The shifting sands of relational peace in Cyprus

Jason Klocek

On March 31, 2004, Kofi Annan made an impassioned plea for local Cypriot leaders to support impending referenda to end three decades of division on the island. He framed the importance of these plebiscites in no uncertain terms: “Let me be clear. The choice is not between this settlement plan and some other magical or mythical solution. In reality, at this stage, the choice is between this settlement and no settlement” (Annan 2004). The Secretary-General’s words proved to be hauntingly accurate. While a majority of the Turkish Cypriot population voted in favor of a federation of two states, more than three-quarters of Greek Cypriots cast their ballots in opposition. And in the decade and a half since the failed 2004 reunification plan, no fewer than four additional rounds of peace talks have been attempted and abandoned. Today, the divided island remains the site of Europe’s longest unresolved political dispute and an archetype of intractable conflict (Heraclides 2011). The half-century of political stalemate in Cyprus raises challenging questions for peace scholars and practitioners alike. Why has it been so difficult to reunify the island? Why have top-down negotiations such as the Annan Plan, as well as more recent bottom-up approaches, proved equally ineffective? What might a permanent settlement even look like at this point?

There is, of course, no shortage of answers to such questions. Politicians, policy analysts, peacemakers, and conflict scholars have all weighed in over the years. This diverse set of actors has advanced varied and inventive plans of action, but most share a common perspective. Taking a negative peace framework as their starting point, they stress that the island has been free of extended periods of armed conflict since the 1974 ceasefire that divided Cyprus and express a strong desire not to undermine the current status quo. Policy suggestions, in turn, involve some variation of security guarantees and a plan for shared governance between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. The primary concern of these plans is to avoid a return to intercommunal violence. They overwhelmingly frame the Greek and Turkish
Cypriot communities as unitary and static actors and focus more on political than societal tensions between the two groups. They often overlook cooperative initiatives that have emerged between the two communities in recent years, and they rarely consider variation within either society.

This chapter applies a relational view of peace as an alternative way of understanding the Cyprus problem (Söderström et al. 2021; Jarstad et al., this volume, Introduction). It traces variation in each of the framework’s components (i.e., behavioral interactions, subjective attitudes, and ideas of the relationship) since 1960. A key value added by this perspective is that it shifts our attention to a more complex set of interactions than is captured by past analyses. Rather than viewing Greek and Turkish Cypriots as homogeneous and fixed groups, this framework draws attention to a varied set of cooperative and competitive relationships within and between the two communities.

This chapter pays particular attention to two sets of dyads at the elite level: those between leaders in the Greek Cypriot community and those between Greek and Turkish Cypriot officials. Understanding the behavior, attitudes, and ideas of Greek Cypriot elites is especially important for securing a lasting peace on the island given the Greek Cypriot community has been the primary veto player in recent years. The opening anecdote of this chapter underscores how support for the 2004 Annan Plan was weakest within that community. A more recent public opinion poll suggests that attitudes toward a federation have not shifted in over a decade (Psaltis et al. 2017: 72–75). Moreover, as the majority population with de jure sovereignty over the island, Greek Cypriots have fewer incentives than their counterparts to reach a resolution in the short term.

The analysis draws on historical accounts, public opinion data, policy reports, English-language news material, and informal conversations with residents of Nicosia during two months of fieldwork in 2015. These data are complemented by secondary sources where appropriate. My analysis is also informed by eight months of research at The National Archives of the United Kingdom and the Cyprus State Archives. This approach of combining multiple data collection methods – known as between-method triangulation – provides several advantages (Denzin 2012, 1970; see also Tarrow 2010: 108–110). It increases the reliability of findings by cross-referencing the accuracy of different data-generating processes. Additionally, triangulation is an important method for mitigating researcher bias because it forces an analyst to consider multiple perspectives and can reveal prejudices underlying a single data source (Fusch et al. 2018). It is also a method especially well suited for the relational peace framework since no single method is likely to capture all of the framework’s components. Of course, triangulation is not without its limits. Although the aim is to draw on the best of each
Relational peace practices

method, it does not eliminate the methods’ flaws. I have, therefore, drawn on a diverse set of sources that complement one another rather than those that reproduce biases. In this way, between-method triangulation increases confidence in my claims in this chapter because the different types of evidence I use strengthen the validity of both descriptive and causal inferences (Brady and Collier 2010: 310).

What I ultimately find is not only that peace and conflict coexist within and between political elites in Cyprus, but also that these relationships have evolved in varied and often clashing ways. For instance, while deliberation between Greek and Turkish leaders through formal peace processes is a hallmark of the Cyprus problem, there has been considerably less room to exchange competing views within the Greek Cypriot community. At various points in time, this lack of deliberation has served as a critical barrier to reaching a political solution, as well as to developing cooperation across communities. This chapter further illustrates how the components of the relational peace framework can be mutually reinforcing. The failure to reform the school curricula in the Republic of Cyprus has, for example, also bolstered cultural forms of dominance on the island.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds in five parts. In the following section, I discuss existing research on the Cyprus dispute and emphasize why a negative peace framework remains insufficient. I then examine the three components of the relational peace framework. Each section of the chapter includes an operationalization of the component and additional detail on the dyads of political elites examined. My analysis of behavioral interactions is the most extensive section because it offers a direct comparison to what a negative peace framework attempts to capture. Demonstrating how the relational peace framework reveals additional complexity in this component, as well as shedding light on other dimensions of peace, offers a compelling case for the value of adopting this alternative. Finally, I consider the broader implications of my analysis for the relational peace framework and contemporary efforts to bring a lasting peace to Cyprus and similar intractable conflicts in the concluding section.

Current approaches to the Cyprus problem

A substantial literature exists on Cyprus and its politics, most of which is centered on how to resolve the protracted conflict on the island. A majority of scholars acknowledge that the situation is complex, multi-causal, and nuanced. At the same time, peace and conflict scholars typically highlight two distinct factors as the driving obstacles to a permanent settlement: ethno-nationalism and foreign powers. Each factor takes a negative peace framework as a primary point of reference.
One commonly used approach to understanding the Cyprus problem stresses the role of ethno-nationalism. This strand of research defines the Cyprus problem as an identity-based conflict in which Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities interpret their struggle for political autonomy, its causes, and potential solutions along a real or perceived ethno-national divide (Wolff 2011; Vogel 2016). Existential fears, mistrust, demonization of the other, unaddressed historical grievances, and socioeconomic inequalities fuel and exacerbate these divisions (Azar 1985; Rouhana and Bar-Tal 1998).

The ethno-national approach pays particular attention to how competing claims for sovereignty evolved and have become reified over time, especially in relation to periods of intercommunal violence (Vogel 2016). The two ethnic communities were widely dispersed across the island and functioned more or less separately during the four centuries prior to independence (Ioannides 2014). This changed, however, with the guerrilla campaign against the British that erupted in 1955 (French 2015). The conflict, waged by the insurgent group EOKA (National Organization of Cypriot Fighters), was the culmination of longstanding and increasingly assertive calls by the Greek Cypriot community for enosis, a political union with Greece. British forces remained the focus of EOKA attacks, but intercommunal violence was not uncommon. In response, Turkish Cypriots formed the TMT (Turkish Defense Organization) and asserted their own ethno-national demands, which called for partition of the island into separate ethnic communities (taksim).

The end of the guerrilla war in 1959 saw the British withdrawal from the Island, but intercommunal tensions and competing ethno-nationalist claims persisted despite attempts to address them through the 1960 constitution (Salem 1992). That document set up a complex power-sharing arrangement that included a national legislature and two communal chambers (Jarstad 2001). In addition, it established separate municipal administrations for the two groups in the five largest cities on the island. Archbishop Makarios III, head of the Church of Cyprus, was named the first president of the new republic, while Dr. Fazil Kutchuk, the main leader of the Turkish Cypriot community, served as vice-president.

Leaders of each community quickly sought to exploit the new system (Salem 1992; Jarstad 2001). This culminated in a 1963 proposal by Archbishop Makarios III to amend the constitution in such a way as to undermine most of the privileges enjoyed by the Turkish Cypriot community (James 2001). In protest, Turkish Cypriot leaders withdrew from the government, and a new round of intercommunal violence broke out in December of the same year. Hostilities became so intense over the next few months that Makarios requested that the UN deploy a peacekeeping force, which it did in March 1964. Still, violence and segregation between the two communities
Relational peace practices continued through the subsequent decade until Turkish military involvement and de facto partition of the island in 1974.

Foreign powers

A second approach to understanding the Cyprus problem shifts the analytic lens toward colonial politics and the regional interests of foreign powers. On the first point, numerous studies demonstrate how the British “divide and rule” policy exacerbated communal tensions on the island (Pollis 1973; Argyriou 2018). The advisory British Legislative Council established in 1882 provides one striking illustration. This representative body, meant to advise British officials, initially consisted of nine Greek and three Turkish Cypriots, elected by their respective communities. The process, however, superimposed political identities on religiously and ethnically defined communities that previously did not view themselves as such (see Faustmann 1998). It also created controversy over representation. In 1924, when the island became a Crown Colony, Greek Cypriot membership on the council was expanded while Turkish participation remained unchanged. Thus, even as the British tried to establish representative political institutions, they also strengthened identification within each community, sharpened the cleavages between them, and drew the communities into political relationships to which they did not previously subscribe (Holland 1998; Rappas 2014).

Of equal, if not greater, consequence has been the role of Greece and Turkey since the 1950s. Both countries were directly involved in British attempts to reach a peaceful resolution to the EOKA insurgency. Indeed, it was the two countries’ foreign ministers that were largely responsible for the Zurich Agreement that finally brought an end to the conflict and independence for Cyprus (Holland 1998: 302–305; French 2015: 288–290). A key component, along with the 1960 constitution that followed, was power-sharing arrangements for each ethnic community (Souter 1984). The imposition of a peace treaty and a rigid constitution that reinforced religious and ethnic divisions, of course, did not achieve their intended effect. Within three years, intense intercommunal violence reignited. This was followed by increased interference in Greek Cypriot politics by the military junta in Greece, which sought to replace Makarios with a leader who would more aggressively advance the cause of enosis. In 1974, Turkish military forces moved onto the island, ostensibly to protect Turkish Cypriots in the north.

The limits of current approaches

Current approaches to understanding the Cyprus problem focus almost exclusively on intercommunal divisions. Some disagreement persists as to
the primary driver of these tensions, especially regarding the degree to which they predate British colonial rule. However, two important assumptions are shared. The first is that the two communities are relatively homogeneous. Even when acknowledging the social construction of Greek and Turkish Cypriot identities, extant studies tend to conceptualize and report a shared set of anxieties and preferences for each group. This is particularly evident in studies that draw on public opinion data, which routinely report the majority view of each society (Hadjipavlou 2007; Stevens 2016). Far less attention, if any at all, is paid to variation within these groups. A second key assumption concerns the unit of analysis. The majority of studies either focus on the whole of the island or treat one side as a homogeneous population. Consequently, they focus on areas where conflict does or does not persist, rather than investigating who within those areas may be cooperating or competing.

Both assumptions have important policy implications. Because the Cyprus problem is understood as being driven by intercommunal divisions, peace processes focus on improving dialogue between Greek and Turkish Cypriot citizens and/or ensuring group rights. This, however, can also reinforce social divisions – much like the above-mentioned British Legislative Council. Additionally, most peace processes concentrate on the idea of territorial unification and political representation based on ethnicity. This obscures other tensions and peaceful interactions, along with alternative ways in which Greek and Turkish Cypriots organize politically. These complexities are precisely what a relational view of peace seeks to capture.

Behavioral interactions in Cyprus

The first component of a relational peace framework involves behavioral interaction (Söderström et al. 2021; Jarstad et al., this volume, Introduction). This includes three main elements: deliberation, non-domination, and cooperation. The initial two elements have evolved in different and sometimes contradictory ways within and across Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. There is significantly less variation when it comes to cooperation within and between these groups.

Deliberation in Cyprus

Deliberation refers to “the exchange of views combined with actors involved giving reasons for their positions” (Söderström et al. 2021: 489). The establishment of, and participation in, political processes whereby key conflict issues can be addressed without turning to violence is a key indicator of
this component. Parliament, the education sector, the media, and formal peace talks stand out as four of the most important arenas for political discussion in Cyprus. Yet, perhaps counterintuitively, there has been more room for deliberation between the two communities than within each of them. One reason for this is that the conflict in Cyprus has been as much a struggle over the territory of the island as it has been a battle for hegemony within each community (Loizos 1998; Lacher and Kaymak 2005).

Deliberation within the Greek Cypriot community

The first parliamentary elections in Cyprus were held on July 31, 1960. Rather than the parliament becoming a site for deliberation, however, infighting among Greek Cypriot leaders quickly undermined the efficacy of this legislative body. Many Greek Cypriot politicians worried, for instance, that the 1960 constitution was a symbol of defeat for their community. Consequently, they urged Archbishop Makarios to advance constitutional modifications that favored Greek over Turkish Cypriots (Souter 1984; Richmond 2002).

The secret right-wing nationalist group known as EOK, or the Akritas organization, was particularly active in advancing this cause. It was formed by Greek Cypriot community leaders and a number of cabinet members. In 1963, EOK authored a plan that formally called for the weakening of the Turkish Cypriot wing of the government and pursuit once more of enosis, or the political union of Cyprus with Greece (Necatigil 1993). The influence of EOK, along with the refusal of Turkish Cypriot legislatures to approve fiscal legislation, eventually led Makarios to introduce constitutional amendments that sparked a constitutional crisis and intercommunal violence in 1963–1964.

The archbishop acted in part to appease right-wing nationalists within his community. However, he did not go far enough for them. Even as intercommunal fighting abated in 1967, dissent from public officials within the Greek Cypriot community intensified. Yet Makarios’s attention remained on reestablishing political stability on the island rather than union with Greece after his reelection in 1968 (Mayes 1981; Assos 2018). This policy increasingly frustrated a number of religious and nationalist leaders. The former included three of the highest-ranking bishops on the island (i.e., the Metropolitans of Paphos, Kiton, and Kyrenia), who called for Makarios’s resignation as president in 1973. As discussed further below, this not only undercut political discussion on the island, but also contributed to forms of domination that put a check on public dissent.

The media in Cyprus reflected similar tensions to those in parliament during the 1960s and 1970s. Even though there were both right-wing and
left-wing TV stations and radio channels, the right dominated in terms of number and resources. As a result, right-wing views were broadcast much more widely and leftist positions were regularly dismissed as propaganda. Close ties between specific print media outlets and political parties persist today (Avraamidou and Psaltis 2019). However, the disparity has been reduced. Since at least the 1980s, the majority of dailies, regardless of political position, have been churning out papers seven days a week (Vassiliadou 2007).

A similar proliferation has occurred with broadcast media. The Cyprus Broadcasting Service enjoyed a monopoly and operated as a semi-governmental organization until 1990. Since then, Cypriots have increasingly turned to private channels. These are predominately owned by Greek or Turkish multimedia conglomerates. Thus, even as state policies ensure freedom of expression and press, a cultural connection to Greece or Turkey and a shared national view are still reinforced via the broadcast media.

The education sector provides a more contemporary example of stifled attempts to promote deliberation within the Greek Cypriot community. Ethnic nationalism remains a central theme in school curricula on the island. Until quite recently, Greek Cypriots were taught the history only of Greece. And even with the introduction of a history of Cyprus to textbooks and classrooms, considerably less space and time is allotted to the island’s past compared with Greek history (Koullapis 2002). A 2004 report from the Ministry of Education and Culture in the Republic of Cyprus went so far as to conclude, “the ideological-political framework of contemporary Cypriot [sic] education remains Greek-Cypriot centered, narrowly ethnocentric and culturally monolithic” (as cited in Papadakis 2008: 134–135).

Efforts by some Greek Cypriot politicians to reform the curricula remain unsuccessful. In 2008, a newly elected leftist government established a committee to produce a revised framework for teaching the island’s history. The committee charged with reforming the history curriculum consisted of five academics who consulted with a number of teacher-led working groups. The final proposal that emerged focused on substantive knowledge and a single narrative approach (Perikleous 2010). However, a center-right government which took power in 2013 froze the process before the curriculum could be implemented.

Nevertheless, deliberation around the 2004 Annan Plan offers some hope that discourse among Greek Cypriot leaders might be broadening and, at the same time, the efficacy of ethnic outbidding waning. Ethnic outbidding refers to a “process where ethnically-based political parties take increasingly extreme ideological positions as a means of distancing themselves from rival parties” (Stewart and McGauvran 2020: 405). The Democratic Party (DIKO) and the Movement for Social Democracy (EDEK), in particular, engaged in
this process in the period leading up to the public referendum on the Annan Plan by appealing to Greek Cypriot concerns around property rights, security, and collective identity (Avraamidou 2018; Amaral 2019). And these appeals did achieve their short-term goal: the majority of Greek Cypriots rejected the peace agreement, as discussed at the start of this chapter. However, ethnic outbidding did not lead to subsequent electoral gains for either party nor did it escalate to violence. Rather, the Democratic Rally (DISY) party peacefully maintained its dominance in elections despite supporting the referendum when the majority of its members and the public did not (Vural and Peristianis 2008).

One key reason why ethnic outbidding may have worked for the referendum but not for subsequent voting lies in the difference in frames employed by the two sides (Moore et al. 2014). Despite advice from the opposition parties’ own communication advisors to avoid “brutal patriotic propaganda” and “soften their language towards moderation,” DIKO, EDEK, and other groups adopted more ideologically extreme positions than DISY during and after the referendum (as cited in Moore et al. 2014: 172–173). In contrast, DISY employed an adaptable and prognostic framing strategy. It emphasized, for instance, pragmatic gains to increase the influence of Cyprus within European institutions (Katsourides 2014). At the same time, DISY selectively drew on identity issues during election periods, which included slogans stating that “Cyprus is Greek” (Moore et al. 2014: 174, see also Sandal and Loizides 2013). Thus, deliberations over the 2004 Annan Plan suggest that while ethnic outbidding has not entirely disappeared from the Cypriot landscape, political elites that also give explicit, strategic reasons for their actions have fared better in the long term. Moreover, the non-violent, public disagreement that occurred during the 2004 referendum stands in stark contrast to the belligerent interactions between groups with competing viewpoints in the 1960s.

**Deliberation between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities**

While deliberation within the Greek Cypriot community remains muted, the exchange of competing views between the two communities has been a central feature of peace talks since even before partition. Many analyses capture this. However, they also often point to intercommunal, rather than intracommunal, differences as the reason why talks break down.

Following the reelection of Archbishop Makarios in 1968, for example, UN-sponsored talks began to develop a system of local government which would have given Turkish Cypriots a degree of local autonomy (Polyviou 1980). The main representatives at these meetings were the presidents of
the communal chambers, Glafkos Clerides for the Greek Cypriot side and Rauf Raif Denktas on the Turkish Cypriot side. These formal discussions offered the space to present both competing views and the reasons behind them. However, no consensus was reached by 1970, at which time Secretary-General U Thant called off the talks, blaming both sides' leaders for their inability to compromise (Mirbagheri 2014). As discussed above, one major constraint on the Greek Cypriot leadership was intracommunal pressure from religious and political elites to hold out for full union with Greece. Indeed, the more Makarios tried to focus on political stability rather than enosis, the more opposition he faced from within his community.

Talks in 1977 made substantially more progress. This time President Makarios and Vice-President Denktas met directly. After five rounds of UN-managed talks, the two leaders signed a four-point agreement confirming that any future Cyprus settlement would be based on a federation. Other details were to be worked out at a later time, but the death of Makarios in August 1977 prevented such an outcome. Instead, Spyros Achilleos Kyprianou, the archbishop’s successor and leader of the Democratic Party, rejected the plan in 1979 (Souter 1984).

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail all of the peace talks that have taken place over the past five decades. Collectively they demonstrate that deliberation between the two communities has not been absent. They also indicate that there is more room for political dissent within the Greek Cypriot community than there is between Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. Take the most recent round of stalled UN-sponsored peace talks, which began in 2017. After initial optimism, the special advisor appointed to lead the effort, Jane Holl Lute, reported after an April 2019 meeting that the two sides seemed more divided than ever and subsequently recommended the negotiations be suspended indefinitely (Congressional Research Service 2019). This episode also raises questions about other factors that can influence the space for dialogue. Non-domination is one important permissive condition.

Non-domination in Cyprus

Non-domination refers to a freedom from the arbitrary influence of a more powerful actor. In line with the Introduction of this volume, I operationalize non-domination as the extent to which elites and others adapt or moderate their behavior in the shadow of more powerful actors (Jarstad et al., this volume, Introduction). This is an especially apt allusion for Cyprus. The two communities literally live under the shadow of each other’s communal symbols, with flags and other nationalist images prolific on the island.
Accordingly, I look at both explicit and implicit forms of coercion in this section.

**Domination within the Greek Cypriot community**

Violence or the threat of violence characterized many relations between Greek Cypriot elites and community members before partition. During the insurgency war of the 1950s, for instance, EOKA killed far more civilians than British security forces did. This was because they targeted defectors from the group and local leaders that cooperated with British authorities. Moreover, they often conducted the assassination of defectors publicly with the explicit aim of deterring similar behavior in the future (see French 2015: 111–114).

Following Makarios's reelection in 1968 and his refusal to further advance the cause of unification with Greece, General Georgios Grivas formed EOKA-B as a successor organization to the insurgent group he had led a decade earlier. It was supported by a number of pro-"enosis" members in parliament, as well as clergy in the Church of Cyprus. For several years, the organization engaged in a campaign of sabotage and civilian attacks that culminated in a short-lived coup against Archbishop Makarios in July 1974 (Assos 2018). Makarios weathered that attempt, in part thanks to the Efedriko, a special police force he created with support from the leaders of EDEK.

Over the years, this type of violence has given way to less explicit – but no less influential – forms of coercion, and indeed domination. The most notable is an ethos that Loizos characterizes as “obsessive ethnic nationalism” (Loizos 1998: 40). This perspective not only limits room for debate but actively demonizes those who express opposition and demands they be silenced. Its persistence is particularly striking not just in the school curricula discussed above, but also in how teachers in Cyprus structure their classrooms and lessons. A number of studies, for example, find that teachers are hesitant to discuss controversial periods in the past, especially those that challenge one-sided victimization narratives (see Zembylas 2015). Thus, even when the threat of violence is removed, institutionalized norms continue to shape the behavior of educators on the island.

Self-censorship among elites and within the broader Greek Cypriot community is another marker of this persistent ethos. For instance, during fieldwork I conducted in Nicosia in the winter of 2015, most of my interlocutors regulated what they did and did not share about the past. Discussion of intercommunal violence or tension no longer appears to be an entirely taboo subject. However, when I would bring up specific events or actors, my conversation partners, especially those older than fifty, would quickly steer the conversation back to general terms. Part of the reason for this may
have been that I was an outsider. However, Cypriot-born scholar Papadakakis (2006) observed similar behavior during his fieldwork in the 1990s. One particularly telling example comes from his time in coffee shops, which were rigidly split along ideological lines. Certain cafes hosted right-wing nationalist party leaders and members, such as the Progressive Front and the Democratic National Party, and others were for leftist party leaders and members, the most notable being the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL). Both of our experiences suggest that even in the absence of societal violence, Greek Cypriots remain guarded in their political discussions and behavior.

**Domination between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities**

Forms of symbolic domination persist even more between the two communities than within Greek Cypriot society. In the north, an image of the flag of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is displayed on the side of Beşparmaklar mountain. Next to the image is the quotation “How happy is the one who says ‘I am a Turk.’” Both are impossible to miss when approaching Nicosia. Furthermore, in 2009, a Greek Cypriot Member of the European Parliament submitted an official complaint about the symbols, describing them as an “unprecedented daily provocation” and a “hostile action” (Papadopoulou 2009).

Such symbolism is, of course, not absent south of the partition line. In 1987, a ten-meter-high bronze statue of Makarios III was erected outside the archbishop’s palace in the capital. It stood as a towering landmark until 2008, when it was moved to the archbishop’s mausoleum in the Troodos mountains. Speculation remains as to whether its position facing toward the northern end of the island is intentional (Assos 2018).

The symbols that dominate the skyline also overshadow the streets of Cyprus. The Greek flag is an example par excellence. One can hardly travel around the Republic of Cyprus without spotting the “sky blue and white” on homes, stores, stadiums, ships, and even beach resorts. On Greek national holidays, the numbers increase exponentially. And the impact of this practice is unambiguous. Turkish Cypriots routinely state that they see the Greek flag as a symbol of “domination, degradation, siege, and violence” that embodies all of their negative experiences prior to 1960 (Anastasiou 2002: 587). The seriousness of this issue led the UN to go so far during the 1990s as to regulate when Greek or Turkish flags could be flown in villages that bordered the Green Line (Papadakis 1997). Despite this effort, however, the number of flags has swelled in recent years.

The symbolic domination within and across communities has reinforced social divisions and produced contestation around the physical development
Relational peace practices of the island (Björkdahl and Kappler 2017: 13–31). And while several peace movements have tried to reshape the politics of these physical places, elites and local media outlets continue to exploit them for their political ends. For example, in a 2004 speech opposing the Annan Peace Plan, President Papadopoulos addressed the public as “Greek Cypriot people” – a term that had not been used in decades and before then used exclusively by Archbishop Makarios (Cyprus News Agency 2004). Papadopoulos’s speech resulted in a spontaneous mass gathering in front of the presidential palace with hundreds waving Cypriot flags and, ultimately, the failure of that peace plan (Loizides 2007).

Cooperation in Cyprus

If deliberation and non-domination concern the external and internal space to express dissent, cooperation shifts attention to activities that bring communities together. This involves taking steps that benefit both sides, as well as adopting common goals and identities (Söderström et al. 2021: 492). Despite various attempts to bring Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities together, including a bi-communal citizen-based peace movement that has grown since the 1990s, cooperation within and between the two communities remains elusive.6

Formal peace talks stand out as the most illustrative examples of a failure to identify common goals at the elite level. Since 2004, Greek and Turkish leaders have increasingly talked in terms of “convergences” related to EU affairs, governance, economics, citizenship, and disputed individual property. This term is notable, as it embodies the overriding frame for more recent negotiations – that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed (Congressional Research Service 2019). Leaders no longer seem willing or able to enter into agreements like the 1997 Makarios–Denktash accords, which settled the federation question but left other issues on the table. If anything, the interests and goals that might unite the two sides have only become opaquer.

A 2015 public opinion survey suggests that consensus within and between communities remains just as elusive at the local level (Psaltis et al. 2017: 72–75). In particular, efforts to engender a shared identity for inhabitants of the island remain hampered by what that might entail in practice. Two thirds of the survey respondents from the Republic of Cyprus, for instance, favored the development of a common “Cypriot identity.” Sixteen percent, however, expressed that such a project would also be detrimental to national interests. Moreover, when they were asked what factors were key for a “Cypriot identity,” sharp divisions within and between the two communities emerged. For instance, one third of Greek Cypriot respondents said a love
of the homeland should form the basis of a common identity, whereas a mere 2 percent of Turkish Cypriot respondents shared the same view. Instead, Turkish Cypriots were much more likely to point to a shared past, culture, and temperament. There was also disagreement about the best timing for cultivating a common Cypriot identity. Turkish Cypriots were three times as likely as Greek Cypriots to say that a common identity was a prerequisite for any permanent solution. Greek Cypriots were again divided, with nearly a quarter stating that the development of a common identity should never happen. Other research, including a 2013 interview study conducted with youth in Nicosia, corroborates these patterns (Leonard 2013). This, undoubt-
edly, also has effects on the subjective attitudes of each group and their idea of relationship with one another.

Subjective attitudes in Cyprus

Peaceful relations involve more than just behaviors; they also encompass how groups perceive one another. These subjective attitudes include patterns of mutual recognition and trust. I assess mutual recognition by identifying explicit and symbolic acts of acceptance of the other’s existence. Trust, in turn, involves a psychological state whereby actors have a positive expectation of the intentions or behavior of another and can express vulnerability (Söderström et al. 2021: 494). Like behavioral interactions, attitudes have moved in contrasting directions within and between the communities in Cyprus.

Recognition and trust within the Greek Cypriot community

Following independence, the infighting among elites was marked by a refusal to accept those with competing visions for the future of Cyprus. Consider again the coup attempt against Makarios in July 1974. In many ways, the archbishop became a victim of the ideology he spearheaded in the 1950s. During the insurgency war, the motto of Greek Cypriot religious leaders and EOKA fighters was “enosis and only enosis” (French 2015: 25). Yet when the archbishop tried to consolidate his authority after British withdrawal through a loose coalition known as the Patriotic Front, some were unwilling to abandon that call. And, as discussed above, a small, but influential opposition movement consisting of right-wing religious and political officials eventually tried to forcibly remove Makarios from office. This example also highlights the relational aspect of recognition; it is an interaction between an actor’s asserted image and the image perceived by others (Lindemann 2011).
Since at least the 1974 partition, Greek Cypriot politics have settled into a more routine set of activities with four major parties: DIKO, DISY, EDEK, and AKEL. Moreover, the Republic’s proportional representation system has necessitated compromise and coalition-building since no single party enjoys the support of a majority of voters. For instance, the left-wing party EDEK formed an alliance with the centrist party DIKO during the early 2000s. Together they promoted a closer cultural, though not political, connection with Greece (Peristianis 2006).

This is not to say that a thick form of recognition has emerged. Elections remain deeply contested, especially between candidates on opposite ends of the ideological spectrum (i.e., those of DIKO and AKEL). Still, a thin form of recognition has developed whereby elites accept that competing parties have the equal right to participate in politics. For example, while communist parties were banned from 1931 to 1941 and during the insurgency war, the current communist party, AKEL, has participated in every election since 1960 (Dunphy and Bale 2007).

Mutual recognition developed among political elites by the 1970s, but social spaces continued to reflect ideological differences for several decades more. As discussed above, coffee shops in cities and villages were rigidly split as late as the 1990s, with some establishments being reserved for right-wing nationalist parties and others hosting leftist organizations. Not only did political officials and members regulate which cafes they frequented, but Greek Cypriots also self-policed the reading materials they brought with them (Papadakis 2006). This latter point is a striking example of the lack of mutual trust that persisted more broadly within the Greek Cypriot community for several decades as party affiliation created and reinforced negative expectations about the other.

What conclusions can we draw about levels of mutual trust today? It is difficult to infer attitudes from behavior, but the relatively peaceful relations within the Greek Cypriot community suggest that stereotyping and prejudices along ideological lines are minimal. Public opinion surveys would be an even more effective way to measure popular trust, but these can be difficult to implement and interpret in Cyprus. One reason for this is that surveys typically take the ethnic community as their unit of analysis and report only aggregate responses. This provides insight into how average levels of trust have changed between the two communities over time, but we still know far less about change in subjective attitudes within the Greek Cypriot community (or Turkish Cypriot society, for that matter). To my knowledge, no surveys have been designed to intentionally compare differences in the attitudes of citizens in major cities of the Republic of Cyprus. Additionally, there is the self-censorship discussed above, raising questions about how openly Greek Cypriots would share their views if asked. The polls cited in
this chapter do provide the demographic backgrounds of respondents, but this is not always the case. Of course, it is not always possible to avoid all bias in a sample. Yet several surveys seem to actually introduce it by restricting their sample owing to the preferences of funding organizations, rather than methodological grounds. For example, Webster (2005) relied on data from an omnibus survey conducted by a market research firm. That organization excluded respondents aged over sixty-five because that demographic was of limited interest to the commercial organization. The study, despite this sampling bias, still claimed that the data were a generally representative sample of the government-controlled areas of Cyprus (Webster 2005: 82).

While there may be reasons to suspect that public trust has increased within the Greek Cypriot community, the same cannot be said of political trust. Most notably, the 2012–2013 economic crisis appears to have engendered suspicion of political elites as a whole and contributed to voter disillusionment (Triga 2017). According to the 2013 Eurobarometer survey, for instance, 91 percent of Cypriots responded that they did not trust their political parties (Eurobarometer 2013). This ranked Cyprus as the second highest on this measure in Europe that year. Moreover, confidence in political parties has yet to rebound, with some 88 percent of Cypriots still expressing no trust in political parties nearly five years later (Eurobarometer 2017). Thus, even as political parties in Cyprus have gradually come to recognize one another, the divide between political parties and the Cypriot populace has grown.

**Recognition and trust between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities**

While intracommunal divisions and non-recognition characterized party politics in the years leading up to and immediately after independence, connections between workers’ parties in Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities stand out as a remarkable example of intercommunal recognition and trust. During the 1930s and 1940s, for example, Greek and Turkish Cypriots frequently interacted through left-wing workers’ institutions (Papadakis 2006). Later too, a clear sense of mutual recognition persisted throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. One telling indicator of this is the practice of official and unofficial AKEL publications reporting attacks by Greek Cypriots against Turkish Cypriots (Papadakis 2006: 72).

Other, especially more contemporary, examples of mutual recognition are few and far between. One is the outcome of the Aziz vs. Republic of Cyprus case in the European Court of Human Rights, which restored some individual civil rights to Turkish Cypriots residing in the Republic of Cyprus (Trimikliniotis and Demetriou 2008). It has not, however, restored any of
the communal rights laid out in the 1960 constitution. Another example of a thin form of mutual recognition is Article Six of the current constitution of Cyprus, which explicitly prohibits discrimination of either Greek or Turkish Cypriots based on race.

Far more common, however, are instances of non-recognition or active attempts to erase the history of the other community. Here the most conspicuous example is the desecration of cemeteries and worship spaces on both sides of the island (Björkdahl and Kappler 2017: 36). North of the Green Line, crosses have been broken off tombstones and icons destroyed. In the Republic of Cyprus, the burial grounds of Turkish Cypriots have been abandoned and vandalized. All of this is compounded by the fact that Greek and Turkish Cypriots have limited interaction because of the formal partition of the island. Nearly three-quarters of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots report they do not maintain any relations and/or contact with members of the other community (Psaltis et al. 2017: 72–75). This isolation has created conditions that make it difficult to advance mutual recognition or trust between elites or citizens. It also has implications for the third component of relational peace.

Ideas of the relationship in Cyprus

Relational peace involves not just behavioral interactions and subjective attitudes, but also actors’ ideas of how they relate to one another. As discussed in the Introduction to this volume, the idea of relationship lies along a continuum from foe to fellow to friend. What demarcates these categories is the extent to which they hold a shared vision about society. Here I evaluate these on the basis of words and deeds of political elites. Like the other components, relations within the Greek Cypriot community have taken a form that differs from those between them and their Turkish Cypriot counterparts.

The contemporary Greek Cypriot community, especially at the elite level, is best characterized as a fellowship. One indicator of this is the evolution of the House of Representatives. Despite its shaky beginnings, the Cypriot parliament has emerged as a deliberative body where parties compete in non-violent ways to advance their vision for the future of Cyprus (Charalambous 2009). As discussed above, political leaders now recognize each other as peers and even form coalitions in order to govern. But this does not mean there are warm feelings between them or that they share a single vision of what the future of Cyprus entails.

Similar ideas characterize the broader Greek Cypriot community. Roughly half of respondents to public opinion polls conducted in 2006 and 2007,
for instance, selected “Cypriot” in response to a question that asked how they personally identified (Faustmann 2009). Another third of respondents chose the category of equally Greek and Cypriot. The smallest percentage of respondents identified as more Greek than Cypriot. A more recent poll, conducted in 2015, shows similar results (Psaltis et al. 2017: 72–75). These surveys demonstrate that while debate persists, disagreements are construed as legitimate.

Relations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots have evolved differently. Prior to independence, one could make an argument that a fellowship also existed at this level. The two communities acted more or less separately prior to the mid-twentieth century (Ioannides 2014). However, each group accepted the right of the other group to exist and cooperated through a number of political institutions as outlined above. The division of the island has once again isolated the two communities, but now the overarching idea of relationship may be more that of foes than that of fellows, especially at the elite level.

This was neither an inevitable outcome nor did it occur uniformly within the two societies. In 1963, Turkish Cypriot officials withdrew from government following Makarios’s proposed amendments favoring Greek Cypriots. Yet even after those formal ties were severed, left-wing parties on the two sides continued to express strong feelings of mutual solidarity until 1974. Their leaders expressed both a common ideological emphasis on being “Cypriot first” and a shared sense of victimization from nationalist parties within their communities (Papadakis 2006). Moreover, as discussed above, they publicly reported attacks by members of their own societies.

Interactions among Greek and Turkish elites are now reduced to formal peace talks. It may be tempting to see this as a form of fellowship, as both sides recognize the authority of the other and are engaging in a common exercise to advance a more lasting peace. However, a deeper look at negotiations offers a more cautionary note. For instance, a round of negotiations between President Demetris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Dervis Eroğlu in 2010 raises questions about whether the two sides really see one another as worthy of respect or simply engage in talks because external forces pressure them into doing so. The meeting was held under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General’s special advisor in Cyprus, Alexander Downer. After just four months, Eroğlu expressed his frustration with the process in an interview with Greek Cypriot press and accused the Greek Cypriots of treating Turkish Cypriot positions with contempt (Cyprus Mail 2010). Moreover, in the most recent round of talks (2017–2019) doubt has even been expressed about terms that were thought to be settled more than a decade ago, such as the formation of a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation (Andreou 2020).
A relational view of peace underscores the complexity of associations that exist both within and across communities in Cyprus. Most importantly, this chapter highlights considerable variation within Greek Cypriot society, an issue overlooked by a negative peace framework. Attention to within-group competition and cooperation demonstrates that the Cyprus conflict is less static than past analyses suggest. It further brings to light a problematic asymmetry between intercommunal and intracommunal relations. Efforts to advance the former are often undermined and exacerbated by within-group differences. A relational peace framework also shifts the analytic lens away from ethno-nationalism and foreign interests to the strategic priorities of and actions within each community. This underscores how intercommunal relations are difficult to advance while within-group competition is high. Finally, a relational view of peace raises important questions about civil-society peacebuilding efforts that aim to improve dialogue across communities. This is a worthy goal. But so too should be efforts to increase the diversity of viewpoints within Greek Cypriot society.

Cyprus is not alone in facing such challenges. This chapter and the relational peace framework more broadly can speak to other longstanding interethnic conflicts, especially those where domestic identities overlap with regional powers. These include active conflicts such as those in Kashmir and Myanmar and places where peace deals have been signed but tensions persist, such as Northern Ireland, the Balkans, and South Sudan. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict also stands out for its striking similarities to Cyprus. An armed struggle against British rule led to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Intercommunal violence preceded and continued long after British withdrawal. And an endless series of peace processes have taken the division between the two communities as their starting point. As in Cyprus, internal politics within Israeli and Palestinian societies have played a pivotal role in undermining attempts at a lasting peace. The most notable example is the role of factional politics within the Palestine Liberation Organization, which limited Arafat’s bargaining position during the Camp David Accords. It is telling that foreign policy and conflict scholars have not explored that factor until very recently (see Anziska 2018).

This chapter is, of course, not without its limitations. The most notable of these concerns what is not analyzed. I do not examine variation within the Turkish Cypriot communities, nor do I look at Greek- or Turkish-language sources. A more systematic study of the Turkish Cypriot community and primary sources would add nuance to the investigation. Whether it would contradict the findings is unclear. If anything, a deeper dive into the deliberations of each community might reveal more, not less, internal dissent.
Moreover, the examined sources are public and, for the most part, represent a consensus view of the political parties. These were most likely preceded by internal debate, which would only further demonstrate the multifaceted nature of the communities. Nevertheless, attention to the Turkish Cypriot community and the analysis of primary documents in a future study would be a welcome way to provide additional insight into communities and a peace that are often assumed to be uniform and static.

This chapter also has not systematically explored the interplay between the components of the relational peace framework. Rather, it has pointed out several ways in which the components can be mutually reinforcing. Questions remain as to whether certain components are more influential or should be prioritized by peacebuilders at particular times or during particular activities, such as formal negotiations, or in a certain order. Additional study could shed light on these issues and identify specific mechanisms that might build on advances in one area to promote change in another.

To conclude, analysts all too quickly apply a negative peace framework to interethnic conflicts such as Cyprus. They construe conflict parties as homogeneous communities and frame failed efforts to promote a more lasting peace as a consequence of relations between, not within, these societies. The relational peace framework and the case of Cyprus challenge this conventional approach. They draw attention to opportunities for cooperation, while also providing a cautionary note that some relations can remain competitive and resistant to change over time. Interactions may also not necessarily move in a linear direction, as for example with efforts to identify common goals during elite negotiations. Shared understandings that characterized peace talks in the late 1990s, for instance, no longer seem to be held in common. It is, therefore, never just a simple question of settlement or no settlement between two communities.

Notes


2 Cyprus also boasts one of the longest-standing peacekeeping missions, the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), which began in 1964.

3 In line with the extant scholarship on Cyprus, I refer to the Cyprus problem, conflict, dispute, stalemate, and issue interchangeably. For consistency, I use the first nomenclature most often.

4 The archival research focused primarily on the Emergency Period (1955–1959) and the years immediately following independence. I reviewed records from the War, Foreign, and Colonial Offices, along with the Foreign and Commonwealth
Relational peace practices

Offices’ migrated archives. The latter has been available to the public only since 2013.

5 For a general history of politics on the island, see Souter 1984; Holland 1998; Papadakis et al. 2006; Dodd 2010; Ker-Lindsay 2011; Bryant and Papadakis 2012.

6 For a summary of the peace movement, see Anastasiou 2002.

References


Relational peace in Cyprus


Relational peace in Cyprus


