

# **Beyond the Domestic: Constructing Ethnic Identities and Media Consumption in the Public Ethnic Space - The Case of the Cypriot Community Centre in North London (\*)**

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The ethnic home is the first habitat of ethnicity - it is the starting point, where ethnic bonds and relations initially develop, where people learn their first words in the ethnic language, both the spoken and the unspoken. The ethnic home formalises ethnic identities, as the hierarchy of family relations and the conservative culture of the -still dominant- nuclear family shape roles and moral values. In this domestic space, the media and the communication technologies become increasingly involved (Silverstone and Hirsch, 1994), shaping cultural scapes and mediating interpersonal relations -thus domestic hierarchies and moral values. But the media also challenge the conventional boundaries of the domestic and the public and create a continuation of the living space scapes. This important parameter usually escapes the focus of media consumption/audience research, which often examines exclusively media use at home. In that way, media research fails to capture the continuation and the complexity of the public and domestic experience of individuals and families which are centrally important in the study of identities, especially when referring to group identities, like ethnic identities which are on focus here. As much as the -otherwise valuable- majority of ethnicity studies has underestimated the role of the familial and the domestic in the construction processes of ethnic identities, similarly, many works in media and cultural studies focusing on identities have failed to capture the continuity of the private and public space -the space where identities are actually reaffirmed.

The reason for emphasizing the need to study the public space and public life within the field of media studies in particular, generates from the conceptualisation of media consumption as a cultural behaviour that exceeds the narrowly-conceived activity of receiving the media, and primarily relates

to the participation of audiences in the production of meanings and the increasing role of media discourses in everyday life (Siverstone, 1984; Ang, 1996). While the arguments about audience participation in the construction of media discourses are by now theoretically and empirically well established in media studies (Morley, 1986; Morley 1995; Radway, 1984; Lull, 1990), the 'fascination' with the domestic space in media consumption studies remains. As, at the same time, the study of identities becomes more and more dominant, even fashionable, in the field, the need to actually study the public space comes out to be more and more important.

### **Studying the Media in the Public Space**

The theoretical and empirical focus of this paper is on media consumption and ethnic identity construction in the public space. Not because I would like to replace the 'fascination' with the domestic with an 'obsession' with the public, but because public media use and talk should be given some space in a media consumption and identity construction study. The present case study is part of a bigger project, where media consumption is studied in its diverse expressions in both the public and the private spaces, as experienced by different subgroups of British Greek Cypriots who live in North London. This case study is an ethnography of everyday life at the Cypriot Community Centre in the London Borough of Haringey<sup>1</sup>. This ethnography was conducted over a period of 18 months and the methods used included long-term participant observation, unstructured conversations, focus group and individual interviews.

While the focus is on the public, the role of the domestic in the processes of identity construction is visible both in the collected data and the analysis that follows. At the same time, while the emphasis is on the male, middle-aged, working class, migrant generation group that dominates the particular Centre, it is repeatedly implied that this case study only represents one of the diverse subgroups of British Greek Cypriot, thus a particular -and not a unique- experience of ethnic identity construction, everyday life custom and media consumption.

Beyond its particularities, the story of the Cypriot Community Centre habitues reflects some commonalities characterizing ethnic identity construction in general. As already argued, ethnicity is initially experienced at home, but it is reaffirmed in the public space. This 'reaffirmation' does not imply fixity. Ethnic identities are continuously constructed in everyday life (Bhabha, 1990; R.Cohen, 1994) and are shaped in context: in relation to (historical, symbolic, local, national and global) space, (historical, real and virtual) time, the 'boundary' and the Others, etc. The reaffirmation of ethnic identities in public relates to the construction of group identities and the sense of belongings in a community, shaped while distinguishing the *Self* and *Us* from the *Others* -those who don't share the same sense of belonging, those who don't belong to the same group and community (A. Cohen, 1985). Ethnic identities that are initially constructed at home are 'baptised' in the public and I would argue that, without this 'baptism', ethnic identities are doomed to fade away as people socialize beyond the familial, domestic ethnic environment.

In this process, three important parameters facilitate the 'baptism' and viability of ethnicity: participation, ritualization and informalisation. These parameters help us understand the processes of ethnic identity construction and, at least partly, explain why ethnicity still remains a strong parameter of identification over time, from generation to generation and from place to place. Participation, ritualization and informalisation primarily characterize public ethnic life -even though they are not absent from everyday life at home.

As soon as people go through the door of the ethnic home, they are expected to participate in constructing the ethnic community, in defining the boundaries, in giving a content to ethnicity -processes that require everyday participation. Furthermore, participation makes ethnicity meaningful to individuals and groups who, in that way, try to fulfil their needs and interests<sup>2</sup>. Then, in order to systematise participation and facilitate the formation of ethnic structures, ritualization is necessary - as this can be defined to include customary behaviours that are performed in repetitive forms (Rothenbuhler,

1998), behaviours though that imply creative participation (Hughes-Freeland: 1998). However, in opposition to Rothenbuhler (op. cit.), I would argue that ritual -or rather ritualization, which implies more flexibility than ritual- does not equal formalisation. On the contrary, the process of ethnic identity construction depends on the informalisation of ethnicity, rather than its formalisation. Participation and ritualization of ethnicity in the public space are triangulated with informalisation.

When referring to hybrid and new ethnicities (Hall, 1992), when referring to ethnicities in multicultural western societies, where choice, multiplicity and fluidity characterize group belongings, informalisation is an important dimension of ethnicity's viability. Ethnicity is initially formalised in the family and at home, as young ethnics are given clear-cut identifications that primarily rely on definitions of ethnicity dependant on biological and primordial relations<sup>3</sup>. But as people socialise beyond the domestic space, ethnicity becomes informal, as the 'myth' of primordial and biological attachment to ethnicity is challenged, when people actually have the choice to be detached from it. Then, in order to survive, ethnicity has to be actively constructed and flexible enough to 'fit in' people's lives of multiple belongings<sup>4</sup>. While certain 'core ingredients' remain important (which though are not always the same), fluidity and flexibility -thus informalisation- inescapably characterize new ethnicities.

As the conceptualisation of these three parameters -participation, ritualisation and informalisation- implies certain level of activeness, fulfillment of some needs and interests and continuation throughout everyday life- it becomes clear that this triangular relation intersects both ethnic identities and media consumption. Media use and talk is, at the same time, activity and context - it is a form of leisure and it is a communication discourse saturating everyday life. So it is also for the particular group -the Cypriot Community Centre habitues- who spend a smaller or a larger part of their everyday life in this space, often using ethnic media and, even more often, shaping their ethnic identities through public discourses, largely formed through the media and media consumption.

The specific focus of this research is on electronic ethnic media consumption and its role for the construction of contemporary British Greek Cypriot ethnic identities in North London. The local area of Haringey is the *home* of a large Greek Cypriot population, and many more other ethnic groups, including the significant, yet 'hostile' Other of the *homeland*<sup>5</sup>: the Turkish Cypriots. It is an area where the majority of ethnic Greek Cypriot institutions, including the local media, is concentrated and which is symbolically considered to be the 'heart of the British Greek Cypriot diaspora'.

The media on focus are the electronic new and old media: the 'old' local London Greek Radio (LGR) and the 'new' satellite television channels broadcasted from Cyprus (CBC) and Greece (NET), the local cable television channel Hellenic TV and the Greek and Cypriot Home Pages on the Internet. Electronic media are the media that literally saturate everyday life and those requiring less effort and media literacy<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, electronic media continuously and actively negotiate conventional limitations in space and time, they (re)produce images of the homeland and construct scapes of local and global belongings. Ethnic media are on the focus of this research, not because the complexity and variety of media use -which includes ethnic and non-ethnic- is underestimated, but because I am particularly interested in the way minority and non-mainstream media become active participants in the process of identity construction, especially when they have to co-exist and compete with other mainstream ones in their daily existence.

### **The Cypriot Community Centre and the Media in Context**

Greek Cypriots in Britain are estimated between 160-220,000<sup>7</sup> (Oakley 1979; Costantinides 1984; Anthias 1991), with about 70% of them living in Greater London. Cypriots -including an estimated 20% Turkish Cypriots- form the largest migrant white minority in London, excluding

migration from the British Isles (Storkey 1994a). Cypriot migration to Britain has been the result of economic deprivation of rural Cyprus, enforced by political polarization in the island (Oakley op. cit.). Greek Cypriots have had the tendency to form their own communities in the country of settlement, which, in this case means, among other things, geographical concentration, marriage within the group, establishment of ethnic institutions and, to some extent, development of an autonomous economy (Hassiotis 1989).

Greek Cypriots define their ethnicity largely through public discourses, beyond the domestic, private space. Thus it comes as no surprise that they have established many ethnic public institutions and organizations. Among the most important are the churches and the Greek language schools, but there are also a couple of hundred more Greek Cypriot organizations in Greater London: political, cultural, professional, of people who share the same village origin, neighbourhood centres and more. While it can be said that the schools and the churches serve Greek Cypriots for a long period in their lives and have specific symbolic and use value, some other institutions achieve a greater and more continuous role in people's everyday lives. Places that are meeting points, spaces of activities and of communal celebrations form the public ethnic space - the Cypriot Community Centre being one of the most important, both symbolically and as a living space.

Symbolically, this Centre's existence reinforces people's belief that Greek Cypriots form a distinct, active and strong *community*<sup>8</sup>. As a real space it has various uses, as an everyday hangout and meeting point, as a place where people can participate in various activities and functions, including watching satellite television from Cyprus. Watching Cypriot television becomes central in the process of identity construction, as it opens access to images of the country of origin that are daily renewed and allows participation in the construction of an ethnic discourse that is globally shaped.

The Cypriot Community Centre has been an ambitious project in many respects: it has been formed to serve the *community* in various ways: as a day centre for disabled people and for the elderly, as a leisure space for adults and teenagers, as a space where community organizations can meet

and also as a place where different functions and celebrations can take place . Furthermore, the creation of that Centre aimed at structuring a *community* of Cypriots, which includes Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots, Armenian Cypriots and Maronite Cypriots. This was in many ways a political project which would be achieved through daily co-existence of different ethnic groups who share the common Cypriot origin. Even though there are political disagreements and resistances, the Cypriot Community Centre has achieved its goal in that respect. People from all the Cypriot ethnic groups gather in the centre and many Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot associations are based in it.

The co-existence of different Cypriot ethnic groups means that the limits of community and ethnicity are, at least temporarily, negotiated, even though the Greek Cypriot ethnicity remains the primary identity reference of the majority of the habitues. The vast majority of Greek Cypriots in the Centre still speak Greek among themselves; they define themselves as Greek Cypriots, watch and listen to Greek ethnic media and embrace what they perceive as Greek Cypriot values and culture. But their co-existence with non-Greek Cypriots has an important part for their shaping of ethnicity: the presence of the significant Other of the country of origin is renewed as a daily experience and it is in peaceful terms unlike the present condition in Cyprus . This co-presence with the Turkish Cypriots is a reminder that the *homeland* and its culture is characterized by ethnic richness and it is not uniquely defined by Greek Cypriotness.

### **Everyday Life in the Cypriot Community Centre**

Everyday life in the Centre evolves primarily in the ground floor of the three storey building: in the main lounge -where the canteen and the two television sets are situated- and the game room, where people play cards and back-gammon. The Centre has achieved to a large extent to become a space for all British Cypriots, beyond ethnic differences. But, at the same time, it has failed to attract all the various groups of British Cypriots. This is a working class, migrant generation, male-dominated centre. It primarily attracts men

whose financial situation does not allow them to enjoy many other alternatives of public leisure spaces.

Women and youth are very much under-represented in this space, even though the picture changes radically during the weekends, when wedding and christening parties, as well as community organizations' celebrations often take place. Then, a different group of people -including many young, second and third generation Greek Cypriots-visits the centre. But for them, the Community Centre is no different to any other banquet hall where similar events take place. Wedding and christening parties here are as much 'ethnically-defined' as in most other cases. The discussion in this paper largely excludes the non-Greek Cypriot habitues and those users of the centre beyond the 'core group' of middle-aged men. These groups are not presently at focus, as the experience of the 'core group' is, by itself, complex enough to occupy the present limited space.

### *The 'Core' Group*

The vast majority of the habitues usually gathering at the Centre are men above the age of 50. The demography of the place largely reflects the demography of a traditional Cypriot coffee-shop, which is an exclusively male space<sup>9</sup>. Men gathering here define this space as such as well; their visiting the centre is to some extent an act of nostalgia which does not apply to the experience of British-born Cypriots who have never experienced this traditional, Cyprus-based everyday culture. When I asked one of the habitues why his wife and other women don't go to the centre, he was annoyed and

surprised: 'Our wives don't go to places like that, otherwise we wouldn't have married them!' Women who go to male-dominated coffee-places are not respected for their ethics, according to traditions that actually faded out in Cyprus<sup>10</sup>.

Some activities of traditional Cypriot coffee-shop might be embraced in their original form by the Community Centre and its habitués -such as card and back-gammon playing, coffee drinking and watching television<sup>11</sup> - but this space has its own distinct and hybrid identity, unlike the Cyprus-based traditional coffee-shop. For example, the co-existence of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots is almost non-existent in present Cyprus. Also, in Cyprus the traditional village-based coffee-shops are politically segregated: they attract men belonging either to the Left or the Right, but rarely both. And these are only some of the characteristics that differentiate the Community Centre from the traditional Cypriot coffee-shop model. More importantly, the identities of this place's habitués fit in a global, diasporic setting:

- the habitués of the Community Centre have multiple belongings, unlike most of the habitués of the traditional coffee-shops in Cyprus: they are Londoners for the last few decades, but also Cypriots since they were born; their ethnic identity can't be detached from their British experience
- these people might be the ones that use the centre the most, but they share their local and ethnic public space, as well as their domestic, with other Greek Cypriots born in Britain; they also spend much of their leisure time in this Centre which has been an offspring of Britain, not unlike their children and grandchildren
- this group of people is used to negotiating its ethnic identity -in the public and the private space: they co-exist with the significant Other of the country of origin; many of them have non-Greek daughters-in-law, non-white neighbours and have learned to live with British and not Cypriot social realities
- for these people, the homeland's ostracized Greek Cypriots who do not adjust to the mainstream values and lifestyle of the group have become as much members of the group as themselves, even if they sometimes live on

the margin of the community. That means that their sense of ethnicity as well as that of difference within Greek Cypriotness has changed. The ethnic identities of the first generation, Community Centre Greek Cypriot habitues are hybrid like the identities of the sequent generations, even if their primary ideological at least-reference is Cyprus.

Most of the habitues of the centre are either pensioners or unemployed. They are the ones who have the time to enjoy the relaxed daily rhythms of the centre. The majority of the men visit the centre occasionally, once a week or less often, but those who work just spend relatively little time there and their visits are spent while playing a card or back-gammon game and chatting with friends. Everyday life here is ritualized: activities are repeated with similar patterns at specific days and times, so is participation - the habitues come and go at specific time and days, in a way that everybody knows who to expect to meet at what time.

For most people, a good amount of their time in the centre is spent talking with their friends, even though it is surprising to notice that some people spend hours alone and nobody would talk to them. Particular attitudes, including heavy drinking or arrogance, are disapproved by the group; however, there is always space for people with such attitudes - something that signifies processes of informalisation, of flexible ethnicity. Other habitues might not choose to socialize with them, but they won't be ostracized from the ethnic space either. Often expressed competitive relationships between the habitues about politics, something shown on television, or just about a drink, reveal a dimension of male Greek Cypriot identities as well as the tension and politics of the micro-society, a micro-society though that depends on people's participation.

Many people here have nicknames, like for example 'the teacher' or 'the wise one', which project a single dimension of individual identities. The identity that is projected as the communal and universally shared by all Greek Cypriot habitues is ethnic identity. This is the starting point framing these people's everyday life, not only within the limits of the Community Centre, but also within their domestic space and their locality. It is the starting point for

self-identification for this group of migrant generation males who largely depend on the myth of continuity of their life, of unfragmented belonging to the *homeland*. However, the myth is daily challenged and their discourse reveals the contradictions of 'being from somewhere but not being there'.

A 50-year-old habitue, Andreas, comments on the values and ethics in Cyprus, arguing that they are changing for the worse. The Greek Cypriots in Britain have kept their values and traditions more than those in Cyprus, he says. And he adds that, unlike Cyprus, people in Britain live peacefully together.

Here [in Britain] people live peacefully together. In the same building there are Cypriots, Chinese, Arabs, Indians, Blacks, but they still don't have any problem with each other. It's all a matter of habit. We [Greek Cypriots] always teach our children the wrong message. First of all, our Church teaches children that our religion is the best when all religions are as good. Then some of the teachers of the Greek schools teach them the most nationalistic stuff about the Greeks... But our children are born in this country, they grow up with different customs, different language and food. How do people in Cyprus expect them to be just like them? Just the fact that they speak the [Greek] language should be appreciated.

When he refers to his family, another dimension of his identity is dominant. In that case he rejects the idea of his children getting married to anybody but to a Greek Cypriot:

I am not a chauvinist but I don't want my grandchild to be called Mohammed. My children know my desire to marry Cypriots and I believe that they are not going to hurt me... I told my kids, marry one of our own kind and if you don't have a good time divorce him [/her].

This man's talk reveals the hybridity and contradictory content of British Greek Cypriot ethnicity. First, his British multicultural experience is dominant in shaping his ideas of other ethnic groups and his criticism of Greek Cypriot culture. As he goes on though, the identity of a Greek Cypriot

father becomes more dominant, even though hybridity remains (both marriage and the non-traditional choice of divorce shape his discourse). Contradictory talk and ideology is often the outcome of the Greek Cypriots' experience. It is the resolution of everyday conflicting experience, that is both Greek Cypriot and British. In-betweenness characterizes identities, that are constructed on the meeting point of three spaces of belonging: the distant (but visible, especially through the media) country of origin, the living space of Britain and particularly of North London and the global space of the Greek/Greek Cypriot diaspora.

At the same time, constructing the image of the Other becomes an everyday solution to the dilemma of how to define the Self and Us. On one hand, the celebration of western multiculturalism establishes people's sense of belonging in Britain, the real space of their everyday life. One of the men in the Centre, Costas, says:

We don't have a problem with any race. With the Turks as well. They come here, we are friendly to most of them. The conflict took place in Cyprus. Here we all live peacefully together.

But the approach eventually changes as the Other gets closer. Another member of the same focus group says: 'My two daughters are married to Cypriots. My two sons are married to English. At first we got cold to the idea, but then we got used to it'. And Costas adds: 'Well, if you have many children you don't mind if one marries a foreigner, but otherwise it is a problem'. The ethnic restrictions set to their children is much stronger for the daughters than for the sons. The vast majority of mixed marriages are of male Greek Cypriots. The more 'different' the Other<sup>12</sup> is, the more extreme the setting of the boundaries becomes: 'If my daughter married a Black guy...in a way it would be better if I lost her. Of course, he is human as well, but, oh no, Holy Mary...', says one of the habitues. Marriages between Greek Cypriots and Blacks -which is not a usual phenomenon in the group- is one of the main reasons for people to be ostracized from the group.

Many of the Centre's habitués say that they plan to return to Cyprus as soon as their children settle down in their own families in Britain. Many more than those who do go back to Cyprus, are the ones who say they want to return, but since their family lives and 'belongs' to Britain, they don't have a choice but to spend all their life here. This conflict is a conflict of desire and reality, but also it is a choice that people feel they have to justify by saying it's not their own. The attachment to the country of origin is sacred for the migrant generation and their ethnicity is based to a large extent to the preservation of this *imagined belonging*. At the same time, the 'inescapable' belonging of their children in Britain is the real bridge of their own dual belonging, even if they ideologically reject it.

### **Television Viewing - Everyday Ritualisation**

There are two television sets in the Community Centre lounge and at least one of them is always switched on. It is the necessary background of this setting, like it is in the domestic space for most British Greek Cypriots. One television set is always tuned in the satellite Greek Cypriot CBC and the other is usually tuned into a Turkish satellite channel. CBC broadcasts its programme after 4:00 pm, but before that, radio programmes are rebroadcasted through television and photos of Cypriot places are projected on the screen. Even before the regular television programme starts, listening to the radio through television and watching the photos on the screen is a usual activity for some habitués. The boundary between different media technologies and output is blurred, while the oxymoron of listening to the radio...on television becomes a norm. Sometimes, while the Cypriot radio is on... television, one particular habitué actually starts dancing in front of the television screen, when a song he likes is played.

The Centre becomes even more vivid during the evening when a more diverse group of people gathers there: apart from the pensioners and the unemployed, the habitués who come after work for a game of cards or backgammon and those who come for the evening news on CBC are two important groups. The playing room keeps its own autonomy during the

evening, as well as during the day with the men playing games. But the main lounge is transformed. While the tables next to the canteen are the 'heart' of the centre during daytime, with people having drinks and chatting among themselves, in the evening the life evolves mostly around the area in front of the television set transmitting the CBC programme.

The second television set keeps broadcasting the Turkish channel, but the volume is very low and there is either none or just a couple of viewers of its programmes. Sometimes, the Greek Cypriots take over that television set as well. 'The other night, there was a football match on English tv. So we had one of the TVs on CBC and the other on the game', Nicos, one of the habitués, said once with a cunning smile on his face. This action does not reflect disrespect to the Turkish Cypriot habitués. It rather reflects a use-value approach to television. In simple words, since nobody was using the second television set, why not use it to get the most out of television's programmes that night. It also reflects the co-existence of British media and ethnic media, the co-existence of British identities and Greek Cypriot identities. Communal sports and football viewing in particular, is an experience shared by the men of the Centre, who actively renew and (re)shape their male identities in this space.

Media use, like most of the other activities in the Centre, has diverse dimensions, consistencies and irregularities, depending on people's multiple identities and temporal changes. It is yet important to note that media use is highly ritualized as a public activity. Repeated patterns, planned viewing and interpersonal talk characterize media consumption here. The focused attention, the participation and the interaction that accompany media use in the Centre signify it as a ritualized, and not as a routine activity (Rothenbuhler, 1998).

The vast majority of the people who don't play a game -usually a large group of about twenty people remains in the game room- gathers in front of the television broadcasting the CBC programme. There are three long couches which usually face the television set, like in an auditorium. Sometimes, during daytime, the couches face each other, but never in the evening; then, they are facing the television. This space has its own

characteristic demography. Usually, those interested the most in CBC's programmes sit on the first and the second row. Those not so interested in them, sit on the third row or on the side.

When the main CBC news bulletin comes on at 6:30 pm, it is a sacred moment. The 15-25 members of the audience keep quiet, at least for the main news. Those who might talk attract looks of disapproval, while almost every member of the group is concentrating in the activity of watching the news. As the news evolves with less important stories, some people start talking, usually commenting on what they watch, but sometimes they also talk about irrelevant issues. It is interesting to notice that only rarely people comment on important political news stories when they watch them, while their viewing is more participatory, with expression of opinions, when human stories are shown. In cases of accident or local story reporting on CBC, many people's attention is attracted, since they are interested in finding out if it refers to someone they know. One should not forget that Cyprus is not only a symbolic reference, but also a 'living' reference for most of them. It is the place where they were born, where some of their relatives and friends live. In their viewing of local stories on CBC, they renew their local Cypriot identities as well.

As far as the political stories are concerned, the discussion will follow the news, or the information obtained during the viewing will be used at different times, during discussions of the specific political issue. It is not rare for people to defend their political arguments by saying 'I saw that on CBC', or 'As CBC said....'. Their political identities are global identities primarily relying on the mediated images of distant Cyprus transmitted via satellite.

The television viewing is the central activity for most of the habitues for no more than half an hour, as long as the CBC evening news lasts. After that, television viewing starts co-existing with other activities. Many people might continue watching a series or a comedy on CBC, but these genres' watching does not require complete silence and their full attention. The group of about twenty people which gathers for the news will then split in those who will go for a game, those who will watch other CBC programmes and those talking among themselves.

Even though television viewing is highly ritualized and repeated in similar ways on a daily basis, the usual patterns might change under some circumstances. For example, when important events are taking place, television attracts the attention of more habitues who don't regularly watch the news, while vivid discussions about the news follow the viewing. In general, most British Greek Cypriot -either in the Community Centre or in their homes- value and trust the information provided by CBC. For the majority of the viewers in the Community Centre it is the primary source of information, even though it is rarely exclusive. Next to that, there is the local radio, LGR, the Greek press, as well as the British media. 'We watch the news on BBC or ITV... It's the news of this country...our country, we are interested in it', a man says.

Even for those people gathering in front of the television of the Community Centre every evening, the interest in obtaining information from Cyprus is not the single reason of their viewing. This viewing is also a communal participatory activity, a chance to socialize and also to spend the evening. For some people it is an extremely important part of their everyday life. This raises questions about the importance of the ethnic media use -and the media use in general- as such. Is the television a major attraction for the people who visit the Centre? Does it bring them together? Does it facilitate socialization among the habitues, or does it diminish it?

Greek/Greek Cypriot and Turkish satellite television has been offered in the centre as one of the major daily entertainment choices. Its existence might have created a new audience for CBC, especially those men who can't afford to have it at home. In most cases, though, these are people who watch a lot of television anyway. What CBC has created within the Community Centre is not an audience in general, but an audience for ethnic television. For the Centre's habitues, who choose to spend a lot of their time in a space with direct Cypriot references and connotations, the use of ethnic media is much more meaningful and important than for many other Cypriots. For them, access to ethnic television facilitates participation in forming their ethnicity, which is daily renewed through the multiple and diverse communication flows. They look to CBC for renewing their image of Cyprus,

for building their knowledge around Cypriot politics and culture and for adopting their own culture and ideology to Cypriot contemporary reality. Nevertheless, sometimes ethnic media also remind them that their image of the homeland is illusionary. For example, people often make negative comments about contemporary Cypriot values and about the 'abandonment', as they call it, of the Cypriot dialect by younger people in Cyprus. Furthermore, the broadcasting of CBC has created a space for participation in the Centre, especially for those who don't play cards or back-gammon and still want to be part of the Community Centre, a public space where they can meet other Cypriots.

### **Media Talk**

The habitues of the Community Centre, like most Greek Cypriots, use media extensively and they talk about them as being a taken-for-granted part of their everyday life's plot. Within the Centre, it is satellite Greek Cypriot television that dominates. But it is not only CBC satellite that becomes an issue in the habitues' lives and discussions. Even if they are not all used in the Centre, a collection of media forms their media discourse - a discourse that is nevertheless characterized by contradictions.

Andreas, for example, sees media use as competitive to education, when he says that he doesn't have cable or satellite television at home: 'When you have children who study, it is better to have as little television as possible'. At a different time, he recognizes the important ethnic role of the media for the Greek Cypriots, when he proudly says that the majority of Greek Cypriots have cable or satellite television at home. But later on, he turns very critical when he talks about LGR: 'People at LGR think they protect our traditions, our language and our values. But they don't. I don't want to listen to English music on LGR and these...jumping around noises! No thanks!', he says emphatically, adopting an attitude of resistance to media's ethnic hybridity.

As everyday life becomes more and more media-saturated, people take the continuous presence of television, radio and the press for granted.

However this presence raises more concerns among consumers who are concerned with issues of control of media content and of media use. As Hirsch notes in one of his ethnographic works with a London middle class family, people tend to form 'a sort of folk model of the Frankfurt School' (1999: 210) about the media. In this case though, the minority and ethnic character of the media in question gives the media a dual role, both as 'intruders' and as components and referents of everyday life that serve a community and a distinct minority culture that needs to be protected. One of the most common comments among the people participating in this study in relation to the local London Greek Radio (LGR) is that it keeps to *community* together.

Media use is also gendered. Andreas says that he listens to LGR everyday, but he would never call-in. 'The woman does', he says referring to his wife. 'She calls to congratulate somebody who is getting married, somebody who has his birthday, things like that. But I don't like such things'. The approach to the soap opera viewing is similarly gendered and age defined, even though soap opera viewing seems to be much more universal. Dinos notes: 'We don't watch them [soap operas]. It is the women and children who do'.

The majority of men asked say that they listen and watch news and current affairs programmes, more than any other programme. That discourse illustrates two dimensions of their identities: On one hand, it reflects a male identity shared by these people -one that wants men to be informed about public affairs. On the other hand, it reflects their ethnic identity, since, the media they use the most, are saturated by political information about Cyprus. But they do admit they listen to music programmes, breakfast programmes, even a women's programme and a children's programme on LGR. Again, media use allows a flexibility and a 'playfulness' of identities.

Not everybody evaluates ethnic media as being necessary ingredients of their ethnic life. Yiannis, an insurer who is not actually a habitue, but occasionally visits some of his clients at the Centre, says that English television satisfies him enough. He doesn't listen to LGR even though he finds it useful for old and lonely people, people who work in the Greek Cypriot factories. When asked if he feels different compared to the people who listen

to LGR, he replies: 'Maybe... Sometimes I go to houses or factories and they listen to LGR twelve hours a day... I would never do that'. This man's middle-class belonging, which he consciously projects, partly defines his ethnic experience. For him, ethnic media use which is mostly associated with his *compatriots'* working class ethnic experience is not his personal choice.

However, at least one in three of the centre's habitués have satellite or cable Greek/Greek Cypriot television at home. That doesn't stop them from coming in the Centre for the communal viewing of the evening CBC news, or for meeting their friends and participating in other activities. The social and communal viewing in the public space of the Centre is a participatory leisure activity, shaping ethnicity beyond the domestic. But as media saturate both the public and the domestic space and reshape the boundaries between the two, they form the context of everyday life. 'I watch CBC between 4 pm and 9 pm, which is the time the transmission finishes', says Pavlos. 'I have my radio alarm programmed on LGR, so since 7 o'clock in the morning when I wake up, it is continuously on ', adds a friend of his. Next to ethnic media consumption, there is the consumption of English media. Mainstream television is watched by everybody, especially popular programmes such as the soap operas *Eastenders* and *Brookside*, films as well as the BBC and ITV evening news. British Greek Cypriots don't only come 'from somewhere else'; they are not only members of a diaspora; they also live in a real space, in a 'here' and a 'now' which co-exists with the global and virtual spaces of belonging.

English radio use is limited, unlike television viewing. The social and communal role of the Greek radio as a companion and a bonding medium diminishes the role of English-language radio, at least for the migrant generation. LGR is the local medium, produced by North London Cypriots for North London Cypriots. For that reason, it is the medium with the most permanent presence in people's life, even if at the particular public space it is not actually used. As emphasized already though, understanding media consumption means surpassing the limits of the actual act of media reception.

## Conclusions

This long-term ethnographic study in the Cypriot Community Centre allowed me to study the ongoing, complex processes of ethnic identity construction and media consumption in a public space where ethnicity is the dominant context.

- In this space, especially for the migrant generation 'core group', some important parameters of ethnic relations of the country of origin are reproduced: for example, the domination of Greek Cypriots as a majority over other Cypriot ethnic groups. The dominant role of the Greek Cypriot television viewing in the Centre has a major part in that. However, the analogies in power relations are new and hybrid: Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots share the same space, something that has not been happening in Cyprus for more than a quarter of a century. Also, Greek and Turkish media co-exist and even though Greek Cypriot television is dominant, there is a struggle for the Turkish satellite channel to gain its space in the Centre. This daily process makes the ethnic dimension of communication more obvious: sometimes celebrated and others contested.
- The Community Centre is a dual ethnic referent, for the construction of a Cypriot identity, shared with non-Greek Cypriots and for the construction of Greek Cypriotness in particular. The latter is the most important, but it is negotiated through the former.
- The Centre achieves its ethnic role by offering its habitues the ability to participate in constructing the ethnic public space, a space where ethnic identities are expressed actively -through the extensive media use, the interaction and everyday communication with other Greek Cypriots and non-Greek Cypriots.
- Ethnic media turning into a 'taken-for-granted ingredient' of public everyday life shapes media consumption in two ways. On one hand, the actual media use surpasses the limits of the domestic and becomes a public, communal activity with impact on the framing of public community life. On the other hand, media discourses are formed publicly and communal demands relating to the role, the content and the control of the media are shaped and

communicated in public and taken back home where media are primarily used. In that way, media consumption becomes more critical, but also more and more inseparable part of ethnic life

- Ethnic media achieve a major real and symbolic ethnic role. People turn to them for renewing their image of Cyprus and its culture and also for reaffirming their local participation to the ethnic project. The Centre's habitues celebrate the globalisation of their ethnicity and their diasporic identity, to a large extent because of ethnic new media. The co-existence of local and global ethnic media also creates a discourse for them to construct an ethnic identity that is shaped, at the same time, in the British, the North London, the Cypriot and the diasporic space.
- British Greek Cypriots praise the media and use them in their everyday life, though they are often critical towards them. That is a result of their participatory relation to ethnicity: people are not only at the reception side, but also at the production side of it. And media largely contextualise and facilitate this interactive relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> Ethnography as it is understood and operationalised within anthropology more than within media studies, taking into consideration all the cultural parameters that shape people's lives and not to ignore everything else but the specific research focus - the media in this case (Hirsch,

<sup>2</sup> 'Needs and interests' relate to complex psychological, cultural and social dimensions, including the 'need of belonging', the need to form distinct subcultures, common economic or political interests, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Primordiality, as defined by Geertz (1963) implies that ethnic relations depend on common ancestry, language, religion and kinship

<sup>4</sup> This 'model' of ethnicity corresponds to a specific historic and geographic paradigm of western multicultural societies, where, at least to a certain extent, all people enjoy basic common rights and they are not forced to rely on ethnic identification for their well-being in society. While this is a complex issue and questions of racism and class stratification are not ignored, the argument of 'ethnicity as a choice' implies that ethnicity, racism and social exclusion in multicultural western societies do not necessarily go together anymore

<sup>5</sup>

*Home* and *homeland* are very important, yet problematic concepts, as they have multiple meanings and signify different things at different times. This diversity relates to people's multiple belongings and the change in the meaning of space, initiated by globalisation and populations' movements

<sup>6</sup> The Internet is an exception, but the group of people using it is distinctive as well in that case (primarily young, middle class and male). In this paper Internet use is not discussed, as the group on focus here hardly ever uses it.

<sup>7</sup> These numbers are only estimations. The registration of Cypriots in the Census includes only people born in Cyprus and not British-born Greek Cypriots, that these estimations try to include.

<sup>8</sup> The use of key-concepts, such as *community*, in italics represents their vernacular use

<sup>9</sup> For an interesting discussion of the Greek traditional coffee-shop see Loizos and Papataxiarchis (1991). Particularly Chapter 7 by Papataxiarchis gives a challenging ethnographic account of the coffee-shop and the construction of male Greek identities in it. For the construction of male Greek identities see also Chapter 10 by loizos and Papataxiarchis.

<sup>10</sup> These attitudes raise questions about my own presence in the centre, which was often challenged and questioned by some habitues. This kind of male-resistance was diminished as my presence there became more common and usual

<sup>11</sup>

Watching television is an activity which has developed in the last couple of decades as a necessary component of the coffee-shop culture

<sup>12</sup> Difference cannot be specifically defined, as it is culturally constructed. In this specific case, skin colour and people's historical background are projected as defining dimensions of difference