

Cyprus in World War II: Politics and Conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean

ANASTASIA YIANGOU

I.B. Tauris (London and New York, 2010), CCXL + 240 pp.

ISBN: 978-1-84885-436-9; ISBN10: 1-84885-436-6

Anastasia Yiango's account of politics in Cyprus during the Second World War is a timely rendition, but despite the endorsements on the back of the dust jacket it is not an altogether satisfactory account. While the book is successful in offering an account of the development of 'party' politics in the island during World War II and of the rise of the *enosis* movement, it does not situate these developments in the broader context of the inter-war and war years, and the international and local socio-economic developments.

The main issues of the book are firstly that it has not been set within any historiography, such as studies dealing with the rise of extreme ideologies during the inter-war years, or war and society, or colonialism, and therefore it mostly reads like a descriptive narrative on the relations between local colonial political elites and their colonial overlords; secondly, although the colonial archival material in London has been well accessed, the author has ignored the rich Cyprus archives; and last but not least, there are serious limitations in scope and analysis. On the latter, these are: 1) that the author approaches her questions, data collection and analyses from a Greek nationalist perspective, but she does try to be impartial; 2) she fails to place the political history within the context of the war and its impact on the various sections of society and how all sections of society reacted to the war; 3) that the Turkish Cypriots are not part of her story even though they are an integral part of Cypriot society; and lastly 4) that Greek Cypriot society, beyond ideological differences which are well explored, is treated as a classless society striving for *enosis*, when in fact it was a very disparate community, mostly divided by class, which cut across the religious/ethnic divide, as well as by the emerging ideologies of the inter-war years – communism, socialism, conservatism and nationalism.

The title of the book, *Cyprus in World War II*, excited me a great deal, but the sub-title, *Politics and Conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean*, worried me. I was enthusiastic about the prospects of a monograph on the experience of Cyprus during the Second World War, but was disappointed by the chance of yet another account that focused on the politics of the island, which could fall short of locating the political history within the context of the war and its impact on society and *vice versa*. I tell my students about John Keegan's argument that war is a reflection of the societies and cultures that wage it and make a difference reciprocally. In truth, Cyprus was belligerent during the Second World War on the side of the allies and Cypriot troops were actually

the first colonial troops to engage the Nazis in Western Europe. And yet, the influence of the economic and social impact of the war on Cypriot society along with the motivation for enlistment and its effect on society has not been taken into account by the author. Nor has the question of loyalty and disloyalty.

There are too many occasions when the Greek nationalism of the author comes through in her choice of questions, selection of sources, and analyses of those sources. As early as her introduction Yiangou claims that the request by Charles Woolley, the governor of the island, for a definitive statement on the status of Cyprus foreshadowed the 'never' announcement of the British government in 1954. Without any link being made the author moves onto an anachronistic account of the various Greek disappointments with the British since 1878. She even states that the direction of post-war Cyprus was unclear until the EOKA campaign – a not so thinly veiled statement of support for EOKA. Late in the introduction she also states that Cyprus was divided by the Turkish invasion of 1974, when in fact it had been divided since December 1963 by the actions of Greek Cypriot paramilitary troops that led to the Turkish Cypriots creating various enclaves. From chapter 1 it becomes clear that the book is going to lack historical and theoretical context as well as not offer a local context tainted by nationalist discourse. The author's efforts to connect the events leading up to the occupation of Cyprus in 1878, which are discussed in brief in section 1.1, with those of the Second World War are a good example, since her discussion of the earlier period is potted, while the attempted link assumes that nothing had transpired in between. Section 1.2 provides an eloquent exposition of the *enosis* myth that is in perfect keeping with the advocates of that ideal, but is lacking in theoretical understandings of identity formation in the modern period, not counting any critical re-appraisal of the policy. Chapter 2 continues in the same vein. Yiangou bemoans the British for not inviting the *Locum Tenens*, Bishop Leondios, to meet the new governor, even though he was subject to confinement. She fails to explore further the pro-German views of Leondios or of any other leading Cypriot political elites, which may have been very revealing of right-wing attitudes and colonial disloyalties. She also does not explore the significance of the detail that the first colonial contingent to engage the Nazis in Western Europe was Cypriot. There is a good discussion of worker anxieties and unrest, but then there is a failure to link these, the rise of Greek nationalism and *enosis*, and the high incidence of Cypriot volunteerism for the British armed and auxiliary forces. Chapter 3 is equally unconvincing in its effort to prove that *enosis* was 'revived' in the hearts and minds of all Cypriots, and that Cyprus was mobilised behind the Greek cause. Rumours of Cyprus' imminent cession to Greece are exaggerated and the author's claim that Greek Cypriots preferred to enlist in the Greek army, provides little if any evidence to support this assertion. Yiangou maintains that Greek Cypriot donations to Greek coffers dwarf contributions to British coffers, and although she shows that Leondios issued encyclicals calling on Greek Cypriots to donate for Greece, she does not analyse this further, and her findings contradict the better researched work of Tabitha Morgan (see my review in *The Cyprus Review*, Volume 23, Number 2), who reveals that Greek Cypriot donations

to the British war effort far exceeded those to the Greek war effort. Additionally, Yiangou seems to favour the church over the trade unions, detailing divisions in the trade union but not in the church, and providing no reasons to explain why the trade unions remained anti-war. Chapter 4 begins with an exposition on the Greek resistance movement, which the author does not relate to Cyprus and her theme, and this is because it is an alien historical context for Cyprus. The claim that Russia was the motherland of AKEL seems to contradict the assertion that AKEL was undergoing a process of nationalisation. The author's efforts to distinguish between the Church, the right, and the extreme right are unclear, and she more or less presents them as a picture of unity. Chapter 5 begins with the author placing emphasis on pro-*enosis* British authors and consequently forgetting about balance. Conscription is then mentioned, but she does not go fully into the question, nor does she analyse the interesting assertion of Cypriot political elites that Cypriots contributed recruits beyond their population. It is disappointing that she does not enquire into why so many Cypriots applied to enlist in the Cyprus Regiment: if *enosis* was such a widespread demand, why not fight in the Greek army? Moreover, Yiangou makes little of Leondios' offer to agree to conscription in return for *enosis*. This can only be described as a bribe that could have led to the deaths of so many innocent Cypriot lives. Chapter 6 is an improvement, but suffers again from pro-Greek bias since the author claims that the entry of the USSR into the war did not encourage AKEL to initiate a volunteer movement, yet this has been shown to have been the case by Jan Asmussen's work. Although chapter 7 commendably deals with the effects of the Greek crisis in late 1943 and early 1944 on Cypriot politics, chapter 8 returns to the well-worn language that Cypriots were universally in favour of *enosis*, without social distinction. There is no mention of Grivas' Nazi collaboration and the chapter would have merited from some thorough editing since Kyrou, the Greek consul, was not a politician, and the eastern Mediterranean was not a 'theatre' during the Second World War. Chapter 9 once more brings into focus Yiangou's pro-*enosis* view with the semantics framed around all Greek Cypriots supporting *enosis*. The contradiction is that the majority of Cyprus Regiment recruits came from the poorest areas of the island, from the peasant and labouring classes, who were largely uneducated. What is an interesting revelation, though not explored, is why the Cyprus Regiment was not demobilised immediately after the war and why it served in Beirut.

In my view the author did not know which approach to take and ultimately the book suffers from an identity crisis, devoid of colonial, theoretical and historical contexts. I believe that the outcome would have been better had the author focused on socio-economic dimensions as well. The book would also have been more useful if it had been structured along thematic lines such as: Cypriot society and the rise of extreme political ideologies through the inter-war years; the Cypriot contribution to the Allied war effort, focusing on enlistment; the relations between the British and Cypriot political elites during the war and the development of Left and Right wing politics; the *enosis* question, from both a local colonial and more broader imperial and military/defence context and why it failed.

Overall the book is a starting point for people interested in the development of *enosis* and party politics in Cyprus and the relations between local political elites and colonial authorities during the Second World War, but it should be read with the full knowledge of its various limitations.

ANDREKOS VARNAVA