THE GENESIS OF THE GREEK AND TURKISH NATIONALISM IN CYPRUS, 1878-1914: A COMMON MARCH AT A DIFFERENT PACE

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Abstract

Greek national ideas ruptured the Ottoman millet *system in Cyprus, with the onslaught of the Greek Revolution and the creation of the modern Greek State. Henceforth, Greek nationalism made its appearence, with the beginning of the British rule; as a result the dominant Muslim community was forced to live under legal equality with the Greek Cypriot majority Initially, the Muslims maintained a policy of political obedience towards the British administration, until the creation of the national Turkish State, a fact that prompted them to a nationalistic attitude, similar to the one already adopted by the Greek Cypriots. The emergence of nationalism resulted in the deterioration of relations between the Greeks and the Turks of Cyprus. Peaceful co-existence during the Ottoman period, was gradually replaced by a state of conflict.*

The *Millet* Period

In order to understand the emergence and the development of nationalist ideas in Cyprus, it is, I believe, necessary to examine the social structure of the Ottoman period. The Ottoman rulers had divided the subjects of the Empire into self-governed religious communities *(millets)* under the guidance of the clergy. This particular system allowed a relatively high degree of religious and cultural freedom and at the same time tolerated the presence and the distinction between nationalities. The arrangement was completed by the compulsory acceptance on the part of the subjects and adherence to a common political, administrative and financial system (*Ottomanism).*[1]

The principal element of cohesion, but also of distinction between the *millets* was religion, while the national element was limited to a minor role with no significant influence. The idea of national identity based on a common language, religion and

shared customs did not acquire political meaning but was adopted by the Ottoman State in order to achieve communal cohesion and a regular administrative function.[2]

This general framework of social and administrative policy was imposed in Cyprus as well with the consolidation of the Ottoman domination. The island which throughout its long history was colonised by numerous ethnic and religious groups, was divided into two religious communities *(millets):* the Muslim and the Christian-Orthodox.[3] During this period, the traditionally structured Cypriot society, was based on the enlarged family and the village. Beyond these limits the elements of identity and blood relations were perceived exclusively in religious terms.[4] This is confirmed, among others, by numerous official and private inventories which discriminate population exclusively on the basis of religious faith, without the slightest reference to national distinction.[5] The two communities, in their common evolution, went through stages of peace and conflict;[6] the latter, however, never made use of national elements in order to overthrow or even question the Ottoman legal framework. On the contrary, the conflicts aimed at the reintegration in the existing legal framework under improved conditions.

The absence of internal class homogeneity and the political, administrative and social division of the island regardless of religion, created differences and tension, which, however, were expressed in terms of class rather than religion.[7] The proportionately, almost equivalent, presence of Muslims and Christians in the rural class-the overwhelming majority of the population-but also in the higher social *strata* (civil servants, land-owners, tax-farmers, the clergy), resulted in giving priority to defending and pursuing mutual class interests. Class interest was therefore more important than religious differences. They were not a principal reason of conflict in the Ottoman system which was tolerant towards the religions of the Bible. During this period, class interest was definitely the main cause of most of the conflicts that took place in the island.[8]

The *millet* system functioned rather smoothly until the late 18th century, when religious and ethnic differences in the Empire began to acquire a dynamic national character. They were, therefore, used to supporting and promoting movements with an implicit national orientation. Members of the Greek-speaking elite of the Orthodox *millet,* having exploited in an exemplary way the social, financial and cultural changes that took place in the Ottoman Empire during the previous period, acquired a significant financial weight, thus becoming the most powerful part of the Ottoman merchant class. The financial strength of this group could not be translated into equivalent political prerogatives. Therefore, it put forward the linguistic, religious and cultural particularities of its co-religionists, aiming at the creation and the development of a national movement, and, furthermore, the formation of a nation-state.[9] Thus, in this direction, the intellectual movement of *Neo-Hellenic Enlightment,*[10] played a major role in the expansion and the expression of the Greek national ideology.

The national-liberating struggle of 1821, a spiritual child of the panhellenic nationalism which was largely based on the European model, managed to liberate only a small part of Greek historical territories. Greek nationalism has subsequently tried to complete the unfinished liberation struggle. This was effected on the basis of a territorially non-limited, all-powerful ideology, the *Megali Idea (Great Idea),* which aimed at the reconstruction of a new Byzantine Empire, conceived in exclusively Greek-Orthodox terms. It would extend from the Anatolia to Corfu and from Cyprus to the furthest north borders of the geographical Macedonia.[11]

In Cyprus the Greek national idea made a modest impression for the first time in 1821, when the island's Christian population managed to pierce at the national revolution of their co-religionists in continental Greek Land. The rapid and violent repression of the revolutionary movement in Cyprus, and the atmosphere of terror that followed, did not succeed in repairing the first breach. Moreover, the presence of the small Greek State in the southern ends of the Balkan peninsula, from 1828, served as a bastion and diffusion point for nationalist ideas.[12]

The Period of British Rule *(Anglocratia):*
From Passive Community to Agressive Nationalism

The Greek-Cypriot aspirations for joining their national centre, were manifested with the outbreak of the struggle in 1821 and the subsequent formation of the Greek State. These aspirations remained at a peak during the last fifty years of Ottoman occupation (1828-1878) and became the predominant political issue during the entire colonial period.[13]

From the very beginning the British had to face a solid community imbued with national conscience and free from the former Ottoman bondage which the *millet* system had imposed. The new rulers, casting aside the pre-existing Ottoman system, facilitated the development of objective conditions which favoured the expansion of Greek nationalist ideas. National division, that spread to all aspects of public and private life, resulted in the gradual collapse of the religious communities and, at the same time, in the rise of all those elements that undermined the traditional communal cohesion. The new political institutions put into force, led to the predominance of a political life based on nationalist terms, using a nationalist vocabulary.[14]

The most important vehicles of nationalist ideas in Cyprus were the Orthodox Church, the financially and socially powerful merchant class in the cities and the group of scientists and intellectuals that sprang out of it. The Church, a hegemonic institution in social and financial terms, had acted as the sole political representative of the Orthodox during the Ottoman period. Endowed by the Ottoman regime with a series of exceptional privileges, the Church regarded the new administration

as a major danger, as it refused to reconfirm the Church's official political role, and while depriving it of its financial privileges as well as of the state's support in col- lecting taxes from the Christian flock.[15] This is why the Church having got *over* its initial embarrassment caused by the imposition of the British rule in an exemplary and rapid way, took on a leading role in the fight for *enosis* supporting the diffusion of nationalist ideas.

The same path was followed by the merchant elite, for similar reasons. This class, while demanding in an active way political liberalisation, refused to contribute to any social reform, since this would weaken its ability to control rural classes. So adopting the slogan of *enosis,* the merchant elite tried to increase their internal polit- ical power and to participate in a more active way in state apparatuses so as to ensure their financial prosperity. On the other hand, they conveyed nationalist ideas to the rural masses, deflecting them from a socially oriented struggle.

The new situation did not bring about the slightest change in the political and social pyramid of the Greek-Cypriot community. The traditional ruling classes fought hard to preserve the old social relations of the Ottoman period, since this was the source of all their privileges. The nationalist anticolonial movement in Cyprus, *never* seemed to gather all those progressive elements of social content, present in other similar movements, and was led by groups with conservative models and interests. This is why the movement's development was not followed by a corre- sponding improvement in social and economical situation of the majority. The island's rural population, about 70%, lived under abject conditions, politically a pris- oner and financially a victim of politicians and usurers.[16]

There is, however, another aspect which goes beyond the real causes of the development of Greek nationalist ideas in Cyprus. The *enosis* movement was both the receiver and transmitter of a fascinating ideology which functioned parallel to and independent of political ambitions and social-economic class interests, gaining the support of the whole of the population. The intensity and persistence of the nationalist ideology in Cyprus can be found in no other unredeemeq!Greek territo- ry. Cypriots took the best advantage of the favourable conditions, compared to other Greek-populated Ottoman districts created by the new British occupation. They put forward *enosis* as the main weapon of their ideology and as a major polit- ical issue. ·   ·

Greek-Cypriots clearly declared from the first days of *Ang/ocratia* their political goals, either directly or through their representatives, by means of successive proclamations and other similar manifestations: "... *the only desire and the only hope for the future is the union with the Mother-Greece.*"[17] The *memoranda* and other similar steps that followed in 1895, 1902, 1907, 1911, 1912, were more or less of the same content.

The development of nationalist ideas and the rise of the *enosis* movement was

facilitated by the creation of a double educational system which helped Greek and Turkish cultures to develop separately.[18] This educational system generally accelerated the dissolution of community cohesion and influenced at least in an indirect manner the decrease of mixed villages.[19]

In this favourable context the Greek-Cypriot engagement in the *enosis* affair, seemed as a logical consequence. The Christians in Cyprus, trying to acquire legitimacy in the present, had recourse to the past and became organically linked to it. Enslaved and living under regimes which imposed absolute submission and humiliation for centuries, Christian Cypriots let themselves be seduced on a vague but glorious past. They joined a "pure" and ancient race and adopted the theory of their uninterrupted historical continuity, impatiently and gratefully. Outcasts and "bastards" for centuries, they found for themselves "pure" and famous ancestors: the Hellenes. For as Professor Issacs emphasises: "... *concerning racial apotheosis, mythology, identity, psychological security and magical deceit nothing can be compared to Panhellenism.*"[20]

The Formation of Turkish Nationalism

The establishment of British administration brought about, among other things, a dramatic overturn in the pyramid of political power. Muslims, who until that time were the dominant community both administratively and politically, were now forced to coexist with Christians in a new legal framework of institutional equality. This created for the Muslims a situation of historic embarrassment, since institutional equality between the two communities worked to their disadvantage: the Greek-Cypriots were both the overwhelming numerical majority and the most financially powerful part of the population.

For the Muslims the choice was objectively limited. A small percentage, mainly among the old ruling class, refusing to negotiate with the new regime, emigrated to the Ottoman territories in Syria and Asia Minor during the first years of the British rule. On the other hand, most of the Muslims remaining on the island, chose or were forced to choose, an attitude of obedience and loyalty to the new administration: "... *We Muslims according to our religious faith[. . .] consider as corrupted and subversive any community which using means of a revolutionary character, by unfounded justifications and false inventions and by constantly complaining, creates problems for the Government which it ought to obey.*'[21]

The choice of a policy of loyalty to the local British government was dictated as a result by a series of factors: nationalist ideas that were predominant in the area of the Greek-Cypriot community did not meet with the same response in the Muslim one. The Ottoman Empire was the womb that gave birth to all the national states in the wider Balkan area and the Near East. Nevertheless, the ruling Muslim class

remained prisoner of an imperial logic with a main point of reference and cohesion, the supranational Islamic faith. The development of a Turkish national conscience among Cypriot-Muslims was therefore retarded in the absence of a national centre, and a homeland. This is, as well, one of the reasons for the lack of strong national orientation in their educational system which remained limited and focused on religious education and the Arab language.

Muslims were conscious of Greek nationalist views and desires who had anyway never tried to hide them: "... *the fact that Greeks around the world, through the creation of associations, subversive meetings and other common activities, try to revive Greece in the future[. . .], needs no further proof and is well-known to all governments and even to each individual[. . .]. We believe that her Majesty's government knows that Greeks are so imbued with the idea of Panhellenist idea that they want to see nothing but Hellenism on earth, and will be satisfied with no government but the Greek one.*"[22]

To the Muslim dilemma *"British sovereignty or subordination to the Greek state",* the answer was easy and predictable. Muslim Cypriots, members of a sovereign community for centuries, had developed the matching, proud and even arrogant temperament which rendered the thought of cohabitation with Greeks in a state governed by their old *Rayas,* odious and contrary to their dignity. Moreover, they believed that "... *no community can enjoy security, life, property and honour under a Greek administration, since Greeks were arrogant because of their glorious past and ancestors[. . .]. This is true especially for Muslims who are naturally subject to their vengeance.*"[23]

Those fears were not excessive. Following 1878, the Greek-Cypriots refused to accept equality of rights with the Muslim community concerning political participation and administrative management. Their goal was the Muslims' political isolation: they regarded Turkish-Cypriots as a *necessary evil* and their presence on the island as an *historical misfortune* which should be rendered powerless since it could not be abolished:4 "... *Recognition and justification of our national historical rights may be disapproved by the small Muslim minority, moved by religious rather than national motives. However, their number is too small to allow them to go against the national destiny of this eminently Greek island, nor can they claim that their participation to cultural and economical progress is of any significance. Trade, Sciences, Arts, Letters, Industry and any other activity which can bring economical progress is exercised almost exclusively by the Greeks of Cyprus.*"[24]

This aggressive and intolerant nationalism did not leave much of a choice to the Muslims. So, during the first period of the British dominion, when the relations between the two communities were tense, the Muslims, being in no position to put forward a nationalism similar to that of the Greek-Cypriots, were forced to align themselves with the British administration policy. Later, from 1923 onward, when

Mustafa Kemal's Turkish national State was formed, a Turkish nationalism began to take shape in Cyprus and the Turkish-Cypriots started to use a reference point their national centre, the national Turkish State.

The British Position and Policy

The British, on the other hand, showed no official acknowledgment of national communities dividing the population into *Muslims* and *non-Muslims.* This created discontent on the part of the Greek-Cypriots who reacted strongly regarding this *negative surname* as devious and an obstacle to their nationalist goals. This appellation could be found in British official documents but never acquired any substantial meaning. Both British officials and civilians, in their documents appear to unreservedly accept the Greek nationality for the Christians on the island: "... *no man with a common sense could deny that Cypriots are Greeks who speak, think and feel in Greek.*"[25]

The attitude of the colonial administration towards the Greek-Cypriot expectations for *enosis* was shaped by final decision of the British to maintain their dominion on the island. Nevertheless, during the period between 1878-1914, the Greek-Cypriots' demands were not totally rejected by the British who had adopted a subtle political line: "... *I think that it's only natural for the Cypriots of Greek origin to consider their integration with what they call mother-land as an ideal that needs to be nursed willingly, with warmth and devotion. Such a feeling is an example of the patriotic devotion that so gracefully characterises the Greek nation. And I have trust in those who feel so solemny about themselves not to forget that they must show the same respect for other people's similar feelings. I must say that these aspects [. . .] are views that Her Majesty's Government will not refuse to regard with respect. On the other hand, the view of the Muslim's population on the island that British occupation in Cyprus should not lead to the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, and that Great Britain's mission in the Levant should not have as a consequence the diminution of the Sultan's dominion, is also a view that Her Majesty's Government is equally obliged to regard with respect.*"[26]

This quotation is reflecting, in general, the chosen British policy on the Cyprus problem during the period 1878-1914, and represents the manner in which they intended to handle the problem of *enosis.* The Under-Secretary for the Colonies, after flattering the Greek-Cypriot sensitivities in his elegant manner by acknowledging them as part of a noble nation with noble ideals, in fact demanded that equal respect be shown towards the Muslims' similar feelings. In other words, he declares that Great Britain regards both aspects, though diametrically opposed, equally respectable. But what bears the greatest importance is the passage in the text which underlines England's firm decision not to proceed to any kind of action that would diminish the Sultan's dominion over the Near East. In other words, that

no attempt at diminishing the Sultan's dominion should be made by any country iricluding Greece, but excluding Britain.

The main arguments aiming at restraining Greek-Cypriot nationalist pursuits were based on:

- Their formal inability to cede to a foreign country (i.e, Greece) territory that did not belong to them. This argument was made even stronger by the *Cyprus Convention* (1878) articles, according to which Cyprus was ceded to the British by the Sultan for a certain purpose and amount of time, during which it is still to be considered as Ottoman territory.

- The Greek-Cypriots' extremely negative attitude towards the prospect of a return under the immediate dominion of the Sultan after the withdrawal of the British. The reaction of the Greek-Cypriots to the withdrawal of the British military forces in 1894, which were mistaken for withdrawal from the island, was typical of the discontent and panic that such an action would provoke. The rumours were denied by the British government "... *and people felt reassured, though they made England realise their grave fear at the thought of returning Cyprus to Turkey.*"[27]

Following 1914, the scene changed, and even more so after 1923, when, according to the *Treaty of Lausagne,* Cyprus was ceded to Great Britain as a *Crown Colony.* From that time on beliefs and arguments of all three sides (British, Greek-Cypriots, Turkish-Cypriots), regarding this particular issue were formulated by the new facts on the ground, and assumed different dimensions. Further, relations constantly deteriorated and during the last period of the British rule they went through the stage of *Tension* and to the stage of *Rupture.*

Notes

1.   Kemal Karpat, 'Millet and Nationality: The Roots of the Incongruity of Nation and State in the Post - Ottoman Era," in B. Braude - B. Lewis (ed.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire,* vol. 1 *(The Central Lands),* (New York - London, 1982), pp.141-142. K. Karpat "Ethnicity and Community and the Rise of Modern Nations in the Ottoman State", in *Actes du II Congres International des Etudes du Sud-East Europeen,* Tome III *(Histoire),* pp.113-115.

2.   Karpat, *"Ethnicity and Nationality..", op. cit.,* p. 115.

3.   Kyprianos (Archimandrite), *Istoria Chronogogiki tis Nisou Kyprou,* (Nicosia, 1902), pp. 446-461. Daros Alastos, *Cyprus in History. A Survey of 5.000 Years,* (London, 1976), p. 262. Stavros Pantelis, *Nea Istoria tis Kyprou* (Athens, 1986), p.43.

4.   Adamantia Pollis, 'Colonialism and Neocolonialism: Determinants of Ethnic

Conflict in Cyprus," in P. Worsley-P. Kitromilides (ed.), *Small States in the Modern World. The Condition of Survival* (Nicosia, 1979), p.48.

5.   See, among others, the statistical results of Louis de Barrie in Comte de Mass Latrie, *Histoire de I' ile de Chypre* ... (Paris, 1852-1861), vol. Ill, pp. 580-586, Richard Pockocke, *A Discriptional of the East ..,* (London 1754), p. 148 and the inventories of Maritti, Light, Turner, de Vezin, MacDonald and the official ottoman Census of 1777, in Theodoros Papadopoulos, *Social and Historical Data on Population,* Cyprus Research Centre (Nicosia, 1965).

6.   H. Luke, *Cyprus: A Portrait and an Appreciation* (London, 1965), p. 79. Kostas Graikos, *Kipriaki Istoria,* vol. 8, p. 179-180; M. Attalides, *The Turkish Cypriots: Their Relation to the Greek Cypriots in Perspective* (Nicosia), p. 56.

7.   Pollis, *op. cit.,* p. 48; Karpat, *op. cit.,* p. 121.

8.   H. D. Purcell, *Cyprus* (New York, 1969), p. 189-192.

9.   See more in Richard Clogg, "fhe Greek Millet in the Ottoman Empire" *in Small States in the Modern World, op. cit.,* pp. 185-207.

10. See more in P. Kitromilides, "The Dialectic of Intolerance: Ideological Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict", *op. cit.,* pp. 1443-187.

11. Tom Nairn, 'Cyprus and the Theory of Nationalism", *op. cit.,* p. 32.

12. Kitromilides, *op. cit.,* p.158.

13. See among others Alastos, *op. cit.,* p. 330; C. W. J. Orr, *Cyprus under British Rule* (London, 1972), (1st edition, 1916), pp. 160-161; *To Kypriako Provlima* ..,
(Athens, 1975), p. 26.

14. Wendell Barham, *Enosis: From the Ethnic Commutation to the Greek Nationalism, 1878-1955* (Columbia University), 1982, p. 99.

15. Parliamentary Papers, *no. 2324 (Cyprus 1879).*

16. Ploutis Servas, *Kypriako: Efthines* (Athens, 1980), p. 68-69. See more in Ronald Storrs, *Orientations* (London, 1945).

1   Filios Zannetos, *Istoria tis Nisou Kyprou apo tis anglikis katoxis mehri simeron,* vol. 8. (Larnaca, 1991), p. 45.

18. Pollis, *op. cit.,* p. 53; Barham, *op. cit.,* p. 93-98, Nairn, *op. cit.,* p. 35; R. Patrick, *Minority Group Rights,* no. 29 (1979), (Cyprus).

19. Nairn, *op. cit.,* p. 34.

20. See Memorandum of Muslim Representative to the Secretary for the Colonies Lord Kimberley (5/4/1881), in Zannetos, *op. cit.,* p. 322.

21. Ibid.

22. *Op. cit.,* p. 322.

23. *Op. cit.,* p. 126.

24.   See Memorandum of Greek-Cypriots to the Under-Secretary for the Colonies, Winston Churchill (1907), in C. W. J. Orr, *op. cit.,* p. 164.

25. Storrs, *op. cit.*

26. Parliamentary Papers; "Correspondence relating to the Affairs of Cyprus" (1908), (Cyprus, 3365).

27. Zannetos, *op. cit.,* p. 818.