BEYOND TRADITION: ANTHROPOLOGY, SOCIAL CHANGE, AND TOURISM IN CYPRUS

Gisela Welz

Abstract

Cyprus continues to draw the interest of political scientists and historians as a particularly engaging, if not always hope-inspiring, case of both intra-society and international conflict. Conversely, the other social sciences have not focussed on Cyprus with the same intensity, and indeed, have not figured as prominently in the discourse on Cypriot society. There are many indications that this situation might be changing presently,[1] and a plurality of voices in the social sciences is making itself heard, both within Cyprus[2] and in a wider international context, especially in the English-speak- ing world.

Introduction

Even though anthropological studies on Cyprus are far from numerous, it seems worthwhile to briefly review what anthropology has contributed to an understanding of Cypriot society. As a modernising Mediterranean society, Cyprus has been of interest to social anthropologists primarily as an example of how social change transformed the traditional culture of local village communities after the second World War. Indeed, it was the ethnography of a Pitsilia village conducted in the 1950s by John Peristiany - who would later become director of the Social Science Research Centre in Nicosia - that provided the foundation for an area specialisation on the Mediterranean among British social anthropologists and American cultural anthropologists. His 1965 article "Honour and shame in a Cypriot highland village" is widely credited with what would later be called the "invention of the Mediterranean" in anthropology (see Goddard/Llobera/Shore 1994). He asserted that honour and shame serve as value orientations guiding social life in the small-scale societies of the circum-Mediterranean, where it is not the state and its institutions, but the evaluation of individual actions by village public opinion that provides the basis of social integration, rather than institutions and the state. Building on his work, anthropolog-

ical Mediterraneanists would later define honour as the publicly negotiated reputation of males that is ascribed as a result of successful strategies of dominance in com- petition with other social actors, with public discourse as the local arena of honour requiring calculated presentations of male autonomy and aggression.

More recent studies have also addressed, but considerably modified the divide between tradition and modernity that underlies the anthropological interest in Cyprus. Against the backdrop of a growing number of studies not only on rural com- munities, but also on urban settings,[3] three ethnographies can illustrate this change in perspective especially well. The study of a Morphou district village by Peter Loizos, published as "The Greek Gift" in 1975, inquired into how post-Independence politics affect traditional social relations on the local level, as villagers align themselves according to modern divisions of social class and political ideology. Loizos portrays the Greek-Cypriot inhabitants of Argaki as social actors who are very capable in meeting the challenges of a changing society,[4] a quality of cultural competence that also emerges in the study conducted by Kyriacos Markides in the Mesaoria village of Lysi in the early seventies. This community study combined a social research approach with some ethnographic methodology. Markides and his co-authors (1978), however, follow conventional notions of social change, with modern values replacing traditional ones in a linear transition process that can be traced neatly by comparing the attitudes of the younger generation with that of the older people. Positioning itself in opposition to the findings of Markides, a more recent ethnography by Vassos Argyrou asserts that modernity is "neither a destination to be reached nor an object to be appropriated" (1996:157). Argyrou's study reveals both "modernity", in the sense of Western attitudes and practices embraced by the Cypriot urban middle class, and the affirmation of "tradition" that expresses working class resistance against bourgeois values to be foils that mask the fact that both modernists and traditionalists merely enact the symbolic domination of their society by the West.[5] Argyrou succeeds in displacing anthropology from its cherished role of protecting traditional culture against the threat of modernisation, yet seems to accept tradition and modernity as pivotal points in the discussion of social change in Cypriot society.

These ethnographies on Greek-Cypriot village communities after World War II have to be seen within the context of a larger framework of anthropological work in the Mediterranean (see also Argyrou 1999). Especially in the sixties and seventies, both British social anthropology and American cultural anthropology tended to view Mediterranean societies as places where pre-modern ways of life were still alive and could therefore be observed directly by the anthropologist. As many of their studies selected small and marginal communities as field sites, findings tended to substan- tiate their assumption that in Mediterranean Europe, tradition determines practices and discourses, while in the Western European societies of "modernity's core", prac-

tices and discourses are determining the course of modernisation. These studies erected a sharp divide between the cultures of northern and southern Europe by separating "moderns" from those societies who are "not yet modern". This asymmetrical dichotomy put forward by anthropologists first and foremost seems to have served the ends of disciplinary politics and academic strategising. When fieldwork in extra-European societies became increasingly difficult to implement, not least because Western experts were less welcome than before in non-Western postcolonial settings, European regions acquired considerable attractiveness for social and cultural anthropology as new fieldwork sites that also seemed to require fewer financial and temporal investments of fieldworkers. Mediterraneanists took refuge to a rhetoric of making their not all that distant field appear "other", that is more exotic and alien, thereby legitimating their choice by emphasising its cultural difference vis-à-vis other parts of Europe.

However, much of what they revealed of the inner workings of small-scale social universes has been and continues to appear plausible as a representation of local cultures in the Mediterranean. In recent years, anthropology has increasingly worked towards breaking down the divide between modernity and tradition by reflexively critiquing the ways in which ethnographic writing contributed to a construction of Mediterranean societies as traditional and, by implication, backward, and insufficiently "rational". The above-mentioned studies by Loizos and Argyrou are part of that movement, infusing the anthropology of Greece and Cyprus with a critical energy, as are the writings of American cultural anthropologist Michael Herzfeld (see for instance, Herzfeld 1992). However, public discourse in Western Europe is persistently reproducing images of the archaic and "other" Mediterranean, images that in the context of tourism marketing of Mediterranean destination areas acquire an added dimension of selling these cultures as supposedly untouched by the ravages of civilisation. There is evidence that today's decision makers and opinion leaders in Mediterranean societies themselves are not immune against interpretations of contemporary social life that suggest that the historical experience of poverty and of exploitation by foreign rulers produced social coping strategies that were cemented culturally through the centuries. According to such interpretations, contemporary Mediterranean societies may have arrived in modernity technologically and infrastructurally, but they are at the same time socially and culturally still entangled in older patterns that obstruct the development of a productive and sustainable economy. How such interpretations acquire plausibility becomes much clearer when applying them to some ethnographic observations. A study on tourism in the Paphos district of the Republic of Cyprus[6] will serve as a case-in-point of how practices of contemporary social actors can easily be aligned by both scholarly and common-sense interpretations with notions of backwardness and traditionality.

The economic culture of tourism is a good example to engage anthropological

debates on the nature of tradition and modernity. As a modernising agent, tourism is credited with deeply and irreversibly transforming both the social order and the cultural values of destination areas. Tourism engages anthropology's longstanding concern with the threat that modernisation poses to traditional cultures. Many ethnographic studies of tourism thus serve to re-affirm the divide between tradition and modernity that has helped create the discipline of anthropology as much as anthropology has contributed to its construction and perpetuation. Locating "authentic culture" only in domains untouched by the touristic machinery, such studies often exclude local people engaged in the tourism economy from their focus.

Conversely, in the small-scale ethnographic inquiry that I am presenting here, the cultural practices and cultural knowledges that local actors develop become topical. They emerge as cultural brokers who mediate between their own society and the transient visitors. The interest in my study was with the social practices of small entrepreneurs in the local tourism economy, focussing on the interprenetration of tourist development and individual entrepreneurial decisions, of personal biographies and family histories. After the Turkish invasion of 1974, the Republic of Cyprus has had an unparalleled economic recovery and secured for itself a small but growing portion of tourism in the Mediterranean. The social, economic, and environmental consequences are as problematic as in most other circum-Mediterranean tourist destination areas. Most enterprises that were part of the study[7] are family-run, often with two generations and siblings working full-time. Restaurants and car rental agencies, small tour operators and apartment hotels, diving schools and souvenir shops are among the typical tourist businesses.The advantage of unpaid family labour over hired employees is minimised to the degree that severely underpaid, often illegal immigrant labour has become very widely available in Cyprus. Family members also often contribute financial resources, land, or buildings; predictably, decisions to be taken about new activities or investments cause conflicts. Antagonisms between brothers are expected and seem to follow a cultural logic of sibling rivalry; competition for resources is clearly intensified when one or two of them plan to get married and establish their own nuclear families.

The local economy of a tourist destination area is an "environment of risk" (Anthony Giddens); because the direction of tourism's growth and its local effects can hardly be anticipated by local actors. They become increasingly dependent on global developments they know little of and have no way of accurately calculating their outcomes. The corporate board decisions of transnational corporations are penetrating local life worlds. Needless to say, these are conditions that Cyprus shares with other tourist destination areas. However, in this case, the politically tense situation between the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish-controlled northern part of the island considerably adds to the insecurity that characterises all local tourism economies. Yet, the small entrepreneurs are much less afraid of an actual outbreak of armed conflict than

that they fear the media in the home countries of the tourists headlining yet another rumour of military threat, thus causing tens of thousands of tourists to cancel their bookings for vacation in Cyprus. In such a situation, family businesses represent a strategy to minimise risk because the family usually is involved in a number of economic activities, not all of them touristic. Pluriactive households typically include agriculture with a seasonally varying intensity, one or more touristic activities plus employment in the public sector.

Competition between businesses is extremely tough. Those entrepreneurs whose business is a success find themselves copied by others. Those who enter into the tourist economy consider it safer to reproduce what has proven profitable in the past than to try and develop something innovative or even to scout out a still undeveloped segment of the market. The consequence is that more and more businesses compete mercilessly for an ever smaller market. Those who were first to establish a new type of business fall victim to those who come later; those who manage to push their predecessors out are triumphant. Many new businesses founder after the first year or can only go on because the pluriactive family is able to economically absorb the loss for a while.

Now, are these behaviours and attitudes traditional or modern? In fact, much of what this brief report reveals of the strategies that local actors develop in order to come to terms with new challenges resonates strongly with what the anthropology of Southern Europe has been insisting is the traditional ethos of Mediterranean societies. For instance, the observation that some families are bitterly antagonistic instead of cooperating for their own good seems to make plausible any explanation involving older familistic patterns. Familism as an anthropological trope is heavily suggestive of images of rural small towns torn by strife between rival families which in turn prevents the rationalisation and depersonalisation of social relations, politics, and the economy - considered a trademark of modernity. Here also fits the anthropological diagnosis of the peasant world view of limited good, defined as the assumption that the total number of economic resources available in a given situation cannot be increased. As this is taken to mean that the total sum of profit attainable in a local community always stays the same, the individual and his family can only make a gain by changing the mode of distribution in their favour. This serves well to explain the practice of newcomers to the local tourism economy to copy the economic strategies of their successful predecessors, and to force them out of business instead of attempting to multiply the total number of resources by inventing new types of business options. As another pattern that is assumed to embody the truly Mediterranean ethos, the honour and shame complex appears to lend credibility and legitimacy to the sometimes even criminal acts of economically motivated competition between local tourism entrepreneurs by its very ideal of aggressive masculinity.

15

An interpretive stance that tries to find evidence of traditional behaviour among those local actors engaged in navigating a modernising world looks for persistence rather than for change. Persistence as an explanatory model implies that innovation and modernisation penetrating a society from the outside will be responded to by falling back on historical experience and by activating traditional attitudes and long-stand- ing types of social action. But some caution is in order here, as Michael Herzfeld has repeatedly emphasised: "Entrepreneurship, a virtue in the Protestant West, becomes mere grasping or deviousness when perceived in exotic others (...). The distance between 'rugged individualism' and 'agonistic self-interest' arguably has more to do with whether one is attributing the quality in question to a collective self or an exotic other than with any fundamental difference in moral orientation." (1992:9) It therefore seems fair to assume that an interpretation of social practice that privileges tradi- tionality may not tell the whole story. By staying with the framework of persistence, only those strategies of local actors come into view that indeed can successfully prop up this notion of traditional orientations . Other strategies then are not immediately visible.

Returning to the admittedly limited ethnographic example of small entrepreneurs in the local tourism economy of a Cypriot community, what about practices and orien- tations that do not comply with easy explanations of traditionality? There are quite a few. For instance, the economic strategy of pluriactive households is able to respond to a volatile market and to noncalculable risks by not staking everything on one option, but instead diversifying into a variety of unrelated fields. It can certainly be viewed as being in line with notions of the flexible social actor so much talked about in post-industrial societies. As already mentioned, tourism implies incalculable risks for the businesspeople involved, and successful strategies of contingency manage- ment have to be seen as key qualification for surviving in such a setting.

Certainly quite a few of the entrepreneurs included in the study exhibit this modern key qualification. It is important to realise that most entrepreneurs are self-taught in their field. Their training is highly diverse as are professions held before entering tourism, but the qualification has hardly ever anything to do with their present occu-pation in tourism. However, many of the small entrepreneurs have spent years of their lives in foreign countries as labour migrants or for professional and academic training, in many cases in Western Europe, the United States or the overseas English-speaking countries of the Commonwealth. Often they are multilingual and also highly proficient in terms of cultural knowledge on the societies the tourists come from, something that clearly helps in the tourist business: They are very suc- cessful in decoding indicators not just of nationalities, but of different lifestyles and consumer cultures as well. The biographical experience of migration constitutes a cultural capital. Intercultural competence in their case implies multilinguality, the fac- ulty to communicate well across cultural and social barriers, as well as experiential

knowledge of the home countries of the tourists.

The worldview and the lifestyle of these return migrants has undergone changes; they differ from those of their peers who stayed behind in Cyprus, and they also perceive themselves as having a different outlook than their compatriots. The migration experience combined with the challenge of positioning oneself in the context of changing Cypriot society seems to have generated a new cultural type. These are individuals who are dissenters when it comes to many conventional values of Cypriot society. While an analytical perspective easily identifies these individuals as embodying a post-traditional cultural option, some of them would reject the label "modern" for a self-definition, at least not in its conventional meaning as Western and progress-oriented. Conversely, they identify as traditionalists. Most of them also produce and market "tradition" as a commodity within the framework of the tourism economy. They themselves define what is traditional, or typical for the region, and sometimes do so in a playful, certainly in a creative manner. This is most readily visible in the restaurant business where "traditional" cuisine often is the result of innovative strategies. The claims of these entrepreneurs to traditionality are insistently voiced, but not narrowly defined as restricted by geographical boundaries or historical continuities. Rather, they reflexively relate the experience of transnational migration to the construction of a Cypriot culture at the crossroads of multiple influences. Not simply reproducing tradition, but actively traditionalising, these strategies are not about continuity so much as they are about invention.[8]

In sum, these small entrepreneurs in the tourism economy who have come back to Cyprus as return migrants seem to be quite capable in dealing with the unexpected, and they are good communicators in intercultural situations. Also, they are proponents of a new set of values and attitudes. Most importantly, they have adopted a reflexive stance vis-a-vis tradition. For them, tradition is neither something handed down from their parents and grandparents to be accepted unquestioningly nor an orientation to reject and abandon in favour of "modernity" or "the West". Rather, they are actively involved in shaping and inventing what they call tradition. For the social actors in this case study, being modern means to be self-reflexive about tradition. However, these cultural strategies are novel but hardly uncontested. Rather, there are many other options of identifying oneself as modern in a rapidly changing society such as the Republic of Cyprus, with the adoption of advanced technologies and the striving for material prosperity being embraced by a sizeable portion of the population. Whether the culture of reflexivity and intercultural brokerage that one can observe with the comparatively small group of return migrants will be only a transitory event, or whether it will prove to be durable, is still an open issue.

Modernisation does not progress in a regular and linear fashion, but on the contrary, it kicked off a highly irregular, disjunctive and uneven dynamic that cannot be

observed by ethnologists like a parade going by (see Geertz 1995). As a consequence, the culturally constructed dichotomy of tradition and modernity from which the anthropological and ethnological disciplines emerged and which in turn has been maintained by them is no longer stable. And this destabilising affects both sides of the divide. Today, "modern" has become a problematic category of ascription and self-description, both for modern societies and for those scholarly disciplines that are engaged in constructing societal self images. But also traditionality is not what it used to be. Not because modernisation has obliterated tradition, but because the scholarly concept of tradition and the empirical reality of what is being called tradition are drifting ever further apart. Where before historical depth and the unbroken con- tinuity of traditional patterns of thought and action were assumed, now it is increas- ingly understood - also by the carriers and keepers of tradition - as a construction originating from present needs of people living today, not a mindless reproduction of past habits, but instead a response to contemporary challenges, a response, however, that refers back to the past and by its rhetoric of historicity gains both plausibility and legitimacy. Processes of reflexive modernisation (see Beck/Giddens/Lash 1994, Beck 1992) are therefore necessarily matched by their complement, reflexive traditionalisation.

Because Cypriot society today is an interface of highly diverse and often contradictory interests, influences, and confluences, it could well become a new focus for research. However, not - like in an earlier anthropological perspective - as a place where residues and relics of pre-modern times can be detected, but as a contemporary laboratory where a multiplicity of possible ways of acting and thinking modern is being invented, experimented with, debated, and theorised. In this, the role of the social sciences will be critical.

Notes

1.   For a forceful critique of the monopoly of political science in social science repre- sentations, see Calotychos 1998. More recently, a conference hosted by Floya Anthias at the University of Greenwich gave impetus to introducing Cyprus to the mainstream of theoretical concerns in the social sciences - and vice versa (Cypriot Society into the New Millennium. Globalisation and Social Change, December 4th and 5th, 1999)

2. For examples of collaborative scholarly projects that surmount the division of the two academic communities on the island, see Akis/Peristianis/Warner 1996, Azgin/Papadakis 1998.

3. See for instance, Attalides 1981, Papadakis 1993a and 1993b for examples of studies of Nicosia. See also Mavratsas 1995 for a comparison between Greek-Cypriot, Greek, and Greek-American modernisation patterns.

4. The second ethnography by Loizos 1981, focusses on the losses incurred in the displacement of Greek-Cypriot Argaki residents by the 1974 Turkish invasion.

5. The ethnography makes its case by focussing on changing marriage strategies and wedding practices. Marriage and property transfers also provide a focus for another ethnography on the modernisation of a community in the Paphos district. See Sant-Cassia 1982.

6. Research was conducted in Polis Chrysochous and other communities in the Paphos district in 1997 with a grant from the Heisenberg Program of the German Research Council. See also Welz 1998 and forthcoming.

7. The field study is only the first step in a more extensive research program that I hope to be able to execute over the course of the coming years. A total of twenty five small enterprises were included in the study, fifteen were selected for in-depth interviews with individual entrepreneurs. These interviews had a biographic focus. In Polis Chrysochous, a street-by-street survey of all business enterprises was conducted, mapping and categorising individual businesses.

8. In a sense, these self-proclaimed traditionalists defy and subvert the quality of authenticity attributed to traditional culture. They depart from a notion of tradition as a fixed ensemble of customs and artifacts that is handed down unchanged from generation to generation and closely aligned with ethnic and national identity. Official versions of Greek-Cypriot tradition as a particularly pure relic of the Hellenic heritage

permeate much of the rhetoric of touristic productions - such as folk art museums and historic conservation sites, presentations of folk dance, traditional crafts, and music. Conversely, the traditions that these entrepreneurs invent are more pluralistic and often hybrid. See also Beck/Welz 1997a and 1997b.

Bibliography

Akis, Sevgin/Peristianis, Nicos/Warner, Jonathan (1996) 'Residents' attitudes to tourism development: the case of Cyprus'. In *Tourism Management* Vol. 17, No. 7, pp. 481-494.

Argyrou, Vassos (1999) 'Sameness and the Ethnological Will to Meaning'. In *Current Anthropology* Vol. 40, S29-S41.

Argyrou, Vassos (1996) *Tradition and Modernity in the Mediterranean. The Wedding as Symbolic Struggle.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Attalides, Michael (1981) *Social Change and Urbanization in Cyprus. A Study of Nicosia.* Publications of the Social Research Centre, Nicosia.

Azgin, Bekir/Papadakis, Yiannis (1998) 'Folklore'. In *Siidosteuropa-Handbuch Bd. 8: Zypern* Eds. Grothusen, Klaus-Detlev/Steffani, Winfried/Zervakis, Peter Gt:ittingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, pp. 703-720.

Beck, Ulrich/Giddens, Anthony/Lash, Scott (1994) *Reflexive Modernization:Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order.* Stanford, Stanford University Press.

Beck, Ulrich (1992) *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity.* London, Sage.

Beck, Stefan/Welz, Gisela (1997a) 'Kreative Traditionalisierung. Anmerkungen zu neueren Reprasentationsstrategien im Tourismus'. In *Heimat Thuringen* 4, pp. 31-40.

Beck, Stefan/Welz, Gisela (1997b) 'Naturalisierung von Kultur - Kulturalisierung von Natur. Zur Logik asthetischer Produktion am Beispiel einer agro-touristischen Region Zyperns'. In *Tourismus Journal* 1. Jg. Heft 3/4, pp. 431-448.

Calotychos, Vangelis (1998) 'Interdisciplinary Perspectives: Differences at the Heart of Cypriot Identity and its Study'. In *Cyprus and Its People. Nation, Identity, and Experience in an Unimaginable Community, 1955-1997* (ed), Calotychos, Vangelis. Boulder, CO, Westview Press, pp. 1-32.

Clifford, James (1986) 'On Ethnographic Allegory'. In Clifford, J. and Marcus, G.E. (eds), *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography.* Berkeley/Los Angeles, The University of California Press, pp. 98-121.

Geertz, Clifford (1995) *After the Fact. Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist.* Cambridge MA/London, Harvard University Press.

Giddens, Anthony (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity.* Stanford, Stanford University Press.

Goddard, Victoria A./Llobera, Joseph R./Shore, Cris (1994) (eds), *The Anthropology of Europe. Identities and Boundaries in Conflict.* Oxford/Washington D.C., Berg.

Herzfeld, Michael (1992) *The Social Production of Indifference. Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy.* Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press.

Loizos, Peter (1981) *The Heart Grown Bitter: A chronicle of Cypriot war refugees.* Cambridge/London, Cambridge University Press.

Loizos, Peter (1975) *The Greek Gift: Politics in a Cypriot Village.* Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

Markides, Kyriacos C./Nikita, Eleni S./Rangou, Elengo N. (1978) *Lysi. Social Change in a Cypriot village.* Nicosia, Publications of the Social Science Research Centre.

Mavratsas, Caesar Va. (1995) 'Greece, Cyprus and Greek America: Comparative Issues in Rationalisation, Embourgeouisement, and the Modernisation of Consciousness'. In *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* Vol. 10/11, pp. 139-169.

Papadakis, Yiannis (1993a) *Perceptions of history and collective identity. A Study of contemporary Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Nationalism.* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Cambridge.

Papadakis, Yiannis (1993b) 'The Politics of Memory and Forgetting in Cyprus'. In *Journal of Mediterranean Studies,* Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 139-154.

Peristiany, John G. (1965) 'Honour and shame in a Cypriot highland village'. In *Honour and shame.* London, Weinfeld & Nicholson.

Sant Cassia, Paul (1982) 'Property in Greek Cypriot marriage strategies 1920- 1980'. In *Man: The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 17, 4, pp. 643-663.

Welz, Gisela (1998) 'Moving Targets. Feldforschung unter Mobilitatsdruck'. In *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 2, pp. 177-194.

Welz, Gisela (forthcoming) 'Multiple Modernities and Reflexive Traditionalisation: A Mediterranean Case Study'. In *Ethnologia Europaea.*