

## Communication Across Conflict Lines: The Case of Ethnically Divided Cyprus

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This article explores the dynamics of nationalist communication, or better, of non-communication, between the rival Cypriot ethnic communities. The analysis shows how the protracted ethno-nationalist conflict that has stained the history of the Eastern Mediterranean island of Cyprus has affected, among other things, the process of communication between the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot communities. A number of themes that occupy a central place in the conflict are explored from the vantage point of how each community understands and addresses them as it interacts with the other. The inquiry discloses that the interpretive mental frameworks by which the meaning of words, facts, events, behaviors, and phenomena have been perceived, recalled, understood, and transferred have become culturally and institutionally configured in such a way over the years as to often dissociate and even dismantle the very conditions by which intercommunal communication becomes possible. The article also examines the conditions and prospects of freeing communication from its entrapments in the 'meaning patterns' of ethno-nationalist conflict, particularly in the context of the emerging bi-communal citizen peace movement. It shows how the germinating inter-ethnic dialogue in the spirit of peaceseeing rapprochement is commencing a process of deconstructing the traditional forms of conflictual, nationalist discourse while opening up new vistas of understanding, possibilities, and vision for the future.

### Protracted Nationalist Conflict

The history of ethno-national conflict on the ethnically divided Mediterranean island of Cyprus has decisively marked the communication process between the major stakeholders in the conflict, but most of all, and in a profound way, between the two Cypriot communities, namely, between Greek Cypriots (G/Cs) and Turkish Cypriots (T/Cs). The so-called Green Line, which ethnically divides the capital city of Nicosia, is not so much in itself an obstacle to communication as it is a symbol of a communication problem that goes far deeper than the physical barriers of sandbags and barbed wire.

Any understanding of the complexity of the communication process across the 'great

divide' that separates the G/C and the T/C minds must be preceded by a grasp of the major structural dynamics of the conflict. There are two interrelated parameters that define the framework of the conflict, which in turn effectively conditions the mode of communication between the two sides. These are the longstanding impact of ethnic nationalism as a world- and life-view, and the collective memory specific to the experiences of pain and injury in each community.

As a rule, communication between rival, nationalistically oriented ethnic groups is always divergent, in that the respective frameworks of meaning tend to resist establishing communicative contact with each other. Nationalist world- and life-views are such that they exhibit a certain incapacity in

establishing an overlap of meanings and of points of reference, far enough to initiate genuine dialogue. Their inner logic exhibits a resistance to what Gadamer calls 'the fusion of horizons', the major condition that renders communication and understanding of the past and of other narratives possible (Gadamer, 1975). More specifically, on an intergroup level, nationalist frameworks resist the natural process of communicative interaction by which communicating parties create increasingly an emergent, shared domain of meaning.

The reason for this is not because the frameworks of rival nationalist groups are different, but, paradoxically, because they tend to be identical in their fundamental nature. Nationalism carries a view of 'the nation' that is absolute and sacred in value, mono-ethnic in nature, collectivist and narcissistic in mentality, conflictual in predisposition, and militant in its concept of defense and its means of freedom (Alter, 1994: 5, 20; Gellner, 1994: 65). It conceptualizes society in terms of a single, homogeneous ethnic identity, thus rendering the existence of other ethnic groups in the body social a 'national anomaly' and, in times of conflict, a 'national blemish' that needs to be cleansed. This type of 'imagined community' is couched in an ethnocentric construct of history, highlighted by wars and revolutions, in which national heroes, in their alleged supreme actions and sacrifice, assume national immortality as 'the nation' exhibits through them its infallible record of glory and eternal grandeur (Anderson, 1995; Hobsbawm, 1994: 76–82). In all this, the value, history, and identity of 'the nation' are defined in conflictual juxtaposition to 'an enemy' (Ignatieff, 1995; Kedourie, 1994: 50). Hence, to the degree that two or more ethnic groups, in any mixed society, espouse nationalism as a world- and life-view, the prospect of coexistence becomes grim, as communication across ethnic lines is ruled out *a priori*.

These features of nationalism have

historically marked both the G/C and the T/C communities (Loizos, 1998; Worsley & Kitromilites, 1979). The G/C agenda has been disclosed in the relentless attempt to unite the island with Greece (*enosis*), or otherwise claim Cyprus as a purely Hellenic island. The T/C agenda, supported by Turkey, has been revealed in the pursuit of the ethnic partition of the island (*taksim*). While coexisting in an ethnically mixed society, the historical ambition of each side to establish its own pure, mono-ethnic state led to unprecedented violence and the physical separation of G/Cs and T/Cs in 1974. Observers of the Cyprus phenomenon have noted that while the separation of people by natural barriers, such as rivers, seas, and mountains, is understandable, the separation that occurs along artificial lines of hostility is horrifying. For here, one is stunned by the fact that 'borders are not just geographic barriers, but that they are the enemy of talk, of interaction, of the flow of ideas, in short, they are the opponents of communication' (Gumpert & Drucker, 1998: 237).

Nationalist conflict in Cyprus has brought with it a legacy of pain and suffering resulting from the violence. The memory of pain, entirely different in content and references for each community, constitutes the second major parameter in the structure of the Cyprus conflict that has affected and continues to affect communication between the two sides.

For the T/Cs, the painful memories concentrate mainly on the period 1963–74. Their experiential recollection concerns the constrained, underdeveloped life in their enclaves. In terrifying vividness, T/Cs remember the repeated defeats in bloody conflicts with the G/Cs and Greek troops, and the loss of human life that appeared staggering in the eyes of their community as a consolidated numerical minority. The collective memory of T/Cs is marked by the missing persons (483 T/Cs over 32 G/Cs in

1964), and generally by the feeling that for years they were living under conditions of perpetual siege (Denktash, 1982; Oberling, 1982; Volkan, 1979: 18–25, 119).

For the G/Cs, on the other hand, the collective historical memory and experience of injustice originate mainly from the more concentrated but inundating events of 1974, with the Greek coup d'état and the Turkish military intervention. The tragic memories refer to the unprecedented loss of human life, to the mass uprooting from their homes, to the irreplaceable loss of property, to the refugees and the missing persons. Within days of the Turkish military invasion, 200,000 G/Cs became refugees in their own country. Casualties, many of them civilians, were estimated at about 2,850 persons. The number of missing persons reached 1,619, while about 20,000 G/Cs initially remained trapped in the Karpas area, under Turkish military control. Thousands of G/Cs were taken to prisons in Turkey; some of these prisoners were later exchanged for T/Cs who had been captured by G/C and Greek forces in the south. The fate of those G/Cs who were left in Turkey remains to this day a dark mystery, haunting the memories of their families and of the G/C community in general.

Furthermore, the pain incurred by the loss of life and property was compounded by a decisive shattering of the G/C nationalist aspiration of union with Greece. To the degree that nationalism breeds and sustains a collective, narcissistic psychology of exaggerated and absolutized political objectives, the ending of any prospect of fulfilling such objectives invariably results in an equally accentuated experience of loss. Following the civil strife within the G/C community, the Turkish invasion left the G/Cs with a profoundly deflated sense of ethno-national pride. In an unprecedented manner, the events inflicted on the G/Cs what political psychoanalysis refers to as 'narcissistic injury' (Volkan, 1979).

## Communication Between Perspectives in Conflict

### *The Dialectical Process of Non-Communication*

Over the decades, this dynamic has led to an essential form of alienation that has institutionalized the interaction between the two communities, psychologically, intellectually, and culturally, into what may be called a dialectical process of non-communication. The phenomenon entails a dialectical process inasmuch as it involves sustained and perpetual cycles of 'communicative' interactions between the two sides, mainly through the official positions of each side and the mass media. And it entails non-communication insofar as the more the two sides interact, the less they understand each other, and consequently the more they frustrate each other. This is fully demonstrated in Papadakis's analysis of published materials prepared by the Public Information Office of each side. It is shown how each side resorts to the attribution of evil intentions to the other, by analyzing and interpreting events through the absolutist notions of the respective nationalist frameworks and related stereotypes (Papadakis, 1998).

### *The Process of Non-Communication Around Phenomena and Their Meaning*

The most obvious points around which communication discord has been occurring are those that concern the references to the role of the Turkish army, the status of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), and the status of the Republic of Cyprus. Whereas the G/C side perceives and refers to the Turkish army as an invasion and occupation force, the T/Cs see it and refer to it as a peace force that conducted a peace operation. The Turkish and T/C side addresses and considers the TRNC as a historically justified, and hence legitimate, independent state, while it views the Republic of Cyprus

as an entity that has ceased to exist as sovereign over the entire island. On the other hand, the G/Cs and Greece see the TRNC as an illegitimate breakaway state, and the Republic of Cyprus as the sole legitimate state structure whose territory extends over the whole island.

Traditionally, any attempted direct dialogue around these key issues, formal or informal, has always led to a decisive breakdown of communication. Though the above issues reflect the communication problem in its most obvious form by reason of the conflict, there are numerous other matters where the communication process and the ambiguities of meaning therein are much more subtle. Some examples may suffice to illustrate the issue in more concrete terms.

When the G/Cs, through their official positions and public political culture, claim the right of the refugees to return to their homes (which surely constitutes a human right), the T/Cs interpret it as an attempt by the G/Cs to take back everything for themselves and uproot them completely, leaving them helpless and without shelter. Rooted in the T/C experiences of the 1960s, this perception is reinforced and sealed by the traditional G/C nationalism, which espoused the ideal of a completely Hellenized island. The T/C fear of the prospect of ethnic displacement has been such that it overshadows the ability to acknowledge that, on the human plane, the G/C claim does in fact concern a human right that needs to be acknowledged and addressed.

On the other hand, when the T/Cs demand recognition of the TRNC, the G/Cs tend to attribute it exclusively to an arrogant attempt to legitimize the status quo through the might of arms, in a flagrant violation of justice. Moreover, T/C nationalism, with its notion of a mono-ethnic state carved out of the island, has been totally alarming to G/Cs, thereby entirely concealing from their eyes certain fundamental human realities of the

T/C community. In addition, the association by G/Cs of the cause of their own pain with the agenda of T/C nationalism has had the effect of preventing the G/Cs from perceiving and reflecting on the fact that behind the T/C claim for state recognition, which in itself is surely illegitimate, lies also a past traumatic experience of existential fear which triggers a deep need for security and collective identity. It is precisely this feeling among T/Cs that has been usurped for years by Turkish nationalism in both Cyprus and Turkey, and this in turn has fed and sustained Greek nationalism by provoking the G/Cs to countervailing reactions and interpretations. This type of interaction has had the effect of locking the two sides into a vicious cycle of non-communication.

Over time, the precipitation of events, experiences, and cumulative meanings in a relationship of protracted conflict, particularly under the impact and shadow of nationalism, may pose communication problems even to the meaning of otherwise commonly understood terms. I have witnessed numerous meetings between G/Cs and T/Cs where the problem of refugees was the main issue of discussion. However, in all cases it transpired that in the very communication process, beneath the interactions, there was a crucial discrepancy in the meaning that each side attributed to the word 'refugee'.

Though a number of T/Cs who were present had been refugees twice, and some even three times during the troubles between 1960 and 1974, they spoke of the refugee problem and experience in a mode of strong emotional disengagement. When the G/Cs spoke of the refugee issue, which in their case had been a one-time occurrence in 1974, they did so with considerable pain and potent emotional content.

The detached way in which T/Cs referred to their experience as refugees gave the G/Cs the distinctive impression that the T/Cs were completely indifferent to the G/C plight

following their displacement by the Turkish army. In the mind of the G/Cs, the attitude of the T/Cs in reference to refugees was seen as a confirmation of the old aim of T/C nationalism to ethnically partition the island. On the other hand, accompanied by a passionate demand for the return to their homes in the north, the G/C reference to refugees was perceived by T/Cs as a great threat, behind which lay the original G/C nationalist notion of Cyprus as a completely Hellenic island.

Given the divergent historical experiences of the two communities and their encapsulation in nationalist frameworks, the two sides attributed completely different meanings to the word 'refugee'. For the T/Cs, to be a refugee meant living in one's home under conditions of extreme danger, fully exposed to the enemy's nationalist agenda for complete territorial control, and being compelled to leave one's home in exchange for areas of safety and security. This, in fact, was the experience of T/Cs from 1963 to 1974. For T/Cs, therefore, being a refugee means leaving one's home in order to go to a safe place. Hence the detached way in which they spoke of the refugee problem.

For the G/Cs, on the other hand, being a refugee refers to the experience of living a life of safety and prosperity and then being forced to leave one's home overnight, and, having lost all one's belongings, being placed under conditions of complete uncertainty, insecurity, and exposure to physical danger in the face of an advancing army. This, in effect, was the experience of the G/Cs in 1974 with the invasion of Cyprus by the Turkish military. Given the Turkish nationalist objective of creating a geographical ethnic space for T/Cs by cleansing it completely of G/Cs, the word 'refugee', in the G/C mind, acquires a meaning far more awesome and disturbing than that given by T/Cs. A careful reading of personal accounts of T/Cs and G/Cs regarding their respective experiences

and relationship to the land brings to the fore this differentiated memory of what 'refugee' means (Hadjipavlou-Trigeorgis, 1998: 251).

Thus understood, it becomes clear how the process of communication between the parties, even in the use of exactly the same words, may become so skewed by its entanglement in the matrix of the conflict that it effectively breaks down. One can see how the same word comes to have a considerably different meaning and reality for each side! The process of mutual non-communication thereby sets in as an aspect of a protracted conflict relation.

At the formal political level, the difference in the two approaches has been reflected and highlighted in a verbal interchange through the mass media between the two sides on 8 and 9 February 2002. In the midst of ongoing, top-level negotiations, the leader of the T/C side, Rauf Denktaş, stated that the issue is not one of G/C refugees returning to the north, but a matter of property exchanges and/or compensation settlements (Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation, 2002). Referring to the decision of the European Court of Human Rights, 10 March 2001, the G/C side, through the Attorney General, asserted that the refugee issue is in fact a central problem of the violation of the human rights of the G/Cs, who are prevented by the Turkish army from returning to their homes (European Court of Human Rights, 2001).

Another example of the process reflecting a mutual failure to communicate centers around the respective meanings attributed, since 1974, to the T/C attempts to engage in international trade and the G/C attempts to block any and all such efforts by T/Cs. For the T/Cs, exporting from the northern, Turkish-controlled Cyprus has implied a necessity for economic survival, whereas, for the G/Cs, it has meant nothing more than an attempt to trade stolen goods and property. Communication on this issue has always been most difficult, leading to an impasse every time.

The matter came clearly to the fore in relation to the European market. The G/Cs, insisting that exports from northern Cyprus entailed exploitation of their own properties, which had been taken from them by force, appealed to the European Court for a ruling that would ban products originating from northern Cyprus from being traded in the European market. In the G/C mind, the central concern was to curb the de facto results of Turkish militant nationalism and its aim of making a part of the island entirely Turkish. When in 1994 the European Court ruled that the exports from northern Cyprus did not carry the appropriate documentation to meet the standard legal requirements for the European market, the T/Cs interpreted the event as yet another attempt by the G/Cs to break them economically, and to reduce them to second-class citizens, perpetuating thereby the economic supremacy of the G/Cs. In the T/C mind, the event was reminiscent of the ethnic majoritarianism traditionally imposed by G/C nationalism in its claim to power over the entire island. In this sense, the T/Cs experienced the decision of the European Court as a deplorable continuation of the economic embargo they suffered in the enclaves during the 1960s, only this time on a grander scale, with the Europeans on the side of the G/Cs.

Conditioned by the protracted nature of nationalist conflict, the mode of communication around the issue of property rights and trade has obstructed the G/Cs from understanding that, while Turkey has occupied northern Cyprus through military force and has certainly violated G/Cs' rights to their property, the T/Cs still need to survive economically, and that this ought to be seriously addressed in any relevant dialogue between the two sides. The T/Cs, on the other hand, while focusing on the economic survival of their own community, have tended to block out of the communication process the fact that the property rights of the G/Cs need to

be addressed, if any constructive interaction between the two sides is to take place.

In the final analysis, G/C communication with T/Cs over the economic plight of the T/C community, and T/C communication with G/Cs over the property rights of the G/Cs, have come to be framed by the conflict in such a way as to never meet in a common communicative framework to render meaningful exchange possible. Needless to say, persistent and in-depth dialogue around issues is indispensable for any movement toward a settlement. The challenge therefore lies in strategizing ways to achieve a shift from antithetical modes of nationalist communication to a minimum, common communicative framework that can encompass and bring into the realm of dialogue the major concerns of both sides.

### *The Process of Non-Communication Through the National Symbols*

The dialectical process of non-communication also holds true in the public display of national symbols by each side. Along with the flag of the Republic of Cyprus, the G/Cs have always flown the national flag of Greece. Similarly, next to the flag of the TRNC, the T/Cs have always flown the flag of Turkey. However, it is the national flags of the respective motherlands that have actually commanded the collective passions of the two Cypriot communities. It is with the Greek and Turkish flags that G/C and T/C nationalisms have traditionally identified, as it is in relationship with the motherlands that the concept of national unity has been historically developed in each community.

From an objective historical vantage point, the two national flags of Greece and Turkey, and all that is associated with them, have undermined and continue to undermine the state sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus. Subjectively, however, the symbolism of the national flags, for each

community, summarizes and represents meanings and experiences directly opposite to those attributed to them by the other side. For the G/Cs, and especially for those with explicit nationalist tendencies, the Greek flag has always constituted a symbol of national pride, glory, grandeur, collective identity, and ethnic purity. The equivalent national symbol of the T/Cs, the Turkish flag, has always been viewed by the G/Cs as a symbol of shame, barbarism, and darkness. Since 1974 in particular, in the eyes of the G/Cs, the Turkish flag has contained the meanings of invasion and occupation, of missing persons, of illegality, of injustice, of violence, of partition and Turkification of part of Cyprus. In a bi-communal encounter, a young G/C articulated the matter quite succinctly when he stated, 'I often go for a walk along the "green line" in Nicosia, I see the Turkish flag and I feel insecure. I struggle with past memories and present realities' (Hadjipavlou-Trigeorgis, 1998: 251).

For the T/Cs, on the other hand, the Turkish flag has generally embodied a symbol of collective protection, of salvation and support from the motherland. It has functioned as a reference to the guarantee of their physical security by the all-powerful Turkish state, and has been a reminder of the condition that secures the separate collective identity of the T/Cs. In the eyes of the T/Cs, the Greek flag, on the other hand, has been a symbol of domination, degradation, oppression, siege, and violence. It has represented for them their negative experiences of the 1960s, the backwardness, the deprivation, the perpetual containment in the enclaves, the uncertainty, the missing persons, the attempted Hellenization of the entire island, and the traditional G/C nationalist aim of unifying Cyprus with Greece. All these meaning-patterns of the two sides, which come into conflict around the national symbols, have been derived from

a series of diachronic associations of subjective historical memories on the one hand, and of nationalist stereotypes encompassing and fossilizing these memories on the other.

The fact that the national flag of each community is the flag of another country, distinct from Cyprus, complicates the meanings even further. For each side, its national flag turns out to be a symbol of pride and ethno-national unity beyond the specific state entity it represents. However, each side has always considered the presence in Cyprus of the national flag of the other community as a symbol of unacceptable claims over the island by a foreign state that simultaneously supports the unacceptable positions of the corresponding Cypriot community. Ever since the rise of nationalism on the island, even after independence and more so in 1974 and thereafter, the G/Cs have viewed the flying of the flag of Turkey by the T/Cs as an abominable symbol of foreign intervention and occupation. But the T/Cs have perceived the flying of the flag of Greece by the G/C community in exactly the same way, namely, as an extension of the sovereignty of Greece over the island of Cyprus. These facts reveal a distinctive impasse in the process of communication that is mediated through the national symbols that have been exhibited by each community over the decades. Though they are held tacitly, the interpretations and meanings attributed to the national flags by each side have been both intense and potent in content. In this sense, the continued presence of the Greek and Turkish flags in the G/C and T/C communities constitute symbols that represent as well as preserve the Cyprus conflict.

At a deeper level, this process of mutual non-communication betrays a form of hypocrisy that is generally born within the schismatic psychological make-up of nationalism, and the personality that expresses it. This inner schism in the nationalist mind can be illustrated as follows:

While the national flag of 'my own' ethnic group self-evidently constitutes a necessary, rightful, and inalienable symbol of national pride and justification, the national flag of the 'other' ethnic group is clearly and essentially an unacceptable phenomenon, a symbol of shame, abomination, and under-handedness. This antinomy reflects a double standard in how the nationalist mind interprets national symbols. Conditioned by a nationalistically laden history, it is derived from a collective pattern of perception whereby each side, while gazing with uncritical familiarity at its own national symbols, is disturbed and repelled by the national symbols of the other side. The massive Turkish and T/C flags painted on the side of the Pentadaktilos mountain range, observable for over 20 miles into the G/C south, the huge flags covering public buildings in northern Nicosia, as well as the flying of the Turkish flag during military parades, are perceived by G/Cs as a flagrant violation of justice, while their own Greek national symbols are seen as natural. On the other hand, the indiscriminate flying of the Greek flag on Greek Orthodox Church buildings (usually alongside the anachronistic flag of the Byzantine Empire), the presence of the Greek flag on numerous public buildings, and even in the offices of certain ministers, together with the flag of the Republic of Cyprus, are perceived by the Turkish side as a persistent attempt by the G/Cs to assert the Hellenic identity of Cyprus reminiscent of the nationalist goal of *enosis*.

This non-verbal, but powerful and ever-present, exchange of meanings through national symbols results in the perpetual undermining and often annihilation of the conditions necessary for genuine communication. When we grasp the national symbols, not in isolation and in the abstract, as nationalism does, but in the context of the relationship between the two communities, we see the national flags functioning as

symbols of conflict, threat, and militarism. This reality, which supersedes any abstractly attributed meanings, was once revealed in the innocent observation of a 6-year-old boy, who upon seeing his national flag in a military parade, turned to his father and said, 'Look father, the flag of war!' Here, the coincidence of symbolic meanings and nationalist rivalry became complete!

### *The Process of Non-Communication Through the Mass Media*

Critics of the type of propaganda disseminated through the means of mass communication argue that the phenomenon not only thrives under conditions of protracted conflict, but that it also generates an effective, general uniformity of thought within the rival groups concerned; a uniformity that is precipitated around the major axis of the dispute (Ellul, 1973; Orwell, 1949).

Interestingly, many have argued that, even irrespective of their specific content, the very structure of the mass media tends to facilitate the establishment of generalized stereotypes (McLuhan, 1964: 24, 32; Meyrowitz, 1985). In the case of Cyprus, under the pervasive condition of protracted conflict, the long-standing tradition of populist nationalism and the advent of the mass media have naturally joined forces, decisively shaping the public communication landscape of the island. The stereotypes of traditional nationalism, which have emerged in their fury again and again, have been easily sustained and revived, partly because in the up-to-date systems of mass communication they found the perfect media through which they become entrenched and proliferate as a central element of public culture. Apparently, throughout the history of the Cyprus conflict, nationalism found its own stereotypical patterns of thought to be quite congruous with the *modus operandi* of the mass means of communication.

In Cyprus, the nationalist propaganda

that has been either consciously or indirectly assembled and disseminated over the years by the means of mass communication has transformed the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations rooted in the history of the conflict, from scattered suggestive tendencies, from implicit and individual references, to collectivized, crystallized stereotypes and explicit meanings that in turn have come to integrate and condition public culture (Ellul, 1973: 34–38).

The fact that since 1964 (and more so after 1974) the two communities have hardly had any direct daily interpersonal or group contact means that interaction and communication between the two sides have been almost entirely restricted to the abstract domain of the mass media. Communication has thereby been occurring solely in the form of an impersonal exchange of messages and stereotypes, through what, in time, have become standardized, mutual accusations, characterizations, self-victimization, and a rhetoric based on one-sided, skewed, and often even unfounded nationalist assumptions (Papadakis, 1998).

The specific language that is standardized in and through the means of mass communication, especially each time there is a re-emergence of overt nationalism, is generally the language that conditions the content of public culture. Consequently, the way of thinking that is associated with this kind of language binds, and often muzzles, anyone who enters the public realm. In the G/C community, this condition has been occurring mostly spontaneously, and, at times, with a more or less subtle form of state intervention, depending on which party is in government. More often than not, censorship in the G/C community has been indirect through the nationalism permeating the general culture, which inevitably cuts across party lines.

By contrast, in the T/C community, the style of nationalist censorship has been

conducted more through direct control or supervision and even active intervention by the administrative authorities, securing thereby a more intense, immediate, and substantive reinforcement of nationalism. Even though there have been non-nationalist voices, such as that of the newspaper *Avrupa*, questioning the traditional, nationalist mentality and policies characterizing the T/C administration, the historical momentum of nationalism is still the dominant force that one must reckon with as it is directly linked to the power structure of the status quo (Ozgur, 2000).

A glance at the media landscape in northern Cyprus, particularly when one scrutinizes the media originating from the north, reveals a high degree of 'government' control and a complete 'state' monopoly when it comes to television broadcasting (Gumpert & Drucker, 1998: 240–1). There are no privately run television stations broadcasting from the north. The only additions to the electronic media landscape are transmissions from Turkey. The press, on the other hand, has been exclusively linked to political parties.

Hence, while in the case of the T/C community, nationalism in the media culture has been a direct extension of centralized statism and party politics, in the case of the G/C community, nationalism in the media has been occurring as a 'free' enterprising mass culture, which simultaneously has been reflected in public political life. The dialectical process of non-communication between the two communities has been taking place through the interaction between the dominant cultural nationalism of the G/Cs, on the one hand, and the dominant statist nationalism of the T/Cs, on the other.

What is interesting, but also tragic for the interest of peace, is that whatever positive experiences of symbiosis and peaceful coexistence between G/Cs and T/Cs may have been inherited, or are even now taking place,

they are restricted to people's private and personal memories. In her philosophical and social critique of totalitarian and fossilizing thinking, Hanna Arendt has repeatedly warned that as the public realm becomes devoid of 'space' for genuine dialogue, and enmeshed into a singular, uniform reality, it gives rise to the prospect of violating and leveling the private realm (Arendt, 1958). Jacques Ellul and others have emphatically stressed the same issue and raised the same concern (Ellul, 1973: 165, 169–171; Meyrowitz, 1985: 16).

This condition is typical of the post-1974 youth. It has been brought to sharp focus in a recent film entitled *Unwitnessed Memories*, in which interviewed youths reflect a schism in their souls and minds as regards their personal relationship to the conflict. Having been raised under ceasefire conditions, in an ethnically segregated society, these youths appeared caught between the inherited nationalist memories and related moral obligations to their ethnic group, on the one hand, and their personal life-experiences on the other, which have no connection to the dark side of the ethnic conflict. In the reflections of the young people, it becomes evident that these two domains are becoming increasingly incongruous, generating a sense of bewilderment, and even guilt, around the fact that the life-perspective they are expected to adopt bears little association with the world they personally experience. In Cyprus, the protracted nature of the conflict, even under ceasefire conditions, has tended to unjustly tax Cypriot youth both psychologically and mentally.

### **Deconstructing Nationalist Non-Communication**

While nationalism weighs down on the collective conscience of the Cypriots as the dominant legacy of their history, neither the G/C nor the T/C community is monolithic

in its stance on nationalist discourse. However, even as one disaggregates each community, differentiating the nationalists from the non-nationalists, the fact remains that the struggle to attain inter-ethnic understanding between the two communities hinges on breaking through the traditional nationalist frameworks that have conditioned political and cultural intercommunal communication in the public realm since the colonial era.

From the analysis of the communication dynamics in Cyprus transpires the fact that there are two major obstacles to opening up the process of communication. The first is constituted by the fact that the cumulative pain resulting from the protracted conflict has closed down historical memory by focusing collective remembrance almost exclusively on the highlighted references to one's own suffering and grievances. The second concerns the fact that, historically, nationalism has sealed the pain of each community into collective mental and cultural frameworks that operate *a priori* through polarized stereotypes of 'us' and 'them', of 'justice' and 'violation', of 'absolute good' and 'absolute evil' (Kizilyurek, 1993). Moreover, the linkage that naturally occurs in ethnonational conflict between the pain of one's own community and nationalism as a closed-ended world- and life-view inevitably stalls communication, preventing thereby the possibility of perceiving and understanding the pain and the grievances of the other side, an acknowledgement that is imperative for orienting dialogue toward a resolution.

Therefore, for genuine communication to open up, it is necessary to pursue strategies and approaches at all levels of interaction that tend to deconstruct the relationship between, on the one hand, the pain and suffering as the human dimension of the conflict, and, on the other hand, the adversarial nationalist frameworks that monopolistically claim and usurp the suffering.

Certainly this is not an easy feat, as it suggests performing a kind of strategic and intellectual neurosurgery on the conflict relationships.

However, in spite of the extraordinary obstacles, there have been a number of approaches and efforts at initiating communication that have achieved precisely this structural disassociation of the distinctive human dimension of the conflict from the inherited nationalism. They concern efforts that have emerged and have been nurtured mainly in the context of the bi-communal citizen-based peace movement that has been on the rise since the early 1990s, almost in direct contrast to the relapsing nationalism of the same period (Hadjipavlou-Trigeorgis, 1998: 259). Assisted by third-party facilitation and support, mainly from the USA and partly from Europe, citizens from both communities have made the conscious decision to become engaged in direct interpersonal communication with 'the enemy'. With the support of the United Nations, and the persistent and continuous interventions of third parties, citizens of the two communities have been able to meet since the early 1990s, both on and off the island, yet not without suspicion, long interruptions, and even ostracization by members of their own communities. Their meetings have been taking place mostly in the buffer zone in the capital city of Nicosia. Following the decision of the European Union not to accept Turkey as a candidate for membership in December 1997, the T/C administration forbade bi-communal contacts for more than a year. But a number of citizens managed to overcome this obstacle either by continuing to communicate through the use of the Internet or by meeting in Pyla, the last bi-communal village adjacent to the British sovereign base of Dhekelia that ended up in the buffer zone following the 1974 troubles.

Using a variety of conflict-resolution methodologies and approaches, through the

intermittent support of third parties, this citizen-based, peace-enhancing effort has initiated, over the years, a great number of activities, ranging from joint workshops on conflict management and conflict resolution, to strategy meetings, to think-tanks on various aspects of the Cyprus problem, to joint social and recreational activities, to development of a common vision. During the first phases of all these activities, 'controlled communication' was employed through specially designed methods of facilitation, so as to manage the conflict and render interaction constructive and sustainable. Through the process, the bi-communal groups have struggled through various critical aspects of the psychological, conceptual, historical, social, and political dimensions of the problem, some of which were not only complex and exceedingly difficult to deal with, but also extremely painful to encounter (Broome, 1997, 1998; Fisher, 1992; Hadjipavlou-Trigeorgis, 1998). However, the structured mode of interaction that effective, third-party facilitation provided restrained the familiar, overwhelming, and paralyzing impact of nationalism on the communication process. This structured process, thereby, gradually allowed the two sides to openly share their particular human dimension of the conflict, namely, the past and present suffering, the grievances, and the sense of injustice that each felt needed to be addressed. The bi-communal peace-seeking groups, which I have observed through active participation, gave rise to a new kind of experiential knowledge reminiscent of the words of Longfellow when he asserted, 'If we could read the secret history of our enemies we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility' (Chattalas, 1984: 95).

It has been noted by outside observers that these bi-communal meetings reveal 'a "coming together" with participants opening up, sharing their mutual feelings of loss and

separation from the entirety of their Cypriot heritage' (Gumpert & Drucker, 1998: 243). As communication matured and interpersonal bonds of friendship and trust started to become established, G/Cs and T/Cs moved to the next level of jointly developing conceptual structures by which a whole range of issues pertaining to the conflict were reframed in an expanded and more inclusive perspective. Higher and deeper levels of awareness were attained as regards, on the one hand, the meaning, structure, and historical complexity of the conflict, and, on the other, possible options, strategies, and directives for rapprochement, including reflections and conceptualizations of realistic paths toward a political settlement. As an active participant and/or facilitator in bi-communal groups for over a decade, I can attest to the repeated statements made by members of both communities expressing their expanded and often fundamentally new understanding of the other side, and subsequently of the Cyprus problem. On a number of occasions, T/Cs stated that for the first time they understood the pain that the G/Cs suffered in 1974 and why the G/Cs have a deep need to have access to the northern part of Cyprus. On the other hand, many G/Cs confessed ignorance and surprise upon finding out that the other community, just like their own, has had its refugees and missing persons (Hadjipavlou-Trigeorgis, 1998). In these encounters, a shift had slowly taken place whereby the traditional pattern of interaction based on 'reified' and 'objectified' images of 'the other' – so inadequate for effective communication – was replaced by a 'dialogic model' of communication (Bakhtin, 1984: 293).

In this process, there occurred a gradual dissociation of the deeper human needs and interests, such as security, identity, community, economic development, and vitality, from the formal, stagnating, nationalistic positions of the two sides. A pattern of com-

munication based on 'relational empathy' started to take effect (Broome, 1993: 103). On this basis, it became possible to address basic human needs in a new light, beyond their imprisonment in traditional nationalism. In this context, there evolved innumerable efforts to develop a joint understanding of civil society, to design citizen-based strategies and actions, to consider alternative modes of power sharing, and to develop a sense of a common vision for the future. In regard to directly addressing the political aspect of the Cyprus problem, the most notable bi-communal effort was made by the Oslo Group and the Harvard Study Group, who generated a set of creative, conflict-resolution ideas providing directives and a general framework for the settlement of the Cyprus problem. Since the late 1990s, the work of both of these groups has been praised by third parties and Cypriot moderates, while fiercely attacked by nationalists who object to the involvement of citizens in such think-tanks.

From the long, arduous, repeated and ever-renewed effort of peace-enhancing bi-communal groups sprang also a plethora of parallel and complementary practical actions and projects, giving both symbolic and concrete expression to peacebuilding as a central factor of social transformation. These activities have effectively enhanced the vision of reconciliation, both across as well as within the ethnic communities (Wolleh, 2001).

In recent years, we have witnessed a significant increase in the number of active bi-communal groups, as well as in the number of citizens showing interest in participating in the rapprochement effort. We have also seen the emergence and establishment of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as a vital element of civil society that was hitherto unknown to Cyprus. As it has gained strength and confidence, the bi-communal peace movement has persistently raised the demand for the 'right to communicate' as an

inseparable element of human rights (Gumpert & Drucker, 1998: 238). But this demand for the right to communicate has acquired significance only because it has been accompanied by the 'will to communicate', as a precondition for peace. In this way, the bi-communal efforts of G/Cs and T/Cs have reinforced and validated the pleas of men like Jean D'Arcy for formalizing the right to communicate within official human rights (D'Arcy, 1979).

Some nationalist critics of the peace movement have argued that the bi-communal meetings in the buffer zone have been in essence artificial. At face value, one can indeed agree. The place of the encounter, the planned and structured process, the methodical features of the facilitation, the conflict-resolution techniques, all are set up as a constructed event. Ironically, however, in the buffer zone, in this neutral, but dead, sphere of no-man's land, this structured, artificial environment created the occasion for members of the two communities to meet and become genuinely engaged with one another. This process eventually gave rise to a new breed of Cypriots. The initial means that were employed may have been artificial, but the direct, personal encounters were real, perhaps more real with respect to grasping the depth and breadth of the Cyprus conflict and the full range of central issues that need to be addressed than the way the average citizen, immersed in the nationalism of his/her community, experiences and understands the problem.

In the buffer zone, G/C and T/C citizens from across the social and political spectrum created, for the first time, a form of 'public space', to use Arendt's term, that was safe and secure enough to engage in hard but genuine dialogue, to express pain, as well as hope, to raise grievances as well as accept responsibilities, to re-evaluate as well as to envision the world anew, to cry as well as to laugh with 'the enemy', to form friendships across the

forbidden line, to dream, plan, and act together for a better future! In this context, the new communication technologies, the Internet and cyberspace in general, have been utilized and integrated by the bi-communal movement into the rapprochement process as peace-promoting instruments. In this regard, the bi-communal movement has moved ahead of the trend identified by analysts in which post-industrial means of communication are seen as a potential aggravator of conflict (Lijphart, 1994: 258). Projects under titles such as 'Technology for Peace' and websites such as <http://www.tech4peace.org> and <http://www.peace-cyprus.org>, as well as the hundreds of e-mail exchanges taking place between peace activists from the two communities, are a testimony of how the bi-communal movement has begun to modify, however slightly, the communication landscape of divided Cyprus (Durduran, 2000).

Paradoxically, for the bi-communal peace movement, the buffer zone, which is nothing other than a dead sociopolitical space, embodying and symbolizing a legacy of hatred and violence, has been transformed not only into a significant springboard for new thinking and action, but also into a lever for exerting a formative influence on the respective communities. No doubt the protracted nature of the conflict and the related nationalism still weigh heavily on Cypriot society. However, in the last analysis, having opened a window of communication in a new peace-seeking framework of meaning, the bi-communal movement has effected, in the respective communities, a partial erosion of public nationalist culture, by gradually infusing into the public domain an alternative vision of Cypriot society. It has created a constituency, however small, providing, for the first time, trans-party and trans-ethnic public legitimacy for those rare political leaders who see the need to move beyond the traditional nationalist approaches to a more

reconciliatory, federally decentralized schema of political symbiosis and settlement. In this sense, the bi-communal peace movement has been giving concrete samples of what the United Nations resolutions on Cyprus have been demanding for more than 37 years.

As a result of the efforts of the bi-communal movement, public opinion is no longer exclusively captive to nationalism. A new approach in communicative interaction, a new mind-set, engaging citizens too, with new analyses and approaches conducive to a peaceful settlement, have, in effect, started to enter public culture. A shifting of the focus of communication from adversarial, nationalist approaches to peace-enhancing visions, strategies, options, and policies has been gradually emerging in the realm of public visibility. Representatives of the citizens' peace movement have been making decisive and increasing contributions to public opinion formation through their presence in the mass media, including the press, radio, and television. Though there is still fierce opposition by nationalists to rapprochement contacts and communication between the two communities, there is clear evidence to suggest that a new generation of citizens, ready to support reconciliation, is on the rise. Moreover, this process of 'citizen diplomacy' on the 'track two' level has also been criss-crossing the official politics of 'track one', not only by reason of opportune contacts, but also by intention and strategy. In this, a considerable array of new ideas on the parameters and possibilities of a solution to the Cyprus problem, incubated by think-tanks of the bi-communal movement, have been silently finding their way into the formal negotiation process.

All the above indicates that strengthening direct, interpersonal contact between the two communities, at all levels of society, constitutes an essential element and catalyst for initiating and developing modes of communication that transcend the traditional

adversarial nationalist frameworks. None of the achievements of the bi-communal peace movement would have been possible without creating the conditions for direct communication between G/C and T/C citizens, or by leaving the communication process solely in the hands of the mass media and nationalist terms of reference. Compared to the whole of Cypriot society, and its long habituation to a culture of conflict, the bi-communal movement remains considerably weak. But when compared to the fruits it yielded given the difficult conditions in which it was compelled to operate, then its strength can be fully appreciated.

Moreover, on the basis of the above analysis, one must not conclude that only the active peacebuilders are in favor of transnationalist, inter-ethnic dialogue and constructive interaction between the two communities. All along, there have been a number of citizens in both communities who have in fact been questioning the traditional nationalist discourse. The important issue, however, is that until the work of the peacebuilders and their alternative political culture became consolidated and openly visible in the form of a peace movement in the 1990s, these citizens had no voice in the public realm with which to identify, whereas now they are both empowered and represented in public culture and dialogue.

The bi-communal peace movement of Cyprus will continue to be exposed to the reactionary criticisms of the nationalists. Certainly, the historical momentum of nationalism in the two Cypriot communities, with its dominant grip on both public opinion and the majority of political leaders, will persist. But, with the peace movement, an alternative path has been placed before the Cypriots, concerning an approach and a mode of communication that bears directly on whether the fundamental options relevant to the future of Cyprus will become closed down and minimized, or opened up and

optimized. It must also be noted that, although it was born and developed under an extremely constraining and forbidding public opinion, the peace movement of Cyprus finally found full legitimacy and official support from the Greek government in the late 1990s, when the Simitis government assumed an open rapprochement policy toward Turkey, involving, first and foremost, direct citizen contacts.

All those who fiercely object to interpersonal and direct intercommunal contacts, either indirectly through a dominant portion of G/C public opinion or more directly through the interventionist policies of the T/C administration, understand, perhaps, the positive power of interpersonal contact and direct communication. For, clearly, the enhancement of positive contacts, opening up public dialogue around matters pertaining to peace, would leave the most nationalistically inclined persons in each community exposed to their own insufficiency and irrelevance, as they would remain enslaved to a mind of permanent animosity and entrapped in the historical cul-de-sac of the past.

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