, offers a unique case for the study of national identity. Despite being a state that is internationally unrecognized and considered illegal, and whose existence and rationale for existence has been challenged, the TRNC has had a reasonably long life, a material and spatial presence and imprint on society. It has been a source of expressions and experiences of national identity as well as producing a sense of belonging for its people.

In Cyprus, the politics of identity played a central role in the rise of inter-communal tension and the creation of the Cyprus problem (Kızılyürek, 2002). In the past, attempts to forge a Cypriot identity failed as the two communities cultivated Hellenic and Turkish national identities based on ethno-nationalist concepts. Recently, as the search for a solution to the Cyprus problem intensified, the question of identity again became the focus of public debate.

As the identity issue became increasingly important among Turkish Cypriots, so its construction and renegotiation by the media also gained significance. For example, the Turkish Cypriot media have played a key role in the formation and maintenance of public attitudes towards Greek Cypriots and, later, as Cypriot nationalism developed, in reaction to Turkish nationals. As attempts to negotiate a settlement of the Cyprus problem continue, the need to scrutinize the media's role in encouraging reconciliation or provoking conflict is pressing.

This article, focusing on news reports in the Turkish Cypriot press during the first week of the opening of the border, investigates the discursive construction of Turkish Cypriot national identity in North Cyprus. The opening of crossings represented a radical change in Cyprus. It allowed communities on both sides of the island to come together for the first time since the division of the island in 1974. It was a positive development and, unlike previous encounters, which were dominated by conflict, it was a peaceful event. Using this event as a case study, the article examines the media texts to see which concept of national identity they articulate and the strategies they employ to maintain and reproduce naturalized concepts of national identity.

National identity is the primary form of identity that creates coherence and a sense of belonging by offering people authenticity, historical continuity and rootedness in a common territory (Dieckhoff and Gutierrez, 2001). It is based on the oppositional metaphors of 'us' and the 'other' to create unity among the members of the 'us-group' and assert its distinction from the 'they-group' (Billig, 1995; Cavallaro, 2001; Hall, 1996). It is like a 'trump card' that overcomes all other identities and binds people together, despite their differences (Calhoun, 1997). Discursively constructed, its definition, or the categorization of who national identity includes or excludes, changes depending on the national project pursued or the context of its production (Reicher and Hopkins, 2001). For national identity to be effective, its constructedness should not be apparent but, on the contrary, should be naturalized and embedded in the routines of everyday life (Billig, 1995; Edensor, 2002; Özkırmılı, 2000). Billig (1995), who describes the process as 'banal nationalism', emphasizes that certain habits, representations and practices of everyday life not only hide the ideological role of nationalism and national identity but also reproduce them as parts of everyday life.

Since one of the main assumptions of the study is that national identity, a phenomenon that is taken for granted, is constructed discursively, the research benefits from the 'discourse-historical approach' developed by the Vienna School of Discourse Analysis. Based on the theory that situational, institutional and social contexts shape or affect discursive acts, this method combines historical, social-economic-political and linguistic perspectives to identify the relationship between texts and social practices (Wodak and Reisigl, 2001; Wodak et al., 1999). In line with this, the research studies the news discourses based on their content, the strategies used in the production of national identity and the linguistic means employed in the process. With this, the nationalist tendencies embedded in news discourses as well as discriminatory and exclusive practices are investigated.

In North Cyprus, despite an abundance of media outlets with differing ideological standpoints, there is very little diversity in content, mainly because the media are heavily dependent on the official news agency, Türk Ajansı Kıbrıs (TAK-Turkish Agency Cyprus). The agency provides news and information to the media which not only reflects the views of state officials but is also 'approved' by them. As a result of this relationship with the agency, the media consists of the same stories with the same content.

Among the daily newspapers published in North Cyprus, three – *Kıbrıs*, *Halkın Sesi* and *Yenidüzen* – are included in the study. These newspapers were chosen because they reflect a broad spectrum of opinions in North Cyprus and have had long and steady publication lives. *Halkın Sesi* (The voice of people) is the longest-surviving Turkish Cypriot newspaper, having begun publication in 1942. During the conflict with the Greek Cypriots, the newspaper played a key role in the promotion of Turkish nationalism and has been a supporter of nationalist policies. *Yenidüzen* (New Order) began in 1975 as the publication of the left-wing CTP (Republican Turkish Party), which favours a solution to the Cyprus problem based on a federation with Greek Cypriots. *Kıbrıs* (Cyprus), on the other hand, is a commercial newspaper with the highest circulation in the TRNC and is regarded as the most influential. During the period under study, the newspaper had shifted its position in relation to the Cyprus problem from a nationalistic to pro-solution stance.

## The context within which the borders opened

The opening of the border, a manifestation of separation and severance of communication between communities (Gumpert and Drucker, 1998), in April 2003, was an important development that brought many changes to Cyprus. Having had no contact since the division of the island in 1974, it allowed both communities to cross to the 'other' side for the first time in 29 years and meet the people they regarded as their enemy.

The restrictions regarding the crossing of the border that separated the Turkish Cypriot and the Greek Cypriot side of the island were relaxed on 23 April 2003 by the Turkish Cypriot government. This meant that people were able to cross in both directions without the requirement for any special permission, as was the case before, simply by showing their passports or identity cards.

When the border was opened, Cyprus was already in the midst of a period of change. The UN had proposed a new settlement plan for a solution in Cyprus. The majority of Turkish Cypriots were in favour of this plan, also known as the Annan Plan. However, prior to the opening of the borders, hopes of finding a solution to the Cyprus problem had diminished when the negotiations collapsed in The Hague in March 2003.

The decision to allow free crossing of the border came as a surprise to everyone as there was no prior indication. The Turkish Cypriot government was a nationalist one which always claimed that Greek Cypriots still wanted *enosis*, unification with Greece, and that the atrocities committed against Turkish Cypriots should not be forgotten. The TRNC President of the time, Rauf Denktaş, also opposed contacts between the two communities and therefore was seen as one of the main obstacles to the peace process. As both the government and the President had been campaigning against the UN plan, the opening of the border was an unexpected move.

## Analysis

The analysis reveals five main themes, which are the linguistic construction of different understandings of nation, common culture, common past, national space and common political future that occurred in the news texts.

### *On the concept of nation*

The opening of the border generated a debate about citizenship, since TRNC citizens born in Turkey were not allowed to cross to the south by the Greek Cypriot authorities. The restriction was not merely directed at these Turkish-born TRNC citizens<sup>2</sup> but also at the younger generation of Cyprus-born immigrant descendants. In other words, it was not one's place of birth that mattered but that of one's parents' as well. The exclusion of these people by the Greek Cypriot authorities, preventing them from joining in the transitional period Cyprus was going through, turned the issue of citizenship into a political dispute between the two sides. The Turkish Cypriot side argued that the immigrants from Turkey and their Cyprus-born children were part of the Turkish Cypriot nation and that the Greek Cypriot authorities were discriminating against them.

The newspapers reported on these political arguments. All three newspapers published articles that included statements by the Turkish Cypriot government as well as the opposition criticizing the Greek Cypriot policy of not permitting these people into the areas under their administration. The official discourse on the issue – that, regardless of their place of birth these Turkish-born immigrants were ‘our’ citizens and should be treated as equal to those born in Cyprus – was integrated into the news discourses.

The discourse of ‘citizenship’, which acted as a unification strategy, categorized Turkish Cypriots and Turkish-born citizens, who were excluded by the Greek Cypriot authorities, as one group. Yet the categorization was not based on ethnicity but on political belonging to the nation. The concept of ‘citizenship’ characterized membership of the TRNC nation on the basis of political will, regardless of place of birth and collectivized Turkish Cypriots and mainland Turks into one nation. On the other hand, frequently highlighting the origin of these people as ‘Turkish’ or ‘from Turkey’ not only failed to acknowledge them as a heterogeneous population with social, cultural and ethnic differences within themselves but also suggested a differentiation from Turkish Cypriots. References to people from Turkey in North Cyprus regarding their TRNC citizenship varied: ‘Turkish-born citizens who have the TRNC identity card’ (*Kıbrıs*, 2003d: 4), ‘People from Turkey’ (*Kıbrıs*, 2003c: 7), ‘Turkish origin’ (*Kıbrıs*, 2003h: 3), ‘citizens who came from Turkey’ (*Yenidüzen*, 2003f: 3), ‘people who were born in Turkey and not regarded as being of Cypriot origin’ (*Yenidüzen*, 2003f: 3), ‘citizens who came from Turkey’ (*Yenidüzen*, 2003c: 1), ‘Turkish origin TRNC citizens’ (*Yenidüzen*, 2003i: 3) and ‘people who were born in Turkey and gained TRNC citizenship later’ (Daloğlu and Türkan, 2003: 2).

Even though it was these citizens who were being discriminated against, none of the newspapers reflected their views and feelings. While Cyprus-born TRNC citizens, who could cross the checkpoints, were shown expressing their joy at being able to do so, no citizen of Turkish-origin appeared in the papers expressing their feelings or experiences at the checkpoints during the period studied. The newspapers reflected the opinions and efforts of the state authorities and the opposition parties concerning their unfair treatment by the Greek Cypriot government, but did not give any voice to them in their news articles. In a sense, these people were not only excluded by the Greek Cypriot authorities from the south part of the island but also from the Turkish Cypriot public sphere by the media that ‘reproduced a symbolic form of nation’ (Morley, 2000). It meant that in the mediation of the nation, they were not fully included in the symbolic representation of the nation. Even though they appeared within the political discourses stating that Turkish-origin citizens belonged to ‘our’ nation-state, in the construction of public life or the reflection of the nation they were not present. Even *Yenidüzen*, the only newspaper that brought the issue to its front page with a headline that said ‘Is it a crime to be from Turkey?’ (*Yenidüzen*, 2003g: 1), did not include any views or experiences of these people in their own words.

Ethnic minorities such as the Maronites and Greek Cypriots living in North Cyprus were also absent from the mediated nation, and the impact of the developments on these communities did not appear in the newspapers. Confined to their own sphere, the views of ethnic minorities were also missing from the image of the nation.

The sovereignty of the nation-state was problematic as the newspaper texts discussing who was really behind the decision to open the border were conflicting. Although they

all announced the decision as being that of the TRNC's Council of Ministers (*Halkın Sesi*, 2003a: 1; *Kıbrıs*, 2003a: 1; *Yenidüzen*, 2003a: 1), *Yenidüzen* and *Kıbrıs* later suggested that the Turkish government was the real decision-maker in this matter. *Yenidüzen* expressed this view openly in one of its headlines: 'Not the government but instructions opened the border crossings' (*Yenidüzen*, 2003b: 6). While the 'government' referred to the Turkish Cypriot one, 'instructions' pointed a finger at the Turkish government. Yet its identity as the responsible agent was kept hidden leaving the readers to construe its role in the action. The inference was that, having decided to relax the crossing restrictions in Cyprus, the Turkish government had instructed the Turkish Cypriot authorities to implement it. *Kıbrıs* quoted President Denktaş as saying that the decision to open the border was taken together with 'Ankara and the Foreign Ministry' (*Kıbrıs*, 2003l: 7). Highlighting the source of the change in Cyprus as Turkey rather than the TRNC authorities not only increased doubts about the sovereignty of the TRNC but also reinforced the image of it as a protectorate and Turkey as the state holding the power. It reduced the TRNC to an entity that merely followed Turkey's instructions. In a departure from the other two newspapers, *Halkın Sesi* announced that 'Ankara welcomed the decision' (2003b: 4). The statement portrayed the TRNC as a sovereign country whose decision was welcomed and respected by another one.

It was evident in the news texts that the nation was conceived as a bordered space where a political administration governed over the population within its boundaries. All the newspapers described the administration in the north as the 'TRNC' and referred to that in the south as the 'Greek Cypriot administration', in line with the Turkish Cypriot official discourse. Having withdrawn from all the administrative and governmental positions of the republic in 1963, during the inter-communal conflict, the official national policy of Turkish Cypriots was to consider the Republic of Cyprus as an illegitimate state. The TRNC authorities thus refuse to use its official name. Having adopted and integrated the official discourse on this issue, none of the newspapers used the term 'Republic of Cyprus' or described the administration as the 'government' in the period studied, instead they described it as the 'Greek Cypriot administration'.

The newspapers described Greek Cypriots as crossing to the 'TRNC' while Turkish Cypriots crossed to 'South Cyprus' or to the 'Greek Cypriot side' but never to the Republic of Cyprus. For example, *Halkın Sesi* stated that 'the number of Greek Cypriots that crossed from South Cyprus.... On the other hand, from the TRNC, 7000 Turks went to South Cyprus' (2003d: 1). The same expressions were also employed in both *Kıbrıs* and *Yenidüzen*. The portrayal of the administration in the north as a state and the one in the south as only an administration contributed to the legitimation of the TRNC in the eyes of their readership. It also implicitly portrayed Greek Cypriots as crossing to the territory of a state that they strongly opposed.

The concept of 'nation' was used synonymously with the concept of 'home'. In the official discourses, the TRNC was reconstructed as the home of Turkish Cypriots while Greek Cypriots visited it as 'guests'. The notion of neighbourly relationships enhanced the idea of the existence of each community within their own territory and next to each other as separate states, an idea which is supported mainly by nationalist groups who oppose the unification of the island. Such representation and discourses were mostly employed by *Kıbrıs*. In two separate articles, *Kıbrıs* reported the Tourism and Environment

Minister of the time, Serdar Denктаş, as saying ‘we are ready to entertain our Greek Cypriot guests’ (*Kıbrıs*, 2003a: 1) and referring to them as ‘our tourist neighbours’ (*Kıbrıs*, 2003h: 3). In another headline, the same newspaper reported that the touristic town ‘Kyrenia is ready for guests from South Cyprus’ (*Kıbrıs*, 2003g: 8). Prime Minister Derviş Erođlu’s statement in a press release that ‘living side by side is the best solution’ (*Kıbrıs*, 2003m: 8) also supported the existing division and the guest–neighbour relationship.

### *The construction of a common past*

In the production of the news articles concerning crossings to the ‘other’ side, the newspapers made use of the past to highlight its importance in the present. There were frequent references to the past, especially to the year 1974 – a turning point in history for people on the island. It was in 1974 that Turkey’s military intervention divided the island into north and south and, until April 2003, crossings were restricted. The significance of 1974 differed in the three newspapers analysed.

Describing the day the border crossings commenced as an ‘historical day’, *Kıbrıs* stressed that it was ‘the first time after 29 years’ (*Kıbrıs*, 2003b: 1) that people from both communities started to cross in both directions. The numerical rhetoric of ‘29 years’ referred to the length of time since such social interaction between the two communities had taken place. It also reminded one of a time in the past when there was neither a border nor checkpoints and when travelling from one part of Cyprus to the other was not described as ‘going to the other side’. Using a strategy of perpetuation in combination with the strategy of transformation, the newspaper implied the continuity of the situation for ‘29 years’, which had just changed or signalled a certain transformation. However, despite the hint of transformation, there was no indication that the national identity was threatened by this change. Another significance of the numerical rhetoric of ‘29’ was to increase the news value of the story and to make it more striking. Stating that something was happening for the first time in 29 years indicated that the event was extraordinary, which no doubt fuelled readers’ interest.

Accordingly, *Yenidüzen* also drew similarities between the past and the present. Comparing the present time to the past, when there was no border, it published on its front-page that ‘it has become similar to the state before 1974. This was the situation in 74, furthermore there was no time limit’ (*Yenidüzen*, 2003a: 1). The temporal reference to 1974 was a metonym employed to represent the military and political actions that took place in that year and its aftermath that had changed and shaped the political situation on the island since. *Yenidüzen*, using the strategy of perpetuation, emphasized the similarity between the past and the present, implying that the time in between was a disruption in political continuity. Reminding one of the situation pre-1974, it evoked the time when both communities lived together, which was also consistent with its conceptualization of a united Cypriot nation and national identity. It indicated the possible restoration of a coexistence which had been suspended in 1974. However, the present transformation was not exactly the same as the past. For example, initially border movements had a time limit, which meant that everyone was required to return back to their side of the island before midnight or be fined. In the text, this condition was given in inverted commas to

highlight and probably to mock it, as it was reminiscent of the fairy tale, Cinderella: 'with the condition of returning back at 24:00' (*Yenidüzen*, 2003a: 1).

*Halkın Sesi's* discourse of '1974' was different from that of the other two newspapers. It defined 1974 as the date of the 'Happy Peace Operation', as it was referred to in the nationalist discourses. Such a representation of 1974 connoted the conflict between the communities in the past and the suffering of Turkish Cypriots (Daloğlu and Türkan, 2003).

The newspapers were full of news articles about visits to the 'other' side by both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots and the re-encounters of old friends and neighbours. The analysis showed that, during this period, the past was not represented by hatred or fear and the narrative of the past was not based on the memories of the conflict and suffering but, to the contrary, on nostalgic memories of family homes and neighbours. Why and under what conditions people had left their homes and hometowns was rarely mentioned. It was not the atrocities and suffering of the past but a longing for the things that were left behind and the joy of finding them that were stressed. Greek Cypriots who were the 'enemy' in nationalistic discourses were being humanized and portrayed as long-lost friends and neighbours. This practice was especially common in *Yenidüzen*. The day after the borders were opened, *Yenidüzen* reported on the meeting of 'old Cypriot friends' at the Ledra Palace checkpoint, the main checkpoint in Nicosia, as an event worth seeing (*Yenidüzen*, 2003e: 4).

The past was not the same though. Going back to the houses they once owned and were forced to abandon when the island was divided created an ambivalent host–guest situation for people: those who had owned the house in the past were now in the guest position. This ambivalence was reflected in the news texts. In contrast to the official policy on this issue, the belief that these houses actually belonged to the people who had owned them before 1974 was integrated into the news discourses of all the newspapers. The definition of houses previously owned by Greek Cypriots as 'theirs' was frequent in the news texts and showed that the information was treated as normal. Despite the gap between the present and the past, the term 'their houses' indicated continuity in that these properties were seen as belonging to the people who had owned them before the division, but at the same time to the people who were presently living in them. The discourse was evident in some of *Kıbrıs's* headlines: 'Visited his house he had abandoned at 8 years old' (*Kıbrıs*, 2003i: 2), 'He found his home with his mother's description' (*Kıbrıs*, 2003k: 2) and 'Kullos who was born after 1974 visited his family's house' (*Kıbrıs*, 2003f: 2). *Yenidüzen*, on the other hand, highlighted the ambivalent guest–host relationship: 'Greek Cypriots entertained the "owners of the house" in their house' (2003k: 2). The inverted comas indicated the awareness of the ambiguous situation. *Yenidüzen* was consistent with its description of 'the owners of their house' as it repeated the same term in another article (Soykan, 2003: 4). In a similar way, *Halkın Sesi* also referred to the originally Greek Cypriot owned houses as 'their' houses but in many cases it added that they were their 'old' houses (*Halkın Sesi*, 2003c: 5).

### *Identifying the 'other'*

The border crossing had created a positive atmosphere between the two communities which enhanced a sense of reconciliation rather than reinforcing conflict. Greek Cypriots



were no longer cast as the enemy and attributions to them were no longer derogatory. Instead, the similarities and friendship between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots were stressed. The news discourses were dominated by ideas such as ‘peace in Cyprus’ and ‘sisterhood/brotherhood of both communities’ which gave the impression that not only the physical borders but also the imagined ones were disappearing. Especially in *Yenidüzen* and *Kıbrıs*, the discourse about the border crossings presented them as peaceful events and pointed towards a positive common political future for both communities. For example, *Kıbrıs* highlighted in a headline a quote from a Greek Cypriot family visiting their house in the north as, ‘we want peace’ (*Kıbrıs*, 2003j: 2). The discourse of ‘peace’ was especially dominant in *Yenidüzen*. Suggesting that ‘the crossings have led a strong wind of peace to blow on the island’, *Yenidüzen* described the coach service that was provided by the Greek Cypriot authorities to take Turkish Cypriots to Limassol as ‘a peace coach’ (Soykan, 2003: 4). The discourse of peace not only supported the argument that ‘things will be better in future’ (Selengin, 2003: 5) but emphasized the discontinuity of the existing situation. This discourse was not employed in *Halkın Sesi*, probably because it supported the state ideology that peace already existed.

Forging resemblances between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots helped to categorize them under the identity of Cypriot with an emphasis on the cultural coherence of both communities. Such thinking was especially visible in *Yenidüzen* as it accentuated the similarities and based its discourse on an idealized Cypriot identity. In a sense, by following a construction strategy, it renegotiated a Cypriot national identity. The concept of ‘us’ as Cypriots included Greek Cypriots as well as Turkish Cypriots, and a positive self-representation applied to both. Perhaps not to cast Greek Cypriots in a negative light, *Yenidüzen* did not report the attack by a Greek Cypriot family on a Turkish Cypriot one when the latter went to see their old house. A report of the incident appeared in *Kıbrıs* and *Halkın Sesi* but not in *Yenidüzen* (*Kıbrıs*, 2003n: 2; *Halkın Sesi*, 2003e: 11).

In *Kıbrıs*, the distinction between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots was maintained, forging an ‘us’ and the ‘other’ group. However, the ‘other’ group was not cast as the enemy or a threat but as a group equivalent to the Turkish Cypriot one. The differences and likeness between ‘us’ and ‘them’ were blurred: even though ‘they’ were not exactly like ‘us’, ‘they’ were not so different either. As well as acknowledging shared cultural habits, contrasts in cultural values and practices between these two groups were also stated. Unlike *Yenidüzen*, the collective representation of both communities in *Kıbrıs* was not essentialized under the identity of Cypriot, even though, like *Yenidüzen*, it also acknowledged certain Cypriot characteristics.

For *Halkın Sesi*, Greek Cypriots existed as the ‘other’ group and the discourses that emphasized the similarities between the two communities were limited. It focused more on official discourses that maintained the dichotomy rather than the stories of ordinary people. It also continued to publish a daily summary of the news from the Greek Cypriot press that usually showed the Greek Cypriot side as corrupt and bad.

### *The linguistic construction of common culture*

Culture, another significant element of national identity, acts as a source in its production. Cultural symbols can have various meanings and can be interpreted differently.

Despite this, shared meanings, habits, rituals and ways of speaking are resources for establishing a sense of belonging (Edensor, 2002). National identity is produced and reproduced depending on the invention and the circulation of these cultural materials.

In the news texts analysed, cultural materials were employed to draw similarities between the two communities as well as to state their differences. Both communities were imagined with certain qualities associated with them. These qualities were not just traditional ones but also the habits of everyday life that are embedded in the practices of daily social interaction. For example, both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots were reported as being very hospitable. In their accounts of meeting the 'other', people kept mentioning how they were invited in to drink coffee when they were on the 'other' side (Akançay et al., 2003: 3; Akkor, 2003: 4; Soykan, 2003: 5). The shared practice of drinking coffee was not treated as anything unusual since it was a habitual performance of everyday life for both communities. This form of habitus provided a shared form of identity between the two communities, linking them together through this daily habitual practice and creating a culture of coherence amongst Cypriots. Food was another form of representation of cultural similarity. For example, *şeftali*, a type of kebab which is common in Cyprus was described as 'Cyprus' well-known dish' (*Kıbrıs*, 2003e: 4). The circulation of *şeftali* as a Cypriot dish rather than Greek or Turkish represented it as another shared cultural feature, maintaining the notion of a common Cypriot cultural identity.

Music, another cultural ingredient that can be associated with national identity, also appeared in the news texts as another uniting component of Cypriot culture. In a romanticized description, *Kıbrıs* noted that some Turkish Cypriots walked through the streets of Larnaca where 'Cypriot folk music' echoed (Akançay et al., 2003: 3). Folkloric music tends to stress national distinctiveness and authenticity. Describing the music as 'authentic' and 'Cypriot' in the news texts reproduced it as a shared cultural component of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The circulation of such representations sustained the concept of a Cypriot identity. *Yenidüzen* also published an article about a performance of a bi-communal choir and folk dance group on its front page. The bi-communality of the choir and folk dance group implied common characteristics in the songs sung and the dances performed (*Yenidüzen*, 2003j: 1).

Along with shared cultural features, some cultural materials were treated as the national cultural symbol of only one group, which highlighted the differences between the communities. It was again food and drink that induced such separation. One such example was a desert called *ekmek kadayıfı*, a Turkish Cypriot speciality which the newspapers claimed Greek Cypriots longed to taste. Linking *ekmek kadayıfı* together with the Greek Cypriots' homes in the north, *Yenidüzen* wrote that 'they couldn't forget the house and *ekmekkadayıfı* [sic]' (*Yenidüzen*, 2003h: 6). On the other hand, wine, a beer called KEO and a brandy known as 31 were the drinks Turkish Cypriots associated with Greek Cypriot culture (*Kıbrıs*, 2003e: 4).

### *National space*

Conceptualizing a nation in spatial terms also contributes to the production of national identity. Edensor (2002) remarks that places and spaces that are regarded as national

contribute to a sense of national identity with their cognitive, sensual and habitual impact. Sometimes these places symbolize the combination of ethnic, religious and cultural characteristics of the nation.

In the news texts analysed, the link between national space and national identity was based, for the most part, on the 'other' rather than 'us'. Landscapes that were symbolically and ideologically important for the 'other' emphasized the differences between the two communities. Highlighting certain areas in the north as significant places for Greek Cypriots, in terms of religion was one such example, as religion was another signifier of national identity in Cyprus. For example, Greek Cypriots' visits to churches and monasteries and their participation in religious rituals was covered in the Turkish Cypriot newspapers. As well as representing the Orthodox religion as a national signifier of Greek Cypriots, such articles also portrayed these places as the symbol of their ethnic, religious and cultural traditions.

Kyrenia (Girne), a town in North Cyprus, was also depicted as a significant place for Greek Cypriots in which they showed great interest and visited in crowds. *Yenidüzen* reported that 'Greek Cypriots also crossed to the North ... and many ran to Kyrenia' (*Yenidüzen*, 2003d: 2). *Halkın Sesi* also reported that 'Greek Cypriots rushed to Kyrenia and villages' (Daloğlu and Türkan, 2003: 2). *Kıbrıs* informed its readers that: 'With the opening of the borders, Kyrenia, the capital of tourism, faced a rush from many Greek Cypriots' (2003g: 8). There are two possible explanations for this interest in the town. First, positioned next to the sea, Kyrenia, and its harbour in particular, was always seen as a beautiful spot and a tourist attraction. As stated above, *Kıbrıs* described it as 'the capital of tourism', which was why Greek Cypriot excursions there were not thought of as unusual.

The second reason could be linked to the naturalizing tendencies of nationalist ideologies. Over the years, the nationalistic discourses of Greek Cypriots stated their desire to return to Kyrenia, which symbolized a return to the situation before the division. In contrast, the Turkish Cypriot official nationalistic discourses pointed to such discourses of the Greek Cypriot officials as evidence of their continuing ambition for *enosis*, the nationalist movement to unite the island with Greece. In both discourses, Kyrenia appeared as the dream of every Greek Cypriot and as the place where they longed to go. The nationalist ideologies adopted by both communities made these discourses look 'natural'. Embedded in the public consciousness, it seemed normal that every Greek Cypriot wanted to go and see Kyrenia. When the Greek Cypriots filled the streets of Kyrenia or the tourist harbour, the newspapers treated this as if it were to be expected.

Whatever meaning Greek Cypriots assigned to it, Kyrenia had a different significance for Turkish Cypriots, which shows how difficult it is to affix national meanings to national spaces. During the years after 1974, Kyrenia had been a landscape which acquired a national importance for Turkish Cypriots. The pictures of Kyrenia harbour had become the predominant image of the TRNC for tourist campaigns, together with other images that symbolized Turkish Cypriot culture. It was an example of a local place becoming an image that represented the national space. Newspaper photographs of Greek Cypriot tourists in Kyrenia harbour showed familiar spatial features to Turkish Cypriot readers and reproduced it as a national space that they identified with.

## Conclusion

The analysis found that there were overlapping discourses of identity such as a Turkish Cypriot identity coexisting with a Cypriot identity. The overall analysis of the data supported the argument that, rather than a single essentialist identity, there was an ongoing process of production of different identities and, depending on the context and the newspaper, the characteristics of national identity changed. In some cases, Turkish Cypriots were constructed as a separate group in opposition to Greek Cypriots, creating a 'national we' group that also included Turkish-origin citizens. At other times, the cultural similarities of both communities were highlighted and their differences were suppressed to construct a common Cypriot identity. Contrary to the assertion that national identity is a natural phenomenon, the study also confirmed that it is a product of the dialectical relationship between discursive acts and social practices.

The ideological stance of the newspapers was a determinant in the national imaginings they represented. It should not be assumed that each newspaper wrote about only one version of nationhood, as there was no strict segregation between the identity discourses of the newspapers. Their ideological positions and the party political affiliations provided the framework and was a factor in shaping their discourses. Yet, despite the differences in their ideological orientations, they all stayed within the boundaries of the universe of official discourse and did not challenge its nationalist expressions. For example, they avoided using the name 'Republic of Cyprus' or questioning the power of Turkey over the Turkish Cypriot administration but instead treated this as normal, which helped to naturalize it.

The image of Greek Cypriots as the 'other' was transformed from their being the 'evil' ones into ordinary people like 'us' when contact between both communities increased. They were no longer an abstract entity for the people but materialized through their encounters in everyday life. Therefore, when reporting about Greek Cypriots, the newspapers were not just mediating strangers to their readers but reflecting an issue that had become part of their daily life. Meanwhile, the role of the newspapers in reflecting the 'other' changed with the opening of the border. Before the crossings began, the media was the only means of getting news of the 'other' and this was largely controlled by state officials. The opening of the border presented an opportunity for the media institutions to collect data for themselves rather than it being provided by official sources.

The role of the newspapers in normalizing certain nationalistic discursive practices was also evident in the research. The representation of the routines of everyday life in the news contributes to self-perception and identity construction. The banal representation of daily life, such as the circulation of images of family homes and shared cultural norms, helped their internalization as national and rational. In other words, by showing the routines and assumptions of everyday life, the newspapers presented it as the nationally organized way (Edensor, 2002), as if that way of living is a part of the national character of Turkish Cypriots or, in some cases, of Cypriots. Thus they reinforced the view that national identity is a natural product rather than a social one. It is important to note that the media are not the only responsible agent in the dissemination of nationalism in society but part of a complex public sphere that forms and redefines national identity. The research confirmed that the media, in this case the newspapers, not only influence the nationalistic imagination in society but were also shaped by the prevailing discourses of the society.

In their construction of national identity, the newspapers benefited from various strategies but mainly those of perpetuation and transformation. Going through a time of change, the political continuity between past and present times was emphasized on the one hand, while, on the other, a necessary and desired political change between now and the future was predicted. Constructive strategies were also employed to forge a unity within communities with a perception of Cypriotness as well as stressing Turkish Cypriotness.

The news texts employed metonyms, synecdoche and personification to establish sameness between groups. While the capital Ankara was used as a metonym to refer to the Turkish government, generalizing synecdoche was frequently utilized, especially to present a small group of people as the general population. This practice was especially useful in their attempts to mobilize their readers around certain political projects and national interests, and to characterize the ideas they presented as the consensus of the nation. Benefiting from the notion of unity without any diversity helped the newspapers state these views as self-evident and a matter of common sense. This approach not only allowed nationalism to be embedded in the news discourses but also hid its constructedness.

For a democratic society, it is important that the media should adopt a non-national definition of citizenship and also act as a public space where representation and negotiation of diverse identities can be carried out. Yet the research showed that diverse identity discourses had limited access to the public sphere through the newspapers, as the dominant collective identity in the news articles was a national one. For example, the mediation of the symbolic nation did not include any ethnic minorities, indicating their absence in the public sphere. It can be argued that this situation not only limited the reflection of society as a pluralistic formation but also prevented it from becoming one by restricting diverse and different representations of and discourses about the society.

In 2003, as the borders opened to public crossings, the news media failed to articulate non-nationalistic identities. Furthermore, they proved themselves to be nationalizing institutions. In 2010, as the process towards a settlement in Cyprus continues, holding the promise of new social imaginings, the need for new re-articulations and conceptualizations of nation and national identity is more pressing than ever, highlighting the role of the media in either facilitating or hindering these new expressions of identity.

## Notes

1. In an interview on Kıbrıs FM radio Denктаş denied having said that the only true Cypriots are wild donkeys in Cyprus. He explained that it was the Greek Cypriot Archbishop Makarios who had used that expression in a news interview and that he only repeated the story at a conference. For further details see *Kıbrıs* (2005).
2. In this research I will use the terms Turkish-born or Turkish-origin citizens not to describe their ethnicity but their country of origin.

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