The Uncharted World of Cypriot Colonial Servants and the Ideological Foundations of British Rule

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Abstract

As historical and anthropological studies show, British colonial rule contributed decisively to the institutionalisation, politicisation and deterioration of intercommunal differences in Cyprus. However at the same time as British colonial authorities implemented divisive policies, they created one institution necessitating the smooth cooperation between Greek and Turkish Cypriots: the colonial bureaucracy, the structure and function of which remains understudied. Based on the cases of three Cypriots appealing against their dismissal from the colonial civil service, this paper argues that exploring the uncharted world of 'native' employees provides important insights into the inconsistencies underpinning British rule. Indeed, the debates prompted by the dismissal procedures shows that notions such as 'nationality', 'loyalty', 'legality' and 'civilisation' constituting the ideological foundations of colonial rule are rather indeterminate. The article makes a case for the study of subaltern Cypriots as a vantage point to explore the points of articulation and cross-fertilisation between colonial morality and local self-representations.

Keywords: colonialism, interethnic conflict, subaltern studies, microhistory

Between Colonialism and Nationalism: In Search of Suppressed Voices

In 1915, thirty-seven years into the British occupation of Cyprus, the colonial governor[1] Sir John Eugene Clauson, shared his impressions of the island's inhabitants with his patron:

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1 Or 'high commissioner' as governors were styled until 1925.

> 'It is creditable, in a way, to the Cypriot Greeks that they are as insistent as ever on Union. When the inconveniences of heavy taxation, conscription and other concomitants of Greek administration might seem to loom larger, one might have expected them to sing smaller. But their better part is bound up in the Quest, as well as their windiness, and their ideal and their appreciation of our English ways give them a much needed lift along the path of the civilisation they talk about so much and practice so little. The Turks of course simply point to their loyalty (not always stalwart at the division bell!) and appeal to our gentlemanly feeling.'[2]

Written at a time of great uncertainty for the political future of the island,[3] this commentary encapsulates the main narrative of political histories of Cyprus under British rule: The increasingly vocal movement for *Enosis* – or the political union of Cyprus with Greece – among Greek Cypriots led to a tactical alliance between frustrated British officials and worried Turkish Cypriot leaders. According to the same historiography, British attitudes towards Greek nationalism escalated from caustic indifference – as reflected in the above citation – to frontal opposition.[4] Then as Greek Cypriot nationalism became more radical, colonial policy eventually degenerated into crude divide and rule policies, and Turkish Cypriot forces were enrolled to repress the nationalist guerrilla campaign led by EOKA in the 1950s. This seamless and much repeated narrative is the product of an elitist, rather than simply nationalist, bias stemming from a conventional reading of official archives: The drama of British rule in Cyprus is often reduced to the squabbles between nationalist – 'Greek' and later 'Turkish' – Cypriot elites and their colonial rulers, as the former are taken to be speaking on behalf of their entire 'communities'.

Another historiographical approach adopts a *longue durée* perspective. Analyses of this type have argued that colonial rule not only exacerbated, but in fact helped congeal pre-colonial religious affiliations and practices into 'Greek' and 'Turkish' ethnic commonalities.[5] Political scientist

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2 Main Bodleian Library, Oxford University, Dep. 475*: Lewis Harcourt, Colonial Office, Correspondence with Governors, B-C.* Sir John Eugene Clauson, letter to Lord Lewis Harcourt, former secretary of state for the colonies, 4 January 1915.

3 Cyprus, occupied by the British in 1878, remained under Ottoman suzerainty. The island was annexed by the Crown shortly after the beginning of World War I, on 5 November 1914. Less than a year later, Great-Britain officially offered – in an aborted deal – Cyprus to Greece in exchange for the latter's entry into the war. This makes the allusion in the text to the Greek Cypriot wish for 'Union' and the preoccupation with Turkish Cypriot loyalty clearer.

4 Especially in G.S. Georghallides' work, a scholar who has written the most thoroughly-researched political histories of Cyprus under British rule: (1979) *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus, 1918-1926: With a Survey on the Foundations of British Rule*, Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre; and (1985) *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*, Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre.

5 Drawing on F. Cooper and R. Brubaker, 'commonality' is here preferred to 'identity', regularly used in the historiography reviewed here: (2000) 'Beyond Identity', *Theory and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 1-47. As the authors note, 'identity' has no analytical value, 'as it is riddled with ambiguity, riven with contradictory meanings, and encumbered by reifying connotations. Qualifying the noun with strings of adjectives – specifying that identity is

Adamantia Pollis was among the first to underscore the culture-defining capacity of British colonial institutions through what Foucauldian social scientists would later call 'modern technologies of power'.[6] Under the preceding Ottoman regime, Cypriots located themselves socially according to religion, class, kinship, patronage and locality. Their religious leaders – primarily the Greek-Orthodox Church – possessed wide civil powers over them and mediated their interactions with the state. Through their instruments of rule – censuses, surveys, registers – the British collapsed fuzzy religious and linguistic differences into three administrative categories: 'Greek', 'Turkish', and 'Other'.[7] In turn these categories served as the basis for the creation of administrative and political institutions – the legislative and municipal councils – and an educational system where Cypriots returned representatives according to their religion.[8] In other words, the British supplanted Ottoman transversal and hierarchical relations with two vertical ones, with all Cypriots becoming separately equal before the (colonial) law.

Historians often mention the use of colonial institutions as platforms for the diffusion of nationalism in Cyprus. Paschalis Kitromilides shows how Greek Cypriot notables and schoolteachers, having received their higher education at the 'national centre', Athens, availed themselves of the liberal policy characterising the first years of British rule to promote Greek irredentism: *Enosis* thus became a fixture of debates and press articles covering the elections to the various representative bodies, from the municipality to the Legislative Council. School curricula were modelled on those of mainland Greece and children 'were socialised in Greek nationalist values'.[9] Andrekos Varnava recently revised this thesis by underscoring how the activities of 'Hellenised' Cypriots, making good use of the enhanced civic space under British administration, combated and eventually prevailed over, partisans of a more Orthodox-centric order.[10]

These studies illustrate the political and institutional transformations laid out by British colonial rule but do not – because it is not their primary concern – address their impact at the

multiple, fluid, constantly re-negotiated, and so on – does not solve the Orwellian problem with entrapment in a word. It yields little more than an oxymoron – a multiple singularity, a fluid crystallisation – but still begs the question of why one should use the same term to designate all this and more'. (p. 34).

6 B.S. Cohn, and N.B. Dirks (1988) 'Beyond the Fringe: The Nation State, Colonialism and the Technologies of Power', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 224-229.

7 *C.-4264 Report on the Census of Cyprus, 1881. With Appendix*, by F.W. Barry, London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1884.

8 A. Pollis (1973a) 'Intergroup Conflict and British Colonial Policy: The Case of Cyprus', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 575-599; *idem.,* (1973b) 'Colonialism and Neo-colonialism: Determinants of Ethnic Conflict in Cyprus', in Kitromilides, P. and Worseley, P. (eds), *Small States in the Modern World: The Conditions of Survival*, Nicosia: Stavrinides Press, pp. 45-80.

9 P. Kitromilides (1990) 'Greek Irredentism in Asia Minor and Cyprus', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 3-17, here p. 5. See also *idem.,* (1979) 'The Dialectic of Intolerance: Ideological Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict', *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, Vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 5-30.

10 A. Varnava (2009) *British Imperialism in Cyprus, 1878-1915: The Inconsequential Possession*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, chapter 6.

level of social practice. In other words, they do not measure the impact of colonial social and political engineering on the nationalist elites' capacity of mobilising their coreligionists and transform their self-representations. This is more thoroughly pursued in Rolandos Katsiaounis' work on the labouring poor (the great majority of the inhabitants) of Cyprus. Focusing on the pivotal transition from Ottoman to British rule, his study highlights the political usage of financial leverage in rural Cyprus and the ambiguous role of patrons – the Orthodox Church or the moneylenders – as both protectors and oppressors. Class is thus put in balance with nationalism and formal colonial rule and sheds some important light on how local clientelistic networks were marshalled in the frame of elections and modern politics.[11]

Rebecca Bryant's work also explores the sinews of politicisation in Cyprus under British rule. Concentrating on the relations between modernity and nationalism, Bryant evinces how, with the abolition of official hierarchies by the British and the establishment of equality before the law, elite Orthodox and Muslim Cypriots began to compete for power over their coreligionists. In so doing they elicited the participation of the masses, through the press or petition campaigns requiring the signatures of the 'simple ones'. This newly created 'public sphere' incited otherwise unrelated Cypriots to perceive themselves as belonging to one of two mutually exclusive, imagined national communities.[12]

The works of Katsiaounis and Bryant greatly advance our understanding of the processes of mass politicisation under British rule and, consequently, the crystallisation of religious affiliations into ethnic allegiances in Cyprus. But out of necessity, their approach rests on a degree of abstraction. The Cypriot 'people' – as opposed to the elites – whose social and cultural environment is so vividly portrayed, remains a silent majority: The tension underpinning their quotidian transactions with their patrons on the one hand, and British officialdom on the other, is inferred from their socioeconomic background rather than collected from their own testimonies. In addition, Bryant and Katsiaounis' analyses of intra- and intercommunal relations are refracted through colonialism which tends to be presented as a cohesive process. Indeed a recurrent trend in the historiography of Cyprus is the radical distinction between 'colonialism' – understood either as British officialdom or a larger process such as 'modernity' – and Cypriot society. This premise compels scholars to envisage British occupation as a period of concatenated fissions where the colonial state's divisive policies and institutions compounded the existing cultural and class divisions.

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11 R. Katsiaounis (1996) *Labour, Society and Politics in Cyprus during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century*, Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre. The order of the words in the title, relegating 'politics' at the end – as in fact, an epiphenomenon of 'labour' and 'society' – denotes the author's Marxist, or rather Thompsonian approach. The mobilisation of clientelistic relationships is also the subject of H. Faustmann's (1998) 'Clientelism in the Greek Cypriot Community of Cyprus under British Rule', *The Cyprus Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 41-77. The author, however, challenges the political usefulness of these relations (p. 46).

12 R. Bryant (2004) *Imagining the Modern: The Cultures of Nationalism in Cyprus*, London: I.B. Tauris.

What such representation fails to capture however is the colonial state's efforts – of varying intensity and nature according to context – to gain the consensual acceptance of the vast majority of Cypriots, essentially the peasantry, independently of religious affiliation. Drawing on Gramsci, scholars of Southeast Asian and African history have termed these colonial designs in securing their subjects' acquiescence to imperial rule 'colonial hegemony'.[13] While the use of 'hegemony' is controversial in colonial studies,[14] a scrutiny of the ways in which the colonial state sought to legitimise itself through its daily transactions with ordinary Cypriots is assured to open new research perspectives. For one, it would embed the colonial state into the local society thereby eliding the risk of 'treating colonialism as an abstract process'.[15] In addition, it would encompass a wide range of possible Cypriot responses, from consent, to strategies of accommodation, survival and resistance. This would show that Cypriot agency cannot be confined to the enactment of an ethnic 'identity'. And this in turn would dissipate the aura of inevitability on the gestation of ethnic conflict under colonial rule. In short, highlighting the frailty, and the anxieties marking the everyday interactions between colonial officials and ordinary Cypriots would reveal that nationalism was but one of the political options available to the latter. This approach would eschew implications that Cypriots were content with and under colonial rule.[16] In effect, acquiescence is not collaboration, it means agreeing to play by the rules to pursue objectives that do not always fall in the realm of nationalism but could nonetheless be eminently subversive of the colonial order.[17]

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13 See D. Engels and S. Marks (eds), (1994) *Contesting Colonial Hegemony: State and Society in Africa and India*, London: I.B. Tauris. Especially the essays by the editors, 'Introduction: Hegemony in a Colonial Context', pp. 1-15, W.G. Clarence-Smith, 'The Organisation of Consent in British West Africa, 1820s to 1960s', pp. 55-78, and P. Chatterjee, 'Was There a Hegemonic Project of the Colonial State?', pp. 79-84.

14 S. Sarkar recalls that 'hegemony' in Gramsci's work 'is bound up with developed capitalist civil society' and therefore uneasily transposable to colonial settings characterised by an essentially agricultural economy. He further notes that disentangling hegemony from coercion and reducing the former 'to some sort of liberal consensual model, marginalising domination and conflict' is analytically flawed. See his 'Hegemony and Historical Practice', in *Contesting Colonial Hegemony*, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-281. Essentially for the same reasons, R. Guha prefers the notion of 'dominance' instead of 'hegemony' to illustrate relations of power between the colonial state and the subject society. See his (1997) *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

15 F. Cooper and A.L. Stoler (1989) 'Introduction: Tensions of Empire: Colonial Control and Visions of Rule', *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 16, No. 4, pp. 609-621, here p. 609.

16 N. Doumanis, seeking to debunk the Greek nationalist myth of resistance to Italian rule falls precisely into the trap of making the implication that Orthodox Dodecanesians were happy with their colonial rulers. See his (1997) *Myth and Memory in the Mediterranean: Remembering Fascism's Empire*, London: Macmillan.

17 This approach might seem reminiscent of J.C. Scott's concept of 'everyday forms of resistance'. See his (1986) *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven: Yale University Press. But the suggestion in this paper is that all forms of interactions between ordinary Cypriots and the state need not be construed as falling within the realm of 'resistance'. Nor is it necessary, or indeed desirable, for research to be tracking open acts of resistance exclusively: The implication is that routine interactions between the state and its subjects could be subversive of the colonial order independently of the actors' intentions.

References to 'ordinary Cypriots' are numerous in the historiography. But with the exception of the works of Katsiaounis and Bryant, they often serve to paint a reverse image of Cypriot society under British rule. Drawing on the research conducted by Early Modernists,[18] scholars regularly point to the hybridity of pre-colonial popular culture in Cyprus. Religious syncretism, cross-cultural political protests against fiscal oppressors (the Orthodox Church or the Ottoman state), linguistic affinities and inter-religious sexuality are regularly invoked to stress the high degree of cultural assimilation between Christian and Muslim Cypriots. These allusions to a pre-colonial situation of 'peaceful coexistence'[19] where 'identities' were fluid too often construct what an observer termed an 'essential folklore'[20] and are deeply inflected by nostalgic political concerns in face of the island's lingering division. They are, in short, a discourse *on* the masses rather than *of* the masses.

Based on the cases of three Cypriot functionaries appealing against their dismissal from the colonial service, this paper explores ways to recover the voice of the masses. It urges to locate and analyse sources and archives ensconcing testimonies of ordinary Cypriots in order to better examine how they understood, internalised and negotiated the boundaries of colonial rule. And it makes a case for the study of subaltern Cypriots as a vantage point to explore the points of articulation and cross-fertilisation between colonial morality and local self-representations.

Locating Subaltern Cypriots: The Example of the Colonial Bureaucracy

Ranajit Guha demonstrated that adopting the subaltern classes' perspective enables to elucidate the series of codes defining and regulating their existence as members of the colonial society.[21] He famously defined the category of the 'subaltern' as including the demographic difference between a total population and its elite. This was an intentionally broad characterisation aiming at

18 See, among others, R.C. Jennings (1993) *Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean World*, New York: New York University Press; and K. Çiçek (1993) 'Living Together: Muslim-Christians Relations in Eighteenth Century Cyprus as Reflected by the Shari'a Court Records', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 36-64. Although they are not Early Modernists, mention needs be made of the work of historian M. Aymes and political scientist C.M. Constantinou and particularly their rehabilitation of the syncretic community known as *Linobambakoi*, too long considered as opportunists shifting between Islam and Christianity according to the political climate. See M. Aymes (2005) 'Lin-Coton: l'étoffe d'une communauté partagée' [Lin-Cotton: the fabric of a community shared], *Labyrinthe: Atelier Interdisciplinaire*, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 111-120; and C.M. Constantinou (2007) 'Aporias of Identity: Bicommunalism, Hybridity and the "Cyprus Problem"', *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 42, No. 3, pp. 247-270, here pp. 251-253.

19 This is the title of a book by C.P. Kyrris (1977) *Peaceful Coexistence in Cyprus under British Rule (1878-1959) and After Independence: An Outline*, Nicosia: Public Information Office. For a discussion on the dangers associated with this concept, see R. Bryant and M. Hatay (2008) 'The Jasmine Scent of Nicosia: Of Returns, Revolutions, and the Longing for Forbidden Pasts', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 423-449.

20 S. Pesmazoglou (2000) 'Essay Review: The Cyprus Problems', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 199-208, here p. 203.

underscoring the importance of chronological and geographical context: subaltern groups might 'under circumstances act for the "elite" (...) and therefore be classified as such'.[22] Irrespective of context however, a colonial subject is a subaltern when she or he undergoes at least two kinds of domination, that of the coloniser and that of the native elite.[23]

In Cyprus – as in most colonial settings – 'native' colonial civil servants would perhaps best be classified as members of the elite on account of their income and social prestige. Yet their activities were framed by rigid regulations and, more importantly, they could never reach the higher administrative jobs occupied by British officials. They made visible, then, the racial divide, what Partha Chatterjee called 'the rule of colonial difference', which is the essence of colonialism.[24] Hence they were subalterns in a very strong sense, and this is the line which will be adopted here.

We know next to nothing about Cypriots who presented the peculiarity of being both colonial public servants and members of one of the subject communities. And yet the corps of Cypriot colonial civil servants represented a non-negligible social reality: By 1939, the colonial administration employed 2,045 permanent Cypriot colonial officials[25] (out of a population of 383,967[26]) to whom can be added 1,400 elementary schoolmasters and mistresses remunerated by government funds.[27] Theirs was an enviable position in a society of indebted smallholding peasant-proprietors as it opened prospects of financial autonomy. Considering that there were slightly less than a hundred British officials in Cyprus in 1939,[28] Cypriot functionaries were the everyday face of colonialism in Cyprus. Finally, out of necessity, religious and linguistic differences were played down in the colonial bureaucracy and the administration's official language was English.

The historiography's neglect of Cypriot civil servants under British rule is not surprising. Governed by a strict set of rules and regulations which left them little initiative,[29] they often unhesitatingly espoused official policies. Hence if we are to believe Governor Sir Ronald Storrs, Greek Cypriot colonial employees were immune to *Enosis* since '[o]nce ... a Greek Cypriot had

21 R. Guha (1983) 'The Prose of Counterinsurgency', in Guha, R. (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-42, here p. 1.

22 R. Guha (1999) 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', in Guha, R. (ed.), *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-8, here p. 8.

23 G.C. Spivak famously unearthed a third kind of domination, that of gender. See her seminal (1988) 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Nelson, C. and Grossberg, L. (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, pp. 271-316.

24 P. Chatterjee (1993) *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 14-34.

25 *The Cyprus Civil List 1939*, Nicosia, Government Printer, 1939.

26 *The Cyprus Blue Book of Statistics for the Year 1940*, p. 214.

27 *Report of the Department of Education for the School Year 1933-1934*, Nicosia, Government Printer, 1935, p. 8.

28 *The Cyprus Civil List 1939*, *op. cit.*

29 *Cyprus Government Standing Orders 1933. Together With a Table of Distances*, Nicosia, Government Printer, 1933.

been admitted to the Civil Service, it became a point of honour, which so far as I know was never transgressed, to support the Government loyally through thick and thin'.[30] The implication is that Cypriot colonial officials were a mere extension of the colonial state: Hence it seems that little is to be gained in studying a group which, in post-colonial Cyprus, carries the stigma of 'collaboration', which, pace Robinson,[31] maintains its pejorative undertones.

Of course, only positivist research would select its historical objects according to some alleged intrinsic value; and Cypriot colonial officials certainly do not fit into nationalist narratives which are written in the positivist vein. Scholars have demonstrated that 'indigenous' colonial civil servants could not be reduced to mindless performers or 'transparent, unthinking conduits' of colonial rule.[32] David Arnold's research on the Madras constabulary evinced the ways subaltern constables handled the potential conflict between their cultural background and their status as colonial employees.[33] Emily Lynn Osborn, who worked on the Guinée Française and the Soudan Français showed how 'low-level colonial employees ... possessed the linguistic capabilities, symbolic trappings and cultural know-how to mediate colonial rule' and reap benefits and power for their own personal use.[34] This paper goes further, and proposes to consider the lower echelons of the colonial bureaucracy as the interface between colonial rule and local society: As Cypriot colonial civil servants were both agents and subjects of colonial rule they blurred and often sought to renegotiate the boundaries between coloniser and colonised. In turn, the reactions they elicited from their British superiors illustrate what Cooper and Stoler refer to as 'colonial anxieties' that tensions among them might emerge, compromise the moral foundations of their dominance and 'fracture the façade'.[35]

The remainder of this paper is built around the memoranda of three subaltern Cypriot officials appealing against their dismissal from the colonial civil service: a Greek Cypriot prison warder, a Turkish Cypriot schoolmaster and a Turkish Cypriot computation officer of the land registration department.[36] The objective is not to restore the elusive – maybe illusory – agency of one category of Cypriot subalterns under British rule. This will not be an argument about an

30 R. Storrs (1937) *Orientations*, London: Ivor and Nicolson, p. 551.

31 R. Robinson (1972) 'Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration', in Owen, R. and Sutcliffe, B. (eds), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, London: Longman, pp. 117-141, here p. 120.

32 E.L. Osborn (2003) 'Circle of Iron: African Colonial Employees and the Interpretation of Colonial Rule in French West Africa', *Journal of African History*, Vol. 44, No. 1, pp. 29-50, here p. 36.

33 D. Arnold (1985) 'Bureaucratic Recruitment and Subordination in Colonial India: The Madras Constabulary, 1859-1947', in Guha, R. (ed.), *Subaltern Studies IV. Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-53.

34 Osborn, 2003, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

35 Cooper and Stoler, 1989, *op. cit.*, p. 609.

36 The right to appeal against dismissal was a formal right, enshrined in the *Colonial Regulations*, See *Regulations for His Majesty's Colonial Service*, London, HMSO, 1923, regulation 212.

atypical form of resistance to the arbitrariness of colonial rule where the aggrieved officers manage to 'use the system to beat the system'; in fact as will be seen, one of the officers failed to overturn the decision of his dismissal while the fate of the other two is not documented.[37] Instead, the paper argues that the dismissal of these officers generates enlightening debates on the constantly readjusted relations between national self-identification, imperial loyalty, civilisation and legality in colonial Cyprus; and that observing how these concepts were invested with different meanings according to the context is essential to understand the ideological foundations of British colonial rule in Cyprus. After briefly presenting the political conditions prevailing in the island in the 1930s, the cases will alternately be examined and will serve to discuss the heuristic potential and theoretical implications of a history of colonial Cyprus drawing on methodologies developed by Subaltern Studies and microhistory.

Cyprus in the 1930s and Colonialism's 'Only Means of Contact with the Outside World'

In 1934, the district commissioner of Nicosia, Charles-Henry Hart-Davis, a veteran colonial officer who presented the fast disappearing quality of speaking both Greek and Turkish, returned his memorandum on the *mudirs*. These Cypriot officials, who would later be called district inspectors:

> 'are the only agents for work outside the office at the disposal of a Commissioner. They are employed on enquiries into complaints and petitions of every kind. They keep the Commissioner informed of the condition and requirements of the villagers in their respective areas. They have to conduct inquiries, sometimes of a confidential nature, on behalf of the commissioner. They are, in fact, apart from the Commissioner's personal visits to villages and interviews with Mukhtars [village headmen] and other villagers, the Commissioners' only means of contact with the outside world.'[38]

In the 1930s, this remark could easily be extended to all Cypriot colonial employees. Seizing the opportunity of an island-wide revolt in October 1931 leading to the burning down of the governor's residence, British authorities abolished all the representative institutions they had

37 Beyond this practical difficulty, as R. O'Hanlon and J. Wilson showed, the very concept of agency as a tool to 'recover the subject' and her/his capacity for autonomous initiative is theoretically flawed: Intended to outline a domain untinged by colonialism, it encapsulates some of the strongest tenets of Western Enlightenment (liberalism, free choice, individualism). R. O'Hanlon (1988) 'Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 189-224; J. Wilson (2006) 'Subjects and Agents in the History of Imperialism and Resistance', in Hirschkind, C. and Scott, D. (eds), *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 180-205.

38 Cyprus State Archive, Ministry of Justice and Public Order, SA1 484/1934 *Mudirs. Improvement of the Position of* – Memorandum by C.-H. Hart-Davis, district commissioner, Nicosia, 1934.

gradually granted the Cypriots since 1882.[39] The uprising was essentially motivated by fiscal and economic reasons against the background of the Great Depression,[40] and while only Greek Cypriots partook in it, the repressive measures were applied to all of the island's inhabitants indiscriminately.

In reality the revolt was a pretext to stamp out *Enosis* and the fledgling Kemalist movement from Cyprus, and implement an interventionist form of colonial rule relying on a public authority sufficiently strong to fast-track reforms without much time lost in deliberations. Pushing aside the Cypriot notability, which they represented as a 'numerically insignificant class of parasites who made a living out of the [peasant producer]',[41] British authorities set out on a quest to find and protect an equally undifferentiated and imagined 'peasantry' as the legitimating basis of their policies. As they would accept no interlocutors to speak on behalf of '*bona fide* agriculturalists',[42] colonial authorities relied exclusively on the civil service as their official interface with Cypriot society.[43] This put tremendous pressure on their recruiting policy which increasingly focused on 'loyalty'. An illustration of this is the following request by assistant colonial secretary Robert C.S. Stanley to the district commissioner of Limassol, Oswald R. Arthur:

> 'The Promotions Board have been considering the filling of the vacancy of first clerk created by the retirement of Vassiliades. Your Chief Clerk, Soteriades, is very much in the picture and there are one or two others who judged by their reports have at least as good a claim to consideration. I know Soteriades personally and agree with everything that has been said about him in his confidential reports as to his ability, adaptability, initiative and energy. It would very much assist us if you could let me have a personal report on his politics, associations, partiality or otherwise for intrigue and in fact anything affecting his personal outlook and character which might assist us in forming a judgment.'[44]

Behind the veil of authoritarianism, these testimonies reflect the beleaguered mentality of British administrators in the wake of what they euphemistically called the 1931 'disturbances'.[45] At the time, the irruption of political violence in the island had transformed Clauson's confident

39 See D. Markides and G.S. Georghallides (1995) 'British Attitudes to Constitution-Making in Post-1931 Cyprus', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 63-81.

40 A. Apostolides (2010) 'Economic Growth or Continuing Stagnation? Estimating the GDP of Cyprus and Malta, 1921-1938', unpublished PhD dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science, pp. 201-207.

41 Storrs, 1937, *op. cit.*, p. 553.

42 Storrs, 1937, *op. cit.*, p. 587.

43 For a discussion of British policies in 1930s Cyprus, see A. Rappas (2008) 'The Elusive Polity: Social Engineering and the Reinvention of Politics in Colonial Cyprus, 1931-1941', unpublished PhD dissertation, European University Institute.

44 SA1 949/1928 *Promotion Board. Minutes of Meeting.* Assistant Colonial Secretary Robert Christopher Stafford Stanley, dispatch to Oswald Raynor Arthur, district commissioner of Limassol, 16 September 1940.

45 National Archives, London, CO 67/243/1 and CO 67/243/2 *Cyprus. Report on the Disturbances of October 1931*, parts 1 and 2.

causticism into alarmism. And, as the first case will show, questions of self-identification in the colonial service became a primary source of anxiety for British authorities.

Being Greek in a Time of Crisis: Nationality, Loyalty and the Sense of Duty

On 13 November 1931, A.E. Gallagher, chief commandant of police and inspector of prisons requested that fifty-one year old Styllis Savvas, assistant chief warder of the central prison in Nicosia be dismissed from the colonial service. The prison guard was found guilty of having displayed signs of a 'nervous and unreliable temperament in an emergency [which] consequently [made him] unfitted to occupy the post he is now filling'.[46] During the events – namely the 1931 revolt – Savvas had asked his superior, resident superintendent of prisons H.L.D. Gee, not to be given the responsibility of Greek Cypriot political leaders arrested and awaiting deportation. Specifically he stated that:

> 'I asked Mr. Gee not to put the Bishop of Kyrenia under my charge, because the Prison Warders, some of whom are my enemies, would get me into trouble by concocting stories that I was treating him favourably ... Regarding the Bishop of Kyrenia, as I am a Greek and he is a Greek, I asked [the superintendent of prisons] to place Turkish warders in charge as I was afraid that if I were in charge of him, the warders might imply that I was carrying messages from him to outside persons and similarly conveying messages.'[47]

This reasoning the colonial governor Sir Ronald Storrs found unacceptable as he observed that 'the greater proportion of the Police and Prisons establishment is composed of Greeks on whose loyalty and sense of duty, overriding sentiments of nationality, this Government is bound to rely for the maintenance of administration'.[48] But whereas Styllis Savvas' reference to his 'Greekness' was unacceptable to the governor, the Colonial Office in London on the contrary found that it was fully understandable. 'An officer with 33 years public service should deserve rather more consideration. It was after all', as a principal secretary at the Colonial Office stated, 'an exceptionally exciting and trying position for a Greek warder to find himself in'.[49] Hence the secretary of state for the colonies' official reply stated that:

> '[T]he circumstances explained in Mr. Gee's report would scarcely seem ..., having regard to the difficult position of a Greek warder in the late emergency, to constitute sufficient

46 CO 323/1134/3 *Cyprus: S. Savva, Assistant Chief Warder at the Central Prison 1931-1932.* A.E. Gallagher, chief commandant of police and inspector of prisons, confidential dispatch to the colonial secretary, 13 November 1931.

47 CO 323/1134/3, *op. cit.*, report of the resident superintendent, central prison, read by A.E. Gallagher on 28 December 1931 and signed by Mr. Styllis Savvas, 28 December 1931.

48 CO 323/1134/3, *op. cit.*, Sir Ronald Storrs, confidential dispatch to the secretary of state for the colonies, 13 January 1932.

49 CO 323/1134/3, *op. cit.*, G.E.J. Gent, minute, 20 October 1931.

> grounds for removing, on the ground of inefficiency, an officer of Mr. Savvas's long and apparently satisfactory service, without a personal and detailed investigation by the Head of his Department into his reported failure on the recent occasion.'[50]

The conclusion of this case remains unknown. The records only show that Savvas himself asked the chief commandant of police not to dismiss him but to allow him instead to apply to be retired on full pension.[51]

The crux of the problem in this case centred on the term 'Greek'. Being Greek for Savvas may have meant being 'Greek-Orthodox'. But he clearly understood that in the political configuration created by the revolt, his superiors construed claims to Greekness as national self-identification and, thence, as potential acts of sedition. Hence he crafted his statement around a plea for honesty and anticipated his loyalty would exonerate him from not performing his duty. The Colonial Office accepted this stand which they justified in regard to Savvas' seniority and impeccable record of service. The chief commandant of police and the colonial governor interpreted the situation in the exact reverse way: They saw the paralysing effects of conflicting loyalties, as Savvas was torn between the traditional leaders of his community for whom he refused to serve as gaoler and the state; and this was precisely the sort of dilemma they would be insistent in stamping out in the 1930s. It should be noted, finally, that the differing views of the metropole and the local colonial authorities may have hinged on different understandings of the word 'Greek'. As often noted, officials in London were more indifferent – and occasionally mildly sympathetic – to Cypriot claims to Greekness;[52] on the other hand, colonial administrators in the island became increasingly less permissive to the point where Sir Reginald Stubbs requested that the term 'Greek' be removed from all official correspondence when referring to Orthodox Cypriots[53] (these 'bogus Greeks' as he colourfully put it[54]).

This case highlights the centrality of loyalty in the colonial administration as well as the impossibility of reaching a consensual, uniformly applicable definition of the term. It is not Savvas' failure at accomplishing his duty that creates the debate; it is the fact that he presents his self-identification as 'Greek' as a proof of his loyalty. In this sense his deposition reveals a fundamental tension in the colonial regime between overlapping and conflicting senses of belonging. But what happens when no such ambiguity exists around loyalty? The following case explores another tension, this time between legal procedure and disloyalty.

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50 CO 323/1134/3, *op. cit.*, secretary of state for the colonies, draft confidential dispatch to the governor of Cyprus, 12 December 1931.

51 CO 323/1134/3, *op. cit.*, A.E. Gallagher, chief commandant of police and inspector of prisons, confidential dispatch to the colonial secretary, 28 December 1931.

52 See for instance Varnava, 2009, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

53 CO 67/254/4 *Cyprus: Political Situation, 1934*. 'Memorandum by Sir. R.E. Stubbs', 16 October 1933.

54 CO 67/251/7 *Cyprus: Setting Up of an Advisory Council 1933*. Governor Stubbs, semi-private letter to the secretary of state for the colonies, 18 August 1933.

Law vs. Loyalty: On the Blind Spots of 'Modern' Colonial Governance

Mehmet Teki, headmaster of a Turkish Cypriot elementary school of Polis in Paphos and representative of the Turkish teachers' committee in Cyprus was dismissed in 1933 from the education department on the charges of drunkenness while on duty, absenteeism, attacks in the press against the education department, political propaganda and 'presumptuous public speeches to schoolmasters'. The colonial governor justified the sanction stressing the schoolmaster's links to the Kemalist Turkish National Congress – an organisation created in May 1930 by Necati Özkan[55] – and the fact that his insubordination had made him something of a hero in the eyes of many Turkish Cypriot nationalists.[56] Teki did not overtly contest the charges brought against him; instead he claimed that:

> 'Even if the delinquencies attributed to me by the Director of Education in his letter of June 23rd 1933 (...) were true, article 31 of the law cannot be applied owing to the fact that article 13 of the Regulations clearly stipulates the penalty for such delinquencies. Furthermore the delinquencies have not been proven.'[57]

His dispassionate denunciation of a legal irregularity proved disconcerting with colonial authorities. Although the Colonial Office agreed with the governor that it was undesirable to keep Teki in the colonial service,[58] 'the secretary of state considered that, as a matter of principle, he must satisfy himself fully in regard to [the allegation of illegality made by Teki]'.[59]

Whereas loyalty was at the centre of the debate in Savvas' case, here it is not even an issue. With his intimate knowledge and brazen utilisation of the colonial administration's rules and regulations, Teki appears to be what James C. Scott terms an 'intermediary': Namely a subaltern enhancing his agency through his fluency in the legal terminology and administrative technicalities of the state.[60] But there is another element to this case which may better explain the anxiety of colonial authorities over procedure. Teki was writing from Ankara in the new Turkish alphabet although he was fluent in English: This was a statement in itself as the dismissed schoolteacher positioned himself not as a colonial subject pleading for the clemency of his colonial

55 F. Crouzet (1973) *Le Conflit de Chypre, 1946-1959, Vol. 1* [The Cyprus Conflict, 1946-1959, Vol. 1], Brussels: Emile Bruylant, p. 172.

56 CO 67/252/15 *Cyprus: Petition from M. Tekki Effendi Against Dismissal as a Schoolmaster Nov. 1933-Feb. 1934*. Acting governor's official dispatch No. 457 to secretary of state for the colonies, 20 December 1933.

57 CO 67/252/15, *op. cit.*, Mehmet Teki, translation of a letter to the secretary of state for the colonies, 15 November 1933, enclosure to under-secretary of state for Foreign Affairs' official dispatch to under-secretary of state for the colonies, 6 December 1933.

58 CO 67/252/15, *op. cit.*, A.B. Acheson, minute, 12 January 1934.

59 CO 67/252/15, *op. cit.*, Sir Cosmo Parkinson, minute, 28 January 1934.

60 J.C. Scott (1998) *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 48.

master, but as the citizen of the Kemalist Turkish Republic that demanded to be treated on equal terms by European powers with which it shared 'modernity' – secularism, law and order, equality before the law, rationalism, etc. By disclosing a procedural error which he exposed as an arbitrary decision, Teki reversed the roles and placed himself on a higher civilisational ground. The Colonial Office's anxiety indicated a desire to restore and hide again the 'rule of colonial difference' ensconced into the impersonal regulations and divulged by the ex-schoolmaster's initiative. But while procedure constituted a safe ground to discuss proper governance, the following case suggests that no such consensus existed among colonial authorities with regard to the notion of civilisation which nonetheless gave them a moral, if implicit, basis for the exercise of their rule.

When Otherness Pierces through Sameness: Honour and Civilisation

Thirty-three year old Ahmed Ratib, computation officer in the department of land registration and surveys, was dismissed by the government of Cyprus on the count of 'gross cruelty to a child' on 23 November 1933. This decision was reached after Ratib had been found guilty by the district court of Nicosia of having chained and beaten a six-year old girl whom he had hired as a servant. For the colonial governor, Ratib's conduct made him an unfit person to remain in the service of the Government.[61] In his memorandum appealing against his dismissal, Ratib set out to correct the facts that were reproachful to him. He thus wrote that the girl was 11 and not 6-years old and that he did not beat her. He reported that the child had run away on two occasions from his house. On one of these occasions the dismissed computation officer had found her in a field, four miles away from Nicosia, accompanied by an unknown labourer:

> 'It was at this stage that I thought that the best way to support her life and her honour was to tie her for some hours with a thin chain so as to prevent her from running the risk of being molested. As she was under my charge I thought it was my duty to deliver her to her parents unmolested. I admit that at that time I could not apprehend that I was doing something wrong as I was under the impression that I was acting properly to safeguard the honour and life of a young girl who had been entrusted to my charge. I am extremely sorry that I could not then perceive that the steps taken by me were wrong and I now feel extremely sorry. I beg leave, Sir, to add that this girl was never ill-treated in my house. She was looked upon as a member of my family. She was living together with other members of my family. She was well dressed and even decorated with bracelets and earrings.'

Ratib added that the reason the girl repeatedly ran away was because her mother-tongue was Greek which prevented her from communicating with his family. He requested to be reinstated to

61 CO 850/28/4 *Cyprus: Cruelty 1933*. Governor's official dispatch No. 424 to the secretary of state for the colonies, 17 November 1933.

his post, suggesting that the conviction of the magisterial court which had sentenced him to pay a £25 fine was sufficient a punishment.[62]

Though an investigation verified and confirmed Ratib's allegations, the governor noted that the computation officer was 'notoriously primitive in his rule of life', and should on this account be removed from the colonial service. In recommending this course of action, he wrote, 'the Executive Council was not so much desirous of punishing him as of removing from the service a person of a semi-civilised type who was not fitted to be a member of it'.[63] Although they regretted that the investigation leading to Ratib's conviction at the district court of Nicosia and his subsequent dismissal had been so hastily and carelessly led, London officials agreed that Ratib was better out of the service.[64]

Colonial authorities presented the computation officer's actions as too alien to their own sense of ethics, what the governor of Cyprus called the 'Western mind'. This radical otherness made it impossible, in their minds, to conceive of him as a representative of the British colonial civil service. Not possessing Teki's bodacious rhetorical dexterity, Ratib reinforced the impression of an individual uneasily poised between two mutually exclusive moral universes, thereby exemplifying what Homi Bhabha called the 'mimic man': A subject who in spite of having assimilated the coloniser's language and norms remains 'emphatically' different, 'repeatedly turn[ing] from *mimicry* – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to *menace* – a difference that is almost total but not quite'.[65] But this difference between a 'modern' attitude shying away from corporal punishment and a 'primitive' tradition of rough handling women may have been a construction, a means for colonial authorities to negotiate their moral superiority. It is not clear that 'defending the honour and life' of a little girl and protecting her from the corrupting contact with older 'labourers' should appear so bizarre to British officials who were so anxious at home about what they perceived as the declining morality of women and girls.[66] Ratib's attitude, where moral concerns intersect with class prejudice could hardly shock a generation steeped in the literature of the likes of Jane Austen, Anthony Trollope or Wilkie Collins.[67]

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62 CO 850/28/4, *op. cit.*, Petition by Ahmed Ziaeddin Ratib Effendi to the secretary of state for the colonies, 23 November 1933, enclosure to acting governor's official dispatch No. 456 to the secretary of state for the colonies, 18 December 1933.

63 CO 850/28/4, *op. cit.*, acting governor's official dispatch No. 456 to the secretary of state for the colonies, 18 December 1933.

64 CO 850/28/4, *op. cit.*, A.B. Acheson, minute, 30 December 1933.

65 H. Bhabha (1984) 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *October*, Vol. 28, pp. 125-133, here p. 132.

66 S.O. Rose (1998) 'Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 4, pp. 1147-1176.

67 Bodleian Rhodes House Library, University of Oxford, Brit.Emp.s.364, *David Athelstane Percival: Letters Home, Northern Nigeria, 1929-1939, Cyprus 1930-1939*, box 2. D.A. Percival, letter to his mother (where he mentions his readings), 10 September 1936. D.A. Percival remained for a long time in Cyprus serving at various positions. He is mostly known for coordinating and publishing the 1946 Cyprus census.

Another feature of this case which calls for comment but was ignored by British authorities is that the little girl whom Ratib was accused of having chained was obviously Greek-speaking. Although it is impossible to conclude that she was Christian, scholars have noted that the practice of impoverished rural families to send their daughters to work as domestic servants in rich urban families of a different faith was not unheard of.[68] If we assume that she was Christian, could not Ratib's anxiety over her honour and life be indicative of his eagerness to respect some tacit rule of intercommunal coexistence in Cyprus centred on the safeguard of the honour of women?

By Way of Conclusion: Permanent Exceptionalism as the Foundation of Colonial Rule

This paper investigated ways to recover the subaltern Cypriots' voice. It showed that this can be done primarily through a microhistorical approach:[69] Perusing through court records, complaints, and any litigation, one will find testimonies of ordinary Cypriots, in however fragmentary form and however inaccurately transcribed.[70] A very close reading of these testimonies, 'against the grain' as it were – namely against the intention of those who produced them – might disclose the complex ways in which Cypriots understood, internalised and sought to negotiate the – sometimes conflicted – ways in which British colonisers sought to position themselves as their trustees.

It is indeed interesting to note how a fairly routinely procedure such as the dismissal of a Cypriot colonial civil servant generated debates which illustrated the tensions around notions such as 'national sentiment', 'loyalty', 'civilisation', which are nonetheless at the core of the ideological foundations of colonial rule. Members of a subject community, Cypriot colonial civil servants were also the everyday face of the colonial state. Their own self-understanding as agents and subjects of colonial rule mostly overlapped but occasionally conflicted with the expectations of British colonial authorities. The anxieties unmasked through such conflicts shed light on the multi-faceted relations between British rulers and Cypriot subjects and underscore the inconsistencies characterising these relations; in other words these conflicts highlight the shifting boundaries of colonial rule.

There is one general conclusion that can be drawn from the three cases. Taken together, they reveal colonial rule as a being in a state of 'permanent exceptionalism'[71] which can be defined in the

68 V. Argyrou (1996) *Tradition and Modernity in the Mediterranean: The Wedding as Symbolic Struggle*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 31-32.

69 The literature on microhistory is voluminous, but a good clarification of its objectives and methodology can be found in C. Ginzburg (1993) 'Microhistory: Two or Three Things that I Know About It', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 10-35 and M. Peltonen (2001) 'Clues, Margins and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research', *History and Theory*, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 347-359.

70 This discussion draws on G. Simonsen's remarkable work (2007) *Slave Stories: Gender, Representation, and the Court in the Danish West Indies, 1780s-1820s*, unpublished PhD dissertation, European University Institute.

71 The expression is borrowed from L. Panitch and D. Swartz, see their (1984) 'Toward Permanent Exceptionalism:

following way. The impersonal bureaucratic procedure allowing aggrieved 'native' officials to appeal to the secretary of state had a double purpose: It aimed to routinise – and therefore make predictable – these officials' potential conflicts with their British employers; and it was intended to uphold the Cypriots' confidence in the justice of British rule. Yet when Cypriot officials used this right, they generated conflicts between the metropole and local colonial authorities which were usually settled outside the realm of legality. The cases presented here qualify the much cited social performativity of colonial bureaucratic governance. Instead, they suggest that this 'modern' governance could be incapacitating when it raised hopes of fair and equal treatment and therefore ran counter to the fundamental arbitrariness of colonial rule. Each of these conundrums was treated as an exception and settled illicitly or discreetly shelved. The permanent exceptionalism buttressing the daily transactions between British administrators and subaltern Cypriots is indicative of the tensions lying at the core of colonial rule. Hence the scrutiny of such transactions allows a better grasp of the subtleties behind the irruption of political violence.

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