

THE POLITICS OF SEPARATION AND THE DENIAL OF INTERDEPENDENCE

Niazi Kizilurek

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to address the issue of separation in Cyprus and the wider concept of separatism on the island. The latter covers all political actions which disable intergration, destroy unity and consequently lead to segregation.

Looking at politics in Cyprus a simple fact becomes obvious: the desire for autonomy of the two communities has resulted in separation.

Since autonomy is the goal of all nationalists, we will have to examine nationalism in Cyprus. Before we do so, however, a few words about autonomy have to be said at the outset.

"With the concept of autonomy we have entered the Kantian world of self-determination. With Kant, autonomy becomes an ethical imperative for the individual, a principle of his being. Applied by Fichter and other German romantics to groups rather than individuals, the ideal of autonomy gave rise to the philosophy of national self determination and collective struggle to realise the authentic national will."

Nationalism signifies the awakening of the nation and its members to its "true collective self", so that it, and they, obey only the "inner voice" of the purified community. "Authentic experience and authentic community are, therefore, preconditions of full autonomy, just as only autonomy can allow the nation and its members to realise themselves in an authentic manner" (Smith, 1991).

The construction of the unique collective identity is possible only through a shared unique culture. By discovering that culture we discover ourselves, the authentic self. This process of self-definition and location is in many ways the key to national identity. Therefore, autonomy, unity and collective identity are the basic characteristics of nationalism.

It is important at this point to distinguish between cultural nation (Kulturnation) and political nation (Staatsnation) as done by German historian Friedrich Meineke.

According to him, the political nation centres around the idea of the individual and collective self-determination and derives from the individual's free will and subjective commitment to the nation. In this case as in the formulation of Ernest Renan, "the nation is a daily plebiscite", and depends on the will of the individual. Therefore, the population of a given historically evolved territory perceives itself as a nation and citizenship is equated with nationality (Alter, 1989).

This suggests that, whatever else it may be, what we mean by national identity involves some sense of political community. A political community, in turn, implies at least, some common institutions and single code of rights and duties for all the members of the community. It also suggests a definite social space, a fairly well demarcated and bounded territory, with which the members identify and to which they feel they belong (Antony Smith, 1991).

By contrast, the spirit of community that exists in a cultural nation is founded upon seemingly objective criteria such as common heritage and language, a distinct area of settlement (so called historical land), religion, customs and history, and does not need to be mediated by a national state or other political form. Consciousness of unity and the sense of belonging together develop independently of the state (Alter, 1989).

The first obvious feature is the stress on descent - or rather presumed descent - rather than territory. The nation is seen as a fictive "super family". In this conception, the nation can trace its roots to an imputed common ancestry and, therefore, its members are brothers and sisters, differentiated by family ties from outsiders. In fact nationalism contains both conceptions in varying degrees and different forms. Sometimes civic and territorial elements predominate; at other times it is the ethnic and vernacular components that are emphasised (Smith, 1991).

Greek-Cypriot nationalism developed as ethnonationalism, creating a strong sense of belonging to the "family of the Greek nation", was the main determinant of the Greek-Cypriot identity and hence of the collective self.

The achievement of autonomy was not based on a political community securing the civil rights of its citizens but on the cultural expression of the authentic self i.e. of the *volksgeist*. Cyprus was not perceived as a self-contained territory, in which an independent politia could be created, but as a piece of territory, which assumes sense only if it is a part of the "super family" of the Greek nation. Thus "the authentic self" can only realise itself and become autonomous through the unification of the island with Greece. In this context political demands and aims are the expression of the national identity and of the authentic self. There is no differentiation between identity and politia at all.

As Kitromilides observes, "the growth of a movement of national consciousness raising and national assertion that culminated in a political vision of national

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emancipation through union with Greece turned the archaic, distant Greek speaking community of Cyprus into a dynamic, political society, which excluded as heresy and treason the visualisation of any other forum of collective existence short of union with Greece" (Kitromilides 1990).

The equalisation of nation and identity with *politia* led the Greek-Cypriots "to see and handle the Cyprus Question exclusively as a problem of self-determination of the Cypriot people in the Hellenic ethnic sense. They were not prepared and willing to tackle the problem from the aspect of a political nation that would comprise the Greeks as well as the Turkish-Cypriots" (Tzermias, 1994).

Indeed the expansion of Greek nationalism in Cyprus resulted in an oversight, even oblivion of the Turkish-Cypriot community. This Hellenic, culturalistic discourse and spiritual inwardness resulted in the denial of difference in relation to the Turkish-Cypriots and also of otherness within the Greek-Cypriot community. Another important result of this process, was the fetishism of history and culture where history and culture have been presented as admonishing, crying or demanding.

The idea of an organic relationship between language, culture and history on the one hand and the *politia* on the other, prevented the Greek-Cypriot community from approaching the Turkish-Cypriot community and from adapting to the reality of domestic and international conditions.

Any criticism of the politics of unification with Greece - which was thought to be the only way to realise the authentic collective self - was perceived as a denial of identity, thus as abnormal and corrupt. According to this concept of national identity, where Greek-orthodoxy, ethnicity and the state are considered as an organic whole, nation and people (*Staatsvolk*) had to be one.

In this context we can undermine the critical remark made by Makarios concerning the creation of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960: "the Agreements created a state but not a nation".

This led to an undermining of the Cypriot state and hindered the emergence of a political community, composed of all Cypriots in the sense of the citizens of the island.

Alongside this lack of recognition of difference by Greek nationalism in Cyprus, it is important here to mention the fact that the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, although taking into consideration the ethnic identity in many respects, did not enable the state to go beyond the collective identities and to create a unity through difference.

During the years after the formation of the Cypriot state we come across certain social groups desiring to move from the ethno-nation to a territorial state, claiming

that "Cyprus belongs to its people". For the first time in the 1960s we see the differentiation between demos and nation. However, the ruling idea "Cyprus belongs to Hellenism" remained until 1974 and loyalty remained centred around culture, which was understood as the organic whole covering religion, ethnicity and politics, rather than around the concept of political society.

From the Politics of Difference to the Politics of Separation.

Nationalism arrived in the Turkish-Cypriot community almost one century after it had arrived in the Greek-Cypriot community. The Turkish-Cypriots seem to have been affected by Turkish nationalist ideas during the emergence of modern Turkey. Newspaper articles indicate that "Turkishness" begins to be pronounced in 1919, at the beginning of the Turkish war of liberation. The establishment of the Turkish state led to increased nationalist ideas amongst the Turkish-Cypriot intelligentsia.

However, the gradual transformation of a pro-British Muslim community into a Turkish ethnic minority on the island that saw itself as part of the Greater Turkish nation is not to be understood independently of the growth of Greek-Cypriot national consciousness. There is a close relationship, perhaps a dialectical one, between ethnic antagonism and the development of the Turkish-Cypriot national identity.

The call on ethnicity, although influenced by Turkish nationalism and encouraged by British colonialism, developed in reaction to the "Other", the Greek-Cypriot community, which was perceived as a threat to the Turkish-Cypriots.

It is not a coincidence that the spread of nationalist feeling amongst the Turkish Cypriots gained momentum in the 1950s, when the Greek-Cypriot demand for unification achieved its highest momentum. This constant conflict has itself crystallised a Turkish-Cypriot sense of ethnic identity in what was before only a linguistic-religious category. It was during this period that the demand for partition as a counter-ideology to enosis came to be pronounced by the Turkish-Cypriot leadership.

The articulation of blind nationalism by Greek Cypriots which in fact was the politicisation of intercommunal difference, combined with the cold war interests of the Western Alliance made the Turkish-Cypriot minority of Cyprus a "Distinct Community" within the Republic of Cyprus.

But to maintain and cherish distinctiveness was not limited only to the legitimate interest to maintain the cultural integrity of the Turkish Cypriots. It aimed in fact at the legitimisation of the politics of partition, in reaction to the "Other", the Greek Cypriots. Thus, Cyprus became a place similar to the Sartrian world of "No Exit" where the other is perceived as hell.

In the words of Kitromilides, "Out of the configuration of two opposed

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conservative and authoritarian nationalisms, symbolically antagonistic and mutually exclusive, developed the dialectics of intolerance that provided the ideological content of ethnic conflict. Precisely on the eve of her independence Cyprus experienced this dialectic of intolerance that stretched from ideological to most other levels of public life" (Kitromilides, 1990).

Given that a political community is defined as a group of people living under a common regime, whose representatives make important decisions for the group as a whole, one can argue that the ruling elites of the newly born state of Cyprus aimed instead for separate conflicting national policies. The insistence on separate national interests left no room for emergence of a united Cypriot society.

The existence of a centralised agency to which all are understood as equally subject sustained an awareness that there was at least one level at which they all shared an attribute, and this shared attribute could have become the basis for insisting on extending the range of shared attributes. However, this was inconceivable in the "Cypriot Society" in which social roles and rights derived and were trapped within the respective ethnic communities. For this reason the emergence of the state and the doctrine of sovereignty did not have a profound and lasting effect on the process of political socialisation in Cyprus as it did in the West.

In fact the state of Cyprus has been perceived by the ruling elites of the two communities as a threat to the Greek and Turkish national identities as they were understood in Cyprus. Throughout the years of independence the Turkish-Cypriot leaders saw a great danger in the 'Cypriotisation' of the Turks, as they have admitted. On the other hand the Greek-Cypriot leadership was after the complete "hellenisation" of the Cypriot state and Cyprus as such.

This instability of the post-colonial state fuelled the ethnic conflict and tended to promote a heightened sense of ethnic identity, which in turn strengthened the aspirations of the Turkish Cypriots for a separate ethno-national identity. Alongside the group anxiety caused by the discourse and actions of the Greek-Cypriot nationalism, especially in the 1960s, the uneven development between the two communities of Cyprus encouraged further ethnic separatism among the Turkish Cypriots.

So, Turkish-Cypriot ethnic nationalism became the vehicle for a new national identity which drew many members of the community, involved in the conflict, into a new type of politicised vernacular culture and created a different kind of participant society. In this context the separatist movement itself was the prototype and harbinger of a new society. Its cells, schools, army units, welfare associations, self-help groups, labour unions, as well as its songs, flags, poetry, sports, arts and crafts, all presaged and created the nucleus of the future ethnic community and its political identity.

Fear of Interdependence

The failure of state building in Cyprus, because of Greek and the Turkish ethno-nationalisms, is to be understood as the fear of interdependence. In fact interdependence was the very characteristic of the Cypriot state, which was based on the concept of bi-communalism . Neither of the two communities could arrange the affairs of the state without considering the general will of the other community.

But this, instead of recognition of the other and co-operation with them brought about denial and antagonism. The very process of acquiring, the autonomous collective self prevented both communities from coming to terms with each other. The ethno-nationalist way of achieving the collective self through separateness and the development of mutually exclusive identities, left no space for commonality and led to the lack of recognition.

For the Greek-Cypriot elite, any consideration of the Turkish Cypriots, was seen as a hindrance to the full expression of the Greek cultural identity and the political will. The Turkish-Cypriot elite saw in the concept of interdependence the mere protection of the Turkish-Cypriot collective self and encouraged the distinctiveness of the community in a way which turned against unity.

In the micro-cosmos of Cyprus we can observe how interdependence without empathy can become a painful experience leading to the total renunciation of the other.

It is important at this point to consider the roles of Greece and Turkey in relation to Cyprus and the Cypriot state. Despite the fact that the two countries agreed to exclude the unification of Cyprus with Greece and the partition of the island, they never ceased as national centres to strengthen the Greek and Turkish national consciousness in Cyprus. Alongside their control of the Cypriot state and their military presence, both countries were actively involved in the educational and communication systems in order to increase their respective influences on the island. For example, as a former member of the Greek embassy in Nicosia, recently admitted, Greece, concerned by the weakening of "hellenistic emotions" in the 1960s in Cyprus, financially supported those Greek Cypriot newspapers, which were engaged in developing strong ties between Cyprus and mother Greece. It is for sure that the same applies to Turkey in relation to Turkish Cypriots and despite the original agreements concerning enosis and taksim, the Cypriot elites were encouraged to see the source of hope for enosis and taksim in Greece and Turkey respectively.

Furthermore, the tendency of the Western Alliance to resolve the Cyprus

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encouraging Turkey and Greece to political maximalist position on Cyprus, since whatever happened, the interests of the Alliance were protected. So, the cooperation of the two countries concerning Cyprus, which began in 1959, was always overshadowed by their competition.

After the events of 1974, which divided Cyprus into two parts, there began a negotiation process for the unification of the island on a bi-zonal federal basis. The presence of the Turkish army in Cyprus changed the balance of power completely. Since federation had been a Turkish proposal for the settlement of the Cyprus question, one expected after the high level Agreement in 1977 between Denktas and Makarios a smooth movement towards the implementation of the federal concept.

However, such expectations are yet to be fulfilled. After the freezing of the conflict for twenty years, the Turkish Cypriot leadership have come to seek a new definition of the Turkish Cypriot community on the basis of nation-building. According to this definition the Turkish Cypriots are entitled to the right of self-determination and to national sovereignty with the dogma of what is territorial is national and what is national is territorial continues the naturalisation of north Cyprus vis-a-vis Turkish nation, intensifies the frustration and emotional reaction in the Greek-Cypriot community.

It is like history repeating itself, with changed positions. In the 1960s *it* was the Greek Cypriots who sought the right to ignore the Turkish-Cypriots. Today it is the Turkish Cypriots who are claiming the same right.

Today, after the bitter experience of nationalisms, Cyprus is threatened by lack of communication and compromise, emotionalism and readiness for the use of violence in a strategic and calculated way. Enough has happened for Minerva to take its dusk flight. If only we prove able to learn and to face interdependency this time, with empathy.

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