

De-Securitizing Identity: Narrative (In)Consistency in Periods of Transition

Authors : Katerina Antoniou

Abstract : When examining conflicts around the world, it is evident that the majority of intractable conflicts are steeped in identity. Identity seems to be not only a causal variable for conflict, but also a catalytic parameter for the process of reconciliation that follows ceasefire. This paper focuses on the process of identity securitization that occurs between rival groups of heterogeneous collective identities – ethnic, national or religious – as well as on the relationship between identity securitization and the ability of the groups involved to reconcile. Are securitized identities obstacles to the process of reconciliation, able to hinder any prospects of peace? If the level to which an identity is securitized is catalytic to a conflict’s discourse and settlement, then which factors act as indicators of identity de-securitization? The level of an in-group’s identity securitization can be estimated through a number of indicators, one of which is narrative. The stories, views and stances each in-group adopts in relation to its history of conflict and relation with their rival out-group can clarify whether that specific in-group feels victimized and threatened or safe and ready to reconcile. Accordingly, this study discusses identity securitization through narrative in relation to intractable conflicts. Are there conflicts around the world that, despite having been identified as intractable, stagnated or insoluble, show signs of identity de-securitization through narrative? This inquiry uses the case of the Cyprus conflict and its partitioned societies to present official narratives from the two communities and assess whether these narratives have transformed, indicating a less securitized in-group identity for the Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Specifically, the study compares the official historical overviews presented by each community’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs website and discusses the extent to which the two official narratives present a securitized collective identity. In addition, the study will observe whether official stances by the two communities – as adopted by community leaders – have transformed to depict less securitization over time. Additionally, the leaders’ reflection of popular opinion is evaluated through recent opinion polls from each community. Cyprus is currently experiencing renewed optimism for reunification, with the leaders of its two communities engaging in rigorous negotiations, and with rumors calling for a potential referendum for reunification to be taking place even as early as within 2016. Although leaders’ have shown a shift in their rhetoric and have moved away from narratives of victimization, this is not the case for the official narratives used by their respective ministries of foreign affairs. The study’s findings explore whether this narrative inconsistency proves that Cyprus is transitioning towards reunification, or whether the leaders are risking sending a securitized population to the polls to reject a potential reunification. More broadly, this study suggests that in the event that intractable conflicts might be moving towards viable peace, in-group narratives–official narratives in particular–can act as indicators of the extent to which rival entities have managed to reconcile.

Keywords : conflict, identity, narrative, reconciliation

Conference Title : ICICC 2016 : International Conference on Identity, Culture and Communication

Conference Location : Boston, United States

Conference Dates : April 25-26, 2016