

ETHNIC IDENTITY FORMATION OF THE KURDISH IMMIGRANTS IN THE NORTHERN PART OF CYPRUS: The Impact of Ethnicity and Social *Otherization*

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Kurdish Immigrants in the northern part of Cyprus

- * The number of the population is unknown
- * Ethnic group is not a common concept in the northern part of Cyprus – “settler population”
“immigrant population”
- * No immigration policy
- * official understanding: “every immigrant came from Turkey is accepted as Turk”

Kurdish Immigrants in the Northern part of Cyprus

1975-80s with the first wave

- It is argued that 20% migrants who came with first wave were Kurdish population
- Mostly migrated because of the oppression in Turkey
- Economic and Social benefits
- Settled in specific neighborhoods and villages : Karpaz region, Bostancı (Zodeia) and some small villages in Morphou and Mesarya Region
- Acquired citizenship

Labour migrants during 1990s.

- Mostly settled in Nicosia walled city, Famagusta walled city and open parts of Varosha
- Not always attained citizenship

Methodology of the Research

- * 2nd generation Kurdish people, who were born and grew up in the northern part of Cyprus
- * How this group see their ethnic identity with the respect to the influence of group identification and stigmatization in the Turkish Cypriot society?

Sample:

- * Age range 20 - 38
- * both surveys and participant interviews
- * citizens
- * mostly born in the northern part of Cyprus
- * majority of the parents are from Muş, other are from Eastern Anatolia (Diyarbakır, Kars..)

Ethnic Identity as socially constructed identity

- * constructed through social relations and interactions
- * not static
- * a dynamic process

“Ethnic identity is a major feature of social structure, everyday interactions, self-understanding, transnational network, political debates and conflict around the world” ¹

Indicators of Ethnic Identification:

A. Ethnic Identity as a socially constructed identity :

- a. Self-identification
- b. Groupness
- c. Social Boundaries

B. Otherization:

- a. Stigmatization
- b. Stigma Internalization

Self-identification

To which population group do you consider yourself as a part?

- Cypriot
- Kurdish
- Turkish-Kurd
- Cypriot-Kurd
- don't know
- other _____
- I don't want to answer this question

Population Group	Percentage of Responses
Cypriot-Kurd	45.9 %
Cypriot	2.7 %
Kurdish	37.8 %
Turkish-Kurd	10.8%

(surplus value: 2.7%)

Self-identification

- 73 % of the respondents agree that they feel tightly connected to the Kurdish community in Cyprus
- Imagine that a Cypriot asks you 'where do you come from' what would be your answer?
 - 59.5% of the respondents identified themselves as Kurdish.
 - Data show that the same percentage of respondents (32.4%) answered Turkey and Kurdistan
 - 27% of respondents answered Cyprus
- Belonging to Cypriot identity

“There is a gap between home and outside; when you are outside, at school at work...etc. you pretend like a Cypriot, but it is different at home.”

“I have different relations at home and the outside. I pretend like a Cypriot when I am out, so I am like a Cypriot. However, when I am at home I start to live like a Kurd, unconsciously. So, you can be a Cypriot on the street, but when you come home your Kurdish identity comes into prominence. My mother can't speak Turkish, so I have to speak with her in the Kurdish language. You have interaction only with the Kurdish people, so you prefer to speak in Kurdish and live with the Kurdish culture. But, when you are out, you find yourself in a different culture and start to behave differently when you are in that environment...”

Groupness and Social Boundaries

- * Ethnic groups are social groups result of the self-identification within the group and the external definitions
- * boundaries are highly visible in Turkish Cypriot Society
- * Belonging to a specific group, sharing common values and culture
- * Culture is a significant component in making ethnic distinctions and maintaining boundaries however, entire social structure is also influential
- * In north part of Cyprus – Kurdish population is categorized as migrants not as ethnic group
- * Authorities try to assimilate them as Turks
- * Highly influenced from policies in Turkey
- * This categorization cause a **group formation as a reaction**

Groupness and Social Boundaries

Statements and Questions	Percentage of Agreement
I find it important that my children learn Kurdish Language	100 %
Did your parents celebrate Kurdish holidays?	91.9 %
Do you celebrate Kurdish holidays?	91.9 %
Do you identify yourself with Kurdish culture?	91.9 %
While growing up, was Cypriot culture part of your everyday life?	86.4 %
At home we mostly speak Kurdish.	78.3 %
While growing up, was Kurdish culture part of your everyday life?	48.6 %
I don't speak any Kurdish Language.	13.5 %

Groupness and Social Boundaries

- only 1 participant no difference between the labour migrants (started to migrate during 1990s) and settled population.
- majority of the interviewees do not identify themselves with the labor migrants who came to the island after the 1990's.
 - non-educated
 - unqualified individuals started to migrate to the northern part of Cyprus after the 1990's
 - restricted work opportunities
 - adaptation problems

Groupness and Social Boundaries

One of the respondents made the following statement,

“We used to sleep without locking our doors and windows when we first came to the island, just like the Cypriots did. There was a secure environment on the island. Afterwards, people who have economic and social problems started to come to the island, and they did not adapt to these conditions. I understand them. It is not their fault because they are non-educated and work with lower salaries without social security. Non-educated people can do everything, theft, crime and so on... But we adapted to Cypriot culture... my children were born here and they are educated. Newcomers can't adapt to Cypriot culture. There is unemployment in this country, and this population has restricted the work opportunities in the island.”

Groupness and Social Boundaries

- cultural differences with Turkish Cypriots

“Kurdish people are more connected to their traditional values and customs...”

“Cypriots are relax people...”

“The family ties are weak for Cypriots. There is no respect to the elderly family members...”

“Cypriot people live more individually. In a way it is a good thing, they have more freedom from us, however they have weak family relations...”

- Reference to the space
- Have networks with Kurdish people outside Cyprus

Stigmatization and External Identification

- * constructed and naturalized categories for persons and groups
- * labeling, negative stereotyping , separation and discrimination
- * separation of “us” from “them” by describing other group as a threat
- * migrants from Turkey as demographic danger
- * anti-migrant attitude

- * **perceived discrimination in daily life , at school and at work**

Perception of Discrimination

Statement	Agreement %
I sometimes feel discriminated by the Cypriots.	62.15 %
I often feel that others categorize me as a “Kurd”.	53.74 %
I suffer from discrimination in the labor market.	32.42 %
I feel often left out by the Cypriots.	18.91 %
People speak negatively about Kurds at my school.	63.10 %
As a Kurd, I feel completely accepted by my Cypriot classmates.	74.10 %
My teachers, as the Cypriot students, treat me the same way.	74.10 %
I am discriminated at school.	31.25 %
A Kurd has to work twice as hard as a Cypriot person to achieve the same result.	77.15 %
Kurds have the same chances for promotion as Cypriots in my work place.	67.10 %
As a Kurd, I feel completely accepted by my colleagues.	53.10 %
I am discriminated at work.	20.14 %

Learnt and constructed through social interaction:

“We learned that we’re Kurdish at school. Before we started school there were no differences. Everybody was speaking Kurdish, living in the same way. When I first started going to school, I began to realize that I am different from other children. Every Monday morning, we had to declare our belonging to the ‘Turkish Nation’ with a *prayer*, which started with the words, ‘I am a Turk. I am right. I am hard-working...’ With these words, I began to question my identity, asking my family who we really are.”

“There are always problems. Cypriots says ‘Cyprus belong to Cypriots;’ so, I am discriminated from this group since my family came from Turkey. On the other hand, Turkish people say that ‘Turkey belongs to Turks and Kurdish people are separatist’ and they also don’t accept us because we are Kurdish. So, what should I do now? Where should I say my homeland is?”

Stigmatization and External Identification

- respondents are stigmatized by Turkish Cypriot Society because they are immigrants from Turkey (türkiyeli göçmen)
- It is mostly the other migrants from Turkey are the ones that stigmatized this population because of their Kurdish identity
- These are all trigger of the *belongingness problem* among this population and increase the emphasis on *Kurdishness* in self-identifications.
- Negative social identity causes stronger in-group relations .
- The respondents identified themselves as Kurdish because it is an undesirable identity that is under repression.

Final Remarks

- Kurdish population in the northern part of Cyprus, identity formation processes are made up of self-identification of individuals, which are highly influenced by internalization of group values, social boundaries and stigma internalization.
- Data showed that this population has a strong ethnic identification of its *Kurdishness*.
- There is a level of groupness in Turkish Cypriot society
- **Culture** (usually defined as traditions and customs by the respondents) and **language** are significant factors that maintain boundaries between groups.
- The interviews show that the stigma internalization creates a problem of belongingness among the Kurdish population and this situation strengthens the emphasis on Kurdishness.
- Reference to the place of birth and acculturation as a strategy in order to get rid of the negative effects of otherization towards immigrants from Turkey, especially to distinguish themselves from newcomers who came after the 1990s.

References

- ¹ **Verkuyten, M.** (2005) *The Social Psychology of Ethnic Identity*. Hove: Psychology Press.

Thank you ...