

SETTLEMENT, DEMOGRAPHY, AND POLITICS IN NORTH CYPRUS

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Politically Motivated Migration:
The case of Turkish immigration to northern Cyprus

By

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Introduction

- In the literature, ‘**political migration**’ has usually been associated with forced migrations including categories such as refugees, displaced persons, asylum seekers etc.
- The case of northern Cyprus, however, seems to represent a distinct category where ‘politically motivated migration’ is a result of a combination of domestic policies of the host country (north Cyprus) and foreign policy objectives of the home country (Turkey).

Introduction

- Organized population transfers from Turkey to the northern part of Cyprus started in 1975 following the division of the island in 1974 and lasted few years. The flow continued afterwards though not in an organized manner.
- Since 1974, the increasing number of Turkish immigrants and their influence in politics has become a sensitive and controversial issue both at intra-communal and inter-communal level of politics in Cyprus.

Introduction

- While this has led to a fear of assimilation among a large portion of Turkish Cypriots, it provoked the Greek Cypriots who see these immigrants as settlers, to accuse Turkey of following a policy of colonization.
- For their part, particularly second and third generation immigrants are facing an identity crisis for being in limbo between Turkishness and (Turkish-) Cypriotness.
- Neither of these concerns have been seriously dealt with by the Turkish Cypriot authorities as they lacked a coherent 'migration policy' and rather adopt a policy of muddling through... The result is a division within the society and mixed reactions to migration.

Introduction

This paper classifies the reactions of the host country society under 3 categories:

- (1) clientelist reaction, which sees immigration from a nationalistic-opportunistic perspective;
- (2) protectionist/defensive reaction, which sees immigration as a threat to the Turkish-Cypriot identity and political stability; and
- (3) legalist reaction, which sees immigration as a human rights issue.



Main Argument

- The paper argues that a distinct policy of ‘clientelism’ of the host country (northern Cyprus) which overlaps with the foreign policy objectives of the home country (Turkey) which promoted Turkish migration to northern Cyprus, has been the dominant reaction.
- In the rest of the presentation, I’ll touch upon the history and dynamics of immigration and elaborate on the reactions.

History and dynamics of immigration in northern Cyprus

We can talk about three waves of immigration :

- The first wave was initiated through a secret protocol between the Turkish Cypriot and Turkish governments.
- The methods and motives of this flow resembled the Ottoman migration policy, *sürgün*, which was a 'post-conquest arrangement' aiming at transforming the population of the newly captured territories by settling Muslim subjects from Anatolia to enable the Ottoman rulers to consolidate their political control.

History and dynamics of immigration in northern Cyprus

- Especially in 1975 organized groups of Turkish families from specific villages in Turkey were transferred to specific villages evacuated by the Greek-Cypriot residents in the northern part of Cyprus. This first wave was completed in few years.
- It is important to note that this was not just a temporary measure to address “labor shortage” in the northern part of Cyprus as sometimes claimed.
- These migrants were encouraged to settle permanently, settlement process was arranged collectively, and the migrants were allocated Greek Cypriot land and houses.



History and dynamics of immigration in northern Cyprus

- Moreover, migration was not based on individual initiative but rather a top down political decision.
- Furthermore, the migrants were not only given economic incentives but also granted citizenship.
- Given this, it is safe to argue that the first wave immigration aimed at providing ethnic-religious homogeneity in the northern Cyprus.

History and dynamics of immigration in northern Cyprus

- The second wave of Turkish migration took place in the period of 1980-1999. This was not promoted by offering economic incentives or citizenship yet it can be argued that it was facilitated by some legal arrangements between the two governments such as Labor Force Agreement in 1987, and passport free travel agreement signed in 1991.
- The third wave of immigration started in 2000's and continued to the present day. This wave differs from the first two in the sense that the main driving force is economic.

Social and Political Reactions: Clientelistic Reaction

Following the geographical division of the island in 1974, the northern part of Cyprus was ruled for three decades by governments dominated by right-wing political parties i.e. the National Unity Party (Ulusal Birlik Partisi, UBP) and its splinter party Democratic Party (Demokrat Parti, DP), whose main distinguishing characteristic is their preference for the continuation of the status quo in the island.

While, the pro-reunification left approached the migration policy of Denktaş with suspicion and opposed it, these parties actively supported the flow of migrants from Turkey.

Social and Political Reactions: Clientelistic Reaction

- Yet, if we put aside a small minority who were ideologically committed to the idea of the sameness of the “Turks of Cyprus” and the mainland Turks, looking from the perspective of the ruling nationalist elite, the immigrant/settler population was nothing but a clientele or a natural vote base against the parties in favor of the reunification of the island, which would be remembered when the election period came.
- The threat, “they will put you in boats and send back to Turkey” was regularly used by these parties to dissuade the voters of mainland Turkey origin, from voting for the pro-reunification parties.

Social and Political Reactions: Clientelistic Reaction

In fact, the election periods were only times that the Turkish immigrants had some leverage on these parties.

In every election period, if the UBP is in power (including the current one) the ministry of interior works overtime to grant citizenship to the Turkish citizens so that they could vote for them.

Social and Political Reactions: Clientelistic Reaction

It should be added that the newly emerging Turkish Cypriot economic elites were also in favor of the flow of migration from Turkey because of two obvious reasons.

Firstly, they have provided cheap and abundant labor force and hence boost profits, and secondly they have created additional demand in the domestic market for the goods they produced or imported. It is no wonder that for a very long time, the Turkish Cypriot Chamber of Commerce was a staunch supporter of the UBP governments.

Social and Political Reactions: Protectionist Reaction

The constant Turkish migration to northern Cyprus also stipulated a political reaction implicitly or explicitly aired by the leftist and liberal circles.

This is a protectionist reaction in the sense that migrant groups are seen as a threat on Turkish Cypriot identity and political stability.

According to this view northern Cyprus should adopt European laws and principles to regulate and limit migration.

Social and Political Reactions: Legalist Reaction

- Legalist reaction sees immigration as a human rights issue overlooking the political motives behind it.

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Conclusions

Overall, the policy of granting Turkish migrants the status of citizenship have become one of the most sensitive issues in Turkish Cypriot politics.

The socio-political and cultural differences between the Turkish migrants and the native Turkish Cypriots not only created a *fear of assimilation* or ending up as a minority, but also resulted in an anti-migrant language by which immigrants are depicted as a “physical threat, potential criminals, and carriers of disease” (Hatay,

2008, p.161).

Needless to say, Turkish migrants also have their own grievances against the Turkish Cypriots.



*Thank you for your
attention ...*