The Framing of Empire:
Cyprus and Cypriots through British Eyes, 1878-1960

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Abstract

Perceptions of people and events in Cyprus on the part of some of the formal and informal agents of the metropolis during the eighty-two years of British rule are the object of this paper, based on a close reading of a mix of historical records, official documents, newspaper reporting, literary accounts and autobiographies. A composite image of the country and its various linguistic groups emerges, as drawn by the scions of empire during their stay. Through the texts of officials and authors like Ronald Storrs and Lawrence Durrell, as well as articles in the Times of London and the framing and interpretation of census data, by way of examples, it will be seen to what degree a racialised discourse was present (as in the cases of colonial Algeria or mandatory Palestine), the ways in which it distinguished between Greeks and Turks, and how it evolved and declined over time, most notably with the approach of the island's independence. A historicised colonial-discursive model is proposed.

Keywords: Colonialism, imperial discourse, racialism, Cyprus, decolonisation.

Source and Discourse

The classic template of Western historiography concerning Ottoman rule in Cyprus still manages to soldier on, albeit with dwindling credibility, thirty years after *Orientalism* (Said, 1978). True, Ottoman history as a whole has evolved considerably, and nowadays, the dominant narrative questions the longstanding 'decline' thesis as well as its motivations. In Dana Sadji's words (2007, p. 4), the

> 'rather comprehensively damning view of the Ottoman sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, resembling the attitude to the premodern histories of many regions that came under colonial rule, served the purposes of, or perhaps was propelled by, a Western hegemonic agenda. This view fitted neatly into Enlightenment progress discourse, coalesced in Orientalist scholarship, and acquired further academic rigour in formulations such as the Marxian "Asiatic mode of production" and "oriental despotism", and the Weberian-inspired modernizationist and developmentist theories.'

Where Cyprus is concerned paradigmatic shifts, although somewhat slower, are also present. Notable contributions by specialists over the past two decades have served to help in deconstructing both colonial discourse and the actions of the indigenous elites in relation to Ottoman and post-Ottoman life. Rolandos Katsiaounis (1996) draws a lively picture of persistent class cleavages amongst the Greeks of the island with regard to the British overlords, who clearly did not understand the majority poor among them. Andrekos Varnava describes the puzzlement of the colonisers, faced upon their takeover by a rather integrated bi-ethnic society, something they could not grasp and proceeded to dismantle because such integration, in the context of their notions of '[m]odernity, which identified races, had no explanation'. It was thus British preconceptions which to a great extent, he opines, 'divided Cyprus' (Varnava, 2009, p. 33). They thought of getting rid of this 'useless' colony, but they could not imagine returning it to the Porte, because this was seen by them as 'contrary to political modernity' (Varnava, 2009, p. 37). Rebecca Bryant, in her study of the emergence of Greek and Turkish nationalism under British rule, notes with irony that

> '[w]hen the new British colonists came ashore in 1878 ... their moral mission was to prove the fertilizing, fecund influence of British reason ... Snatched from the spiral of Ottoman collapse Cyprus would be set aright under British rule, its inhabitants taught the proper husbandry of its resources and the sensible economy of time necessary for its prosperity' (Bryant, 2004, p. 24).

Michael Given (2004, ch. 5) explains the centrality of fiscal extraction and exclusionary enclosure in the battle between (by way of example) the British and their struggling Cypriot subjects, and the consequent framing of mutual perceptions in particular, and discourses in general.

But by and large traditional discourse still dominates. Ottoman history in the late nineteenth century, we are told (Richter, 2006, pp. 11-17), continued to be fixed in the dark immobility of the centuries, wrought as it was with 'merciless tax farmers', with 'Turks' (Katsiaounis, 1996, p. 1 calls them 'Mohammedan Turks') crushing revolts, lording it over 'the enslaved peoples of the Ottoman empire' and their 'freedom dreams', so that when Britain occupied Cyprus, she put to an end to 'the 300 gloomy years of *Tourkokratia*', during which only 'Oriental inefficiency' had prior to 1878 left a little of the island's treasure to its own peoples, by mistake as it were. Indeed, Ottoman rule had been the worst ever, bar none, 'Cyprus [having] been run down as never before in its history', keeping in mind that we are speaking of thousands, not hundreds of years. Not all accounts are as patently discriminating as the one quoted here, between Greek 'civilisation' (embedded in linguistic choices and imagery) and Turkish savagery, for the simple reason that Orientalist writing places both of these peoples in the same backward category. Interestingly, the original version of the account rendered above, is less vehement precisely because it is more detailed (it is difficult to believe that it could have to do with the language – German – in which it is written, less directly linked to the Orientalist cause; on the other hand, we do find the bizarre formulation whereby the Serbian-Turkish war of 1876 'entwickelte sich rasch zu einer wilden Auseinandersetzung über

Rasse und Religion' – quickly became a wild struggle over race and religion – Richter, 2004, p. 11) but the imbedded message is the same. On the other hand, not all accounts, going back to the pre-colonial era, are as damning of Ottoman rule. According to R. Hamilton Lang, the British Consul resident during the 1870s, Cyprus was 'perhaps the best administered' of the Ottoman provinces (quoted in Orr, 1918, p. 46). This stands in contrast to Katsiaounis' standard view of the endemic 'maladministration and corruption' of Ottoman rule (Katsiaounis, 1996, p. 65).

If one tends to marvel at the vehemence of the selected vocabulary (it pervades the literature and is by no means peculiar to only one learned scholar) one should perhaps wonder from where, in the particular case of Cyprus, it descends. Certainly from Machiavelli, from Hegel, and others who form the Orientalist pedigree (Hentsch, 1988). But more recently, it most certainly finds its roots in the period of British occupation, in the commentaries of those who ran the affairs of the island, alongside journalists, literati and adventurers coming from the metropolis, and finally, those who somewhat later took it upon themselves to synthesise and draw conclusions from the first two categories.

These are the people who dispensed what Ranajit Guha labels primary, secondary and tertiary discourse (Guha, 1988), corresponding in part, but by no means neatly, with what conventional historiography labels primary or secondary sources, in terms of the conditions, the means and the ends of their production, in other words, the discourse of the source. In the Cypriot case, as shall be seen, they did not simply carry forward a long Orientalist discursive tradition: they contributed mightily to modernising it, by tempering the religious trope and strengthening the racial one, in keeping with the evolution of the social sciences in the nineteenth century, from de Gobineau to the Social Darwinists. Following the principles espoused in the establishment of the Mandate system after the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, some colonial administrators believed that the non-European child-wards of Empire, the colonies and mandates, while not deserving of the trappings of sovereignty in the present, might eventually grow up to where they could earn them. The Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1930, Lord Passfield, seems to have been one of them, when he stated that

> '[t]he time has not yet come when it would be [to] the general advantage of the people of Cyprus to make a trial of a constitutional experiment in this direction. Those institutions which are already established in the island which are subject in varying degrees to popular control cannot be said to have attained that reasonable measure of efficiency which should be looked for before any extension of the principle is approved' (*The Times*, 1930, p. 13).

In other words, it is not time yet, the time may sometime yet come.

Nature or Nurture?

What was maintained was the notion of the islanders' innate and/or cultural underdevelopment, the childlike need for supervision. While it is not our purpose here to question traditional

categories, it is apparent that one of the important anchors of contemporary historical discourse regarding the Eastern Mediterranean, that is to say the former Ottoman Empire as a whole, is the Weberian concept of patrimonialism, directly influenced by and partly derived from the Young Turks' revolution of 1908 and projections onto political life in the period which preceded and followed it. This is made explicit by Max Weber himself (Weber, 2005, pp. 285-286 and p. 286, n. 2). The paradigm is maintained through the generations, as in Lawrence Durrell's evocation of

> 'the darkness which Turkey brought on the world she inherited. Darkness? These things are relative. What does amaze one however is that the Turks, perhaps through lack of a definite cultural pattern of their own [left the Greeks] freedom of religion, language and even local government ... a recognition perhaps of the enviable qualities of restlessness and imagination which they themselves lacked (Durrell, 1957, p. 123).

This is an interesting and, to say the least, innovative interpretation of the so-called *Millet* policy of the Ottoman Empire seen, to the extent that it may question the 'darkness' paradigm, as a result of a deeply ingrained sense of cultural inferiority and a testimony to the fact that sometimes, as in mathematics, two negatives can make a positive. In other words, and if one is to follow Durrell's reasoning, even those policies which in the West would redound to the credit of governance must, because of the nature of the imperium at hand, have been due to some deeply ingrained cultural-religious imperfection, doubled by the Turks' consciousness of this inferiority of theirs.

The same paradoxical reasoning is found elsewhere. Although the Ottomans, after they captured the island in 1571, freed the serfs, restored Orthodoxy, and granted autonomy to the Christians under their Millet policy, the history of Turkish presence is marked by decline and 'barren stagnation', which lasted three long centuries, with heavy taxation and light administration. According to Captain C.W.J. Orr, an official in the Colonial Office, there was 'no incentive to thrift, industry, originality of character, energy, or, in short, any of those qualities which go to make a virile race' (Orr, 1918, pp. 33-34). The author, a very insightful observer, highly critical of British administration in Cyprus, could not possibly elude the paradigm, nor did he have any incentive to do so.

Michel Foucault (1976, ch. 2) introduced the notion of 'incitement to discourse' as the means whereby loci of power, through a constant stream of whispered, proclaimed and printed versions of social reality, succeeded in filtering these down to the citizenry, and thus help to ensure order in a modern society, where the methods of control proper to pre-enlightenment regimes, and presumably, to the post-enlightenment *Terrible Turk*, who had always 'crushed' revolts 'easily' (Richter, 2006a, p. 11) were no longer available. In his remarkable study *Desiring Arabs*, Joseph Massad carries the concept of 'incitement to discourse' over the Mediterranean, adding a significant pillar to the structure of Orientalism. Faced with a constant stream of European supremacist discourse, Easterners absorbed, accepted and reproduced the conceptions tailored for them by the West. These conceptions impregnated their self-image and the roads through which they proposed to achieve modernity.

We are not here interested in the reception of Western paradigms by the people concerned, that is to say the Cypriots. Of interest in our presentation is the quality of the primary, secondary and tertiary discourse projected and thus incited, on the part of the scions of empire, and in the interplay between them. In other words, this is not a teleological exercise, intended to cast a direct light upon contemporary or present-day history. Much rather, it is an effort to portray the generality of imperial discourse formal and informal, both for its own sake and in the quest for its various subtexts. Even and particularly today, albeit in different parts of the world, the dialectics of empire are still operative, and it is important to seize them in their constituent parts. That moving structure of social relations, history, is carried by the people, but the images transmitted by their rulers helps to frame the speed and sometimes the direction taken.

Who are the Newly-won Subjects?

British views of the type of people they were going to be dealing with are evident from the day the occupation of the island began, 1 July 1878. Prudently seeking intelligence before coming ashore at Larnaca, the British naval commander, wondering what kind of resistance, if any, his forces would encounter, was informed by a Consul Watkins that the Kaimmakam of Larnaca 'was a man of mild and indolent temper, who seldom came out of his *konak*, where he lived with his wives', and from whom, presumably, the occupying force needed fear nothing, all the more so since (according to one Captain Rawson reporting to the Admiral) 'the people were a tame and feeble folk, unlikely to offer any resistance'. It therefore seemed that all was fine, and to pave the way even more smoothly Vice-Admiral Lord John Hay, when he moved up to Nicosia ten days later, 'was accompanied by two mules laden with sacks of new sixpences' intended to pay back salaries (Hill, 1952, pp. 294-295). Thus did the eighty-two year occupation, and the discourse which accompanied it, begin. Meantime, Gladstone did take exception to the occupation, on the basis that it had been agreed *à deux* and without consulting the other Powers. He might have been, he maintained, inclined to hand Cyprus over to Greece, but once the island in British hands, he had to defer to the Queen and to (British) 'popular feeling' and hold on to it (Hill, 1952, pp. 278-279). Besides, Cyprus was needed, if for no other purpose, as a 'sanatorium' for those British officials who had become ill in tropical climes. Unfortunately, this meant that dynamic young colonial officials were wanting (Orr, 1918, p. 179; see also Storrs, 1937, p. 556).

The perceptions of the good they were dispensing abounded, an immodest view shared by historians down to present times, who contrast the benefits of civilisation brought by the new regime, to the maladministration of all of their predecessors going back to the mists of time:

> 'The British occupation in 1878 was the first return to real freedom after some 1500 years of increasing servitude. Although taxation was still necessary, as in every other country, the taxes were gradually arranged to produce the revenue required with the least amount of hardship to the people. Then for the first time for centuries a man could, by energy and intelligence, rise to a higher position and could retain for himself and his heirs what he had gained' (Newman, 1953, p. 221).

Unfortunately for the consistency of the narrative, the trope of laziness still attached to the Cypriots as good Orientals, and this must have made it difficult for the excellent opportunities afforded by enlightened British administration to be seized upon by slothful populations. Back in 1862, Vice Consul Mr. H.P. White had reported that:

> 'The Cypriots are of a quiet and inoffensive disposition; they are social and hospitable, and remarkably fond of pleasure. But they are naturally lazy and given to idleness; they waste much of their time in their cafes and are great frequenters of the fairs which are held at short intervals in different parts of the island ... political agitation or opposition on the part of the people to the constituted authority is equally unknown. The Christians are less false than Greeks are usually reputed to be – yet they have a reputation in the Levant for cunning and keenness in business which is perhaps not altogether undeserved. The Moslems have little of the fanatical spirit and bigotry which characterizes the Arab Moslem' (Newman, 1953, pp. 194-195).

And of course, reflecting on the ironies of history,

> '[i]t is a curious reflection that the descendants of rude savages who inhabited Britain when Cyprus stood in the forefront of civilization should, after the lapse of time of so many centuries, have come from across the seas to aid Cyprus to rise from its long sleep ... (Orr, 1918, p. 18).

More than sleep, they apparently rescued them from rampant crime that was abroad (because the few policemen there were busied themselves with tax collection), as well as the wanton destruction of crops by wandering shepherds, uncontrolled by any authority. Justice was totally neglected, and was anyway in the hands of ignoramuses, easily corrupted to boot. Education was 'primitive', with intellectual attainment barely surpassing a faint knowledge of the basics. The picture was completed by a total absence of hospitals, and rampant disease. Farmers were ignorant of the basics of their profession 'as it is now understood', forests were 'left exposed to the depredation of men and animals', land registration was without system. The people were as apathetic as the government was indifferent. Even olive and carob trees 'were wantonly mutilated or destroyed by their owners[!]'. Britain, it would appear, arrived as a Providential saviour, as shown by her enormous achievements, which the authors proceed to quantify, to the extent that, in comparison with the picture of doom and devastation provided in 1878, '[i]n 1928 the spectacle is such as to suggest ... the ... emotion of Hope' (Storrs and O'Brien, 1930, pp. 31-38). This self-congratulatory rhetoric is characteristic of colonial masters, who usually picture themselves as white knights having intervened to save the much violated colonial object. The benefits as described by the colonising benefactors themselves, for example of French civilisation brought to primitive Algeria and the providential arrival of the Zionists, a people without a land landing in a land without people, to a Palestine devastated by wandering Bedouin primitives to cause the deserts to bloom, come to mind. But in the discourse of the British concerning Cyprus, there is an additional poignancy that

brings to mind Guha's catalogue of primary discourse relating to the Raj, and demanding a classic philological analysis in the quest for what appear to be a distinctly millenarian mentality, whose underpinnings one might wish to explore. The baroque extremities to which the vocabulary tends, go beyond even what the overtly millenarian Lord Shaftesbury, Palmerston's adviser, had produced in the 1840s regarding Palestine, and which prompted Barbara Tuchman to exclaim that '[t]the matter was neo-Puritanism, and once again England was to choke on an overdose of holiness' (Tuchman, 1984, p. 180). The reason may be that in the post-Victorian era the ends had once again been clouded in a more secular language, in which the Unspoken is revealed only allusively, through nominal, verbal and adjectival expostulation. This on the part of a worldly and enlightened servant of the imperial thing, Sir Ronald Storrs, whom one finds conjuring up pictures of masochistic peasants destroying their own means of not only commercial, but nutritional livelihood! An early article in the journal *Science* reports on the paper read by one G. Gordon Hake and supports this line of interpretation, referring to the ways in which under Ottoman administration the island deteriorated, 'as most countries do under Turkish rule'. The example of Famagusta's desolation is cited, as compared with its glory during Venetian times, when it was 'renowned for its brave defence against the infidels'. One of the problems cited by the scientific journal was the refusal of the Turks to fight plagues and diseases, notably locusts, because of the 'Mussulman theory of resignation' which sees such calamities as 'sent by the Almighty' (*Science*, 1886, pp. 576-577). This, in the face of the fact noted in the very same account, that at one point the actions of the Ottoman administration had managed practically to eradicate them, around 1870, and that they reappeared in 1885 during British rule. Worse, the very existence of the locusts, in addition to their increase, is found to be the fault of the Turks, because of their inadequate demographic programmes, which did not permit the population to multiply sufficiently — one notes here the relevance of Foucault's writings on governmentality and biopolitics (Foucault, 2007).

Unfortunately, and if one is to believe Lawrence Durrell speaking in the mid-twentieth century, two or three generations of British rule had done nothing to awaken the islanders to the benefits of civilised rule, since a 'vague and spiritless lethargy reigned', which once made him want to 'kick' his taxi driver, because it was combined with an air of superiority (Durrell, 1957, pp. 22-24). Yet he recognises the unattractive aspects of British colonial morae, wondering however, 'are these choking suburbanisms with which we seem infused when we are abroad any worse than the tireless dissimulation and insincerity of the Mediterranean way of life? I doubt it' (Durrell, 1957, p. 35). Here we have the characteristic Guhan secondary discourse, which places the colonial 'Us' and the colonised 'Other' on the same plane, in typical Orientalist fashion failing to recognise the asymmetry of power.

In the early days however, religion still looms large in the interpretive scheme. During Ottoman times, we are told by the British Vice Consul writing in 1867, Christians are subject to discrimination. However, if they are wealthy, they might win legal cases against poor Moslems. This is taken to prove that in addition to the religious discrimination, there is a sometimes countervailing heavy dose of bribery at hand (Newman, 1953, p. 195). And of course, even though

Cyprus lost its strategic importance as a Mediterranean base when Britain occupied Egypt in 1882, it was impossible to consider returning a majority Christian country to the Muslim Turks (Orr, 1918, p. 43). Later on, around 1953 – the Cold War also impinging – and thanks to the benefits of Empire, it is possible to imagine that religious differences are less important than

> 'the difference between those who base their actions on a belief in God and those who put their trust in the material power of the state. In this new grouping of mankind in the sphere of religion the inhabitants of Cyprus, whether Christian or Moslem, are unanimously on the side of those who believe in freedom, truth and justice as the true basis of civilization. There is therefore, the beginning of a unity in the island, in this aspect of world forces, which is strengthened by the fact that Cyprus is now part of a commonwealth of nations based on similar ideals … [and that in future it] will be united in defence of those principles which all Cypriots hold in common with the empire of which they form a part' (Newman, 1953, p. 224).

Religion, Christian or Moslem (it no longer makes any difference, in principle) has now put itself at the service of a worldly cause, a social religion, the British Commonwealth.

Characteristically, the administrators quickly discovered ways in which the British template could simply (and rather simplistically) be applied to Cypriot society: Moslems are conservative, parsimonious, but rather organised, the Greeks liberal but disorderly and fiscally irresponsible. Of course these projected paradigms do not posit equality, just a kind of Platonic reflection, because these pupils are not studying in English, and are therefore standing before a closed door, that of 'every species of modern learning and advancement' (report on Cypriot schools, submitted to Parliament in 1902 and cited in Orr, 1918, pp. 121-122). On other occasions, British ideological predispositions clearly contributed to policy blunders, as when after the October 1931 events, two bishops and two communists were deported, even though the latter had not until then supported *enosis* (Mallinson, 2005, p. 110).

Indeed, the benefits of the British period were there for all to see, according to some looking back in 1982, to the extent that Cypriots were content with their station, or at least 'their prosperity until the second half of the 1950s' (Hunt *et al.,* 1982, p. 255). True, one finds a much more mitigated evaluation of the virtues of British rule in other sources, particularly regarding the long period up until the end of World War Two (Reddaway, 1986, p. 30). But it is difficult to detect the kind of overall structural (as opposed to dualistic – sometimes trialistic – civilisational) analysis which might yield a more convincing picture of the passage of time in Cyprus.

Philhellenism and Cyprus

A perusal of the literature shows that what is considered Britain's (and France's) traditional admiration of Greeks and Greece, based on the rapprochement between what was considered its classical culture (limited in fact to portions of the fifth century BC, especially in Athens) was seriously diluted in discourse regarding Cyprus, probably because of its hybrid nature, and 'infection' by Turkism and similar Oriental viruses. On the one hand, we are told that '[t]he

archeologist is often faced with the problem of relating the objects and conditions he discovers on an ancient site with similar manifestations of present-day life … [I]n a land such as Greece or Cyprus where there is an unbroken cultural tradition from antiquity to the present day, the problem becomes much more important' (Daniel, 1943, p. 78). On the other hand, Greeks in general, and not only Cypriots, were found by nineteenth century Englishmen to be drunk, violent duplicitous, slothful 'savages', quick to resort to slander and to pull out the knife (Gallant, 2002, pp. 30-31). It was thought, as late as 1926, that philhellenism would help in administering the island: Storrs 'took pride in his classical learning and … was a sincere admirer of the Hellenic literary and cultural heritage' (Georghallides, 1985, p. 11). Of course, as a modern proconsul, he had hopes that British-style modernisation would finally come the way of those he administers: 'by all means admire Euripides, [he told them] but simultaneously organize Boy Scout troops' (Georghallides, p. 13). Perhaps standing in the way of the Greek Cypriots' accession to true Hellenism was the fact that, according to Storrs, their spoken Greek was 'corrupt'. This compared poorly with the form of Osmanli Turkish spoken by 'Moslems' in Cyprus, which was rather 'pure' and more free from foreign (Arabic and Persian) words than that spoken in Constantinople (Storrs and O'Brien, 1930, p. 1). Storrs was clearly open to concepts of racial contamination circulating at the time (was that why he disliked his postings to sub-Saharan Africa so much?).

Lord Curzon, British Foreign Secretary in the aftermath of World War One, did not have such a nuanced vision of the Greek-Turkish, Christian-Moslem divide. He thought that the Hellenes needed to be protected from further racial/cultural contamination, and thus, that Greece needed to stay out of an Asia that was foreign to it, while Turkey should at all costs be kept out of Europe. Cyprus was Asia, and therefore not essentially Greek (Markides, 2006, p. 31).

The Race Factor

The notions discussed above lead logically to the issue of race, which for the British, distinguished them radically from their Cypriot subjects. At the end of the nineteenth century some thought was given to raising local militias.

> 'Whitehall's military advisers saw the proposal in imperial terms and restricted it to Muslims after applying the martial races theory, because the British considered the "Turks" a martial race but not the "Greeks" ' (Varnava, 2009, p. 36).

Sir Ronald Storrs notes himself that Cypriots, until his arrival in 1926, were invariably referred to as 'natives'. Storrs orders that the word be replaced by 'Cypriot' in official business, since, according to his memoirs, '[a]lien rule is not easy to bear, save by the lowest savages', (a formulation which locates him on the continuum of racial classifying as well) in relation to whom apparently his subjects found themselves placed quite a bit higher (Georghallides, 1985, p. 11). And of course

> 'it would be absurd to suppose that material comfort is the sole ambition of even the most backward and ignorant people, and the higher a people progress in the scale of civilization, the wider become its desires' (Orr, 1918, p. 166).

Of course, races are not necessarily fixed and immutable quantities. Storrs, for example, thought that in the twentieth century it was too late 'to attempt to absorb races', and so he opposed the outright annexation of Cyprus in 1914 (Orr, 1918, p. 137). Presumably and by implication, one of the characteristics, or rather the duties, of modernity, in his view, is to arrest the process of miscegenation, and, on the other hand, to mitigate the extent of rule by one 'race' over another.

The question of race is ever-present, in the minds and words of the British, of all stripes and in their various functions. The blackness of Cypriots is, however, lessened by the fact that they have been somehow mongrelised. Storrs, reminiscing among other things over his days as Governor, quotes a 'high legal luminary', 'horrified to learn that he would be expected to shake hands with "the natives"', because of his experience in East Africa, where presumably this would never happen. The man added, 'I understand a white gentleman … and a black gentlemen, I don't let him touch me; but these betwixts and betweens I don't want to understand' (Storrs, 1937, pp. 557-558). Cyprus was not unique in the British mind, from this point of view. The Sudanese had previously been described by Winston Churchill as a 'mongrel (…) mixture of the Arab and Negro types [which] produce[s] a debased and cruel breed, more shocking because they are more intelligent than the primitive savages' (Churchill, 2000, p. 7).[1]

Later on, during World War Two, according to Jan Asmussen (2006, p. 168) the Colonial Office had a policy of separating 'British European troops from … "dark-skinned Cypriots, whom the normal person could class as coloured …."'. In fact, the policy was starker: 'dark-skinned Cypriots, whom the normal person could class as coloured, will not be accepted' is what is stated in the quoted official document (Asmussen, 2006, p. 168, n. 5). It is indeed a dilemma for the British authorities, who needed bodies to kill and die, and so the decision was made to permit this deviation from standard, homogenising discourse, since 'I think we can risk [the possibility that the news that we discriminate among volunteers] may spread to Cyprus' (Asmussen, 2006, p. 168, n. 5). In other words, those whose skin was not so dark might after all be accepted, in recognition of the fact that Cypriots are a hybrid and mongrelised race. The air force, during the war, would only accept Cypriots 'of European appearance and habits' (Asmussen, 2006, p. 169). The longer quotation, found in the footnote, in fact fleshes out the British conundrum: 'the air force will not consider anyone who has, for example, long curly black hair, is of dark complexion, or is of Asiatic or African appearance' (Asmussen, 2006, p. 169, n. 7). This is a time of exacerbated racial perceptions in Europe, in which the fundamentals eugenics and racial theory, and the biopolitical conundrums they posed were widely accepted in the West where they had been developed. Interestingly enough, it was not necessary to have long curly black hair or a particular pigmentation in order to become 'black' for the British colonisers, as can be seen in the case of the particularly reviled Irish (Gallant, 2002, p. 28).

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1   I am grateful to Dahlia Gubara and Alexis Wick for having pointed out this text and its patent discursive analogies to our case.

It would seem that the racial characteristics and ascendants of the Cypriots are at least partially responsible for the fact (the rest being due to cultural traits that are found outlined by other British commentators, from Storrs to Durrell) that they cannot be trusted in sensitive positions within the armed forces, since they are incapable of keeping military secrets (Asmussen, 2006, p. 168).

Facing New Realities

As we noted above, C.W.J. Orr pays tribute to the trope of historians through the present, and notably to the idea of disastrous Turkish rule. Then he goes on, *de facto,* to deconstruct the entire interpretation. One, Sir Samuel Baker, thought very highly of the work done during only twelve months by British occupation officials (all drawn from the army at first), especially given that they did not, as military men, understand the technical nature of work they had to carry out in the agricultural, the legal, the commercial and the engineering fields, and given the fact that they did not speak a word of the island's languages, so that they had to work through interpreters (cited in Orr, 1918, p. 68). And yet, it would appear that large numbers of Cypriots were dissatisfied with the change of regime early on. By 1887, things had deteriorated greatly (the drought is blamed). A delegation of members of the Greek community went to England in 1889 to complain about the markedly increased taxation and subsequent 'exhaustion of the resources of the island'. The British government proved that the impression of the islanders was mistaken, and that yields of various crops had increased in the eleven years of British occupation, by 50% to 100%. Nonetheless, instructions were given to answer the petitioners kindly, and try to convince them that their views 'had received very full and careful consideration ...'. The actual results, we are told (a slight reduction in the cost of a passport for those wishing to travel from the island) constituted 'a very exiguous mouse to result from the labour of mountains'. In fact, according to the same source, village and municipal administration 'has undergone little change since the British occupation ...' (Orr, 1918, pp. 70-74).

Persistent Tropes

Although for some personalities of Empire, there are sophisticated differences to be drawn between the available categories of people residing in the Eastern Mediterranean, such as 'Bedouins', 'Arabs', and 'Levantines', (Picaudou, 2008), there is by and large a finite series of recurring images that they may all be classified with a single comprehensive category, for example the 'Oriental'. Ronald Storrs liked Kitchener the best of his successive masters in Cairo, because 'both men understood, as few others have done, the devious methods and mentality no less than the cynical humor of oriental politicians' (Georghallides, 1985, p. 1: note that it is the late-twentieth century historian who is passing judgment, not the early twentieth century civil servant).

Both Greek and Turkish Cypriots are widely viewed in Britain as belonging to a large family of Near Eastern (i.e. Levantine) peoples, who behave according to common norms (article in *The Observer* upon the 1926 appointment of Storrs as governor: Georghallides, 1985, p. 7). Orientals

are debauched, from Istanbul to Delhi, as noted by a *New York Times* correspondent commenting on 30 July 1878 (quoted in Hill, 1952, p. 280), on the agreement to hand Cyprus over to Britain. It may well be, he writes, that the great effects of British rule in India may be obtained in this instance, with Britain extending 'to the worn-out debauche who is Caliph and Sultan the same kind of protection which it gave to the last descendant of the Great Mogul'.

In this view, people get in the way of what counts most: the ancient history and archaeology of Cyprus. As one High Commissioner prepared to take up his duties in Cyprus, the Secretary of State for the Colonies told him:

> 'there are in Cyprus I believe ... a number of interesting and valuable antiquities. I trust that you will see that they are adequately preserved and cared for. I wish you a successful tour of office. Good-bye' (Orr, 1918, p. 7).

One important characteristic of Orientals in the British mind following decades of frustrating rule is the unfortunate fact of their heavy politicisation. The British consul in Port Said, speculating in 1935 on where a British university in Cyprus might be placed, preferred to see it

> 'not situated in or near a large town. Oriental and Mediterranean students are inclined to take an active part in political movements, which is contrary to British ideals, and it will be wise to eliminate temptation as far as possible' (Strohmeier, 2006, p. 153).

It is interesting to note the essentialisation of characteristics, in this case not 'racial' or 'cultural', but rather socio-political. Thus it is Mediterraneans who are by nature political, and not those who, because they are under occupation or otherwise subaltern, are likely to turn to political means to achieve change.

Turning-point 1931?

Even before the violent events of 21 October 1931, the British were concerned about the excessive leniency of Sir Ronald Storrs' administration. After all, A.J. Dawes of the Colonial Office argued, Cypriots, with their Oriental mentality, interpret friendly gestures by their rules as 'signs of weakness'. Those Governors had been the most popular who had treated them in the harshest manner (Richter, 2004, p. 221). Furthermore, according to Lord Passfield, Secretary of State for the Colonies (in 1930), there was no great attraction felt by Greek Cypriots for *enosis*.

> 'Union is not wanted at all by the rural population and only half-heartedly by the towns. Such agitation as there is is largely for the purposes of the forthcoming triennial elections, and has been in large part financed by the Church. The rapid increase in rural prosperity through the help of cooperative credit societies is displeasing the local usurer-political class, which is thereby losing its influence' (*The Times*, 1930a, p. 11).

A palpable change in administrative style did occur after the total surprise of 21st October, which had, on the part of Greek Cypriots, been an uprising *en bonne et due forme*. It resulted in the

transfer of the governor, and the adoption of harsher measures. It also meant a sea change in relations between the British and the majority community, the end of any socialising between them and the institution of emergency rule, not lifted until independence (Holland, 1998, p. 5). One of Storrs' successors, Governor Sir Richard Palmer, a military man, described the change, which involved a far greater use of force as 'the substitution of a British for a Greek atmosphere' in Cyprus. The question arises, given the sudden and significant transformation in the style of imperial rule, whether a transformation of discourse followed, as theoretically it should have, relations having become tenser, no longer being conducted along Storrs' preferred 'oriental method of administrative tactics', whereby he would 'flit from a Greek social gathering, where he liked to display his considerable classical learning, to some Turkish reception where a sprig of green would be worn in his white lapel' (Holland, 1998, p. 9).

In fact, and despite increasingly tense and sometimes violent relations between Britain and (usually Greek) Cypriots, views did not really change. During World War Two, the Governor, Sir Charles Woolley 'expressed what became a common expatriate view' when he noted that Cypriots only wanted to contribute to the war if it seemed like a paying proposition (Holland, 1998, p. 13). After the war the tension grew again, and Governor Sir Andrew Wright, appointed in 1949, viewed Cypriots, according to the Colonial Office, 'as children who needed a firm hand [and] ... an occasional spanking' (Holland, 1998, p. 16). He further opined that 'if you wave sticks at Cypriots you do not have to call out the garrison', and a well-known Labour MP, Richard Crossman, noted (during the rising revolt against British rule in 1955!) that 'nothing is very serious, since no one on either side means what he says or does what he means ... Cyprus is the only amiable police state I have ever visited' (Holland, 1998, p. 23).

Instead of the expected transformation of the discourse, one finds an ever stronger conviction that 1931 proved the necessity for further integration into the Empire of these backward people.

> 'Since 1931, however, a marked change has taken place in Cyprus. It is now widely realized that inclusion in the British Empire provides security and freedom in a world where these benefits are by no means universal, that no security is possible except under the protection of a dominant navy and air force, and that liberty to achieve a representative government [which in the wake of the 1931 riots had been shelved for the duration of the colonial period] is one of the main principles on which the British Empire is based' (Newman, 1953. p. 210).

It may well be that the continuing propinquity for considering Cypriots as weak-willed, corrupt(able) children contributed to Britain's failure to foresee and then to deal intelligently with the revolt of 1955. At any rate, when the Colonial Office despatched a new Governor to the island in 1954, it felt satisfied not to provide him with any firm instructions before leaving for the assignment, since there was not 'seething discontent, chronically threatening internal order' ... – a version of the argument much used amongst expatriate officials in Cyprus that the very absence of violence was testimony to the 'natural passiveness of Cypriots ...'. As late as 1956, the governor 'seemed to be completely and obstinately isolated from popular feeling and in some measure this

was due to the colonial civil servants who surrounded him – mostly leftovers from previous regimes who had always assured everyone that nothing would ever happen' (Foley, 1964, p. 51).

As noted by Robert Holland, these imperial perceptions were an inseparable part of the 'ingrained dialectic in the island', (Holland, 1998, pp. 33-34) and thus, one is justified in assuming, played a significant part in creating and perpetuating the impasse and provoking the apparently insoluble dilemmas of contemporary Cypriot history. It can certainly be seen to what extent the sense of knowing the reified Mediterranean personality must be linked to the obvious ignorance of specific conditions which had accumulated by December 1954, when all evidence from the previous years to the contrary, British representatives could speak of 'the recent *unpredictable* swing of the rural population to the *Enosis* idea' (Holland, 1998, p. 45 – emphasis mine on *unpredictable*).

By Way of Conclusion: Discourse and/in Defeat

Certainly the literature suggests a sharp diminution in 'categorised' generalisations once the fighting had begun in earnest in 1955 (Richter, 2006a, pp. 143-580; Choisi, 1991, pp. 204-225) with British thoughts concentrating perforce on how to deal with the complex emergency and its implications for the future of Empire, relations with NATO allies (Turkey, Greece and of course the United States of America) and, despite what we have seen to be deep layers of prejudice, the future of the island and its people. Nonetheless, it must have been difficult even then to go beyond the immediately previous view of Cyprus as mainly an 'unsinkable aircraft carrier' (Newman, 1953, p. 216).

This case illustrates the extent to which there is, in imperial discourse, a type of inelasticity which prevents it from bending or breaking until it is by definition too late to change course in political and social relations with the colonised. Discourse reflects power relations, and colonial masters by definition think in terms of permanence. Once the breaking point has been reached, and the power relations are undergoing a clear and irreversible transformation (which, as we noticed, was not yet perceived by the British to be the case after October 1931), then the discourse, as a clear signifier, is bound to follow rather quickly.

According to Jeannette Choisi (1991), nearly a century of British rule was unable to break into, much less break, the structure of hierarchical relations within Cypriot society, which she describes as clientelistically and rather hermetically organised until well after the end of the colonial period. For a time, especially in the wake of World War One, Britain tried to do what late-colonial powers often tend to do, namely to foster a type of weak and dependent 'Cypriot patriotism' which would suit the metropolis, especially through the teaching of an Anglophile, Anglophone curriculum in the schools, possibly going so far as to launch a Cypriot flag (Georghallides, 1985, p. 6). The gambit having failed, Britain did, however, contribute to furthering the breakdown of the society into two discrete, bordered and increasingly antagonistic populations (which continued nonetheless to be largely impermeable to British social engineering). This was intended to serve the

traditional policy of *divide et impera*. Discourse, on the other hand, became increasingly unitary, as the initial philhellenic, religiously supported trope gave way to an undifferentiated projection based on race. This development both supported and confounded the perpetuation of control; supported it by strengthening the rulers' sense of the justice of their mission; confounded it, since it was inevitably, to a greater or lesser extent, externalised in behaviour. It remains an open question whether the clear pattern found in the Cypriot case would be matched elsewhere. Guha and his colleagues have shown that this is the case with regard to the Raj; there is every reason to suppose that Palestine presents an analogous picture. And further afield, it would be important to compare the evolution of discourse in French-ruled Algeria and the American-ruled Philippines, for example, in the quest for underlying differences and similarities in these and other colonial dyads.

The following discursive model can now be advanced, based on this case as well as comparable ones:

1. In colonial empires, discourse introduces, modifies and strengthens stratification;
2. In particular, modern and contemporary colonial-imperial projects are characterised by the centrality of racial discourse;
3. Hybridity threatens to undermine the stratification, so it is designated as mongrelisation;
4. The famous colonial gaze exists, and results in the coloniser's incapacity to see;
5. There finally comes a wake-up call, when it is too late, at the beginning of the end for the coloniser;
6. Discourse then collapses and is slowly, painfully reconstituted, then passed on to the post-colonial elites in a new form.

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