Constructing 'The People' and Its 'Enemies' in the Republic of Cyprus: A Country of Populist Frames but not Fully Fledged Populism

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Abstract

This essay engages with the concept of populism, situating it in the history and contemporary political setting of the Republic of Cyprus. Discussing the multiple ways in which the discursive construction of a people and practices of otherisation have manifested themselves in Greek Cypriot political discourse, the essay lays out a number of arguments about the place and evolution of populist frames on the island, arguing for their pervasiveness across time and political space but cautioning that so far they have not been forcefully combined into a single, classical and above all populist, institutional agent. In this light, the relationship between nationalism and populism is briefly considered.

Keywords: populism, otherness, Cyprus, elites, nationalism

Introduction[2]

It is commonplace to regard populism as something important, as a topical or 'hot' issue in contemporary societies. Arguably, populism occupies a central place at the top of the political agenda in Europe today in a number of ways. According to the EU and European politicians, as well as liberal intellectuals, populism is a threat, a challenge to liberal democracy, demagogic and incompatible with rational judgment. It is utilised to moralise politics and to invoke otherness and conflict devoid of substantive political reflection. According to certain parts of the left, populism can alternatively prove beneficial to democracy, a corrective to the misuses of power by political elites, essentially a tool for democratizing politics and fighting multiple forms of oppression. With the normative debate far from settled, empirical accounts converge that this is a global phenomenon with a long history, but at the same time, it is on the rise today.

Despite the proverbial claim that populism is conceptually elusive and ill-defined, the literature on the subject tends to converge towards a number of chief elements that provide analytical unity to the concept: in Cas Mudde's popular

definition, populism is characterised by a view which sees 'society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale [general will] of the people'.[3] Although there is disagreement whether populism constitutes a thin ideology or system of ideas, or a discursive schema, a communication style or tool, scholars of the phenomenon agree on its two chief features: people-centrism, or in other words an emphasis on the people as a sovereign, virtuous subject; and otherness, manifesting itself into both anti-elitism or an anti-establishment stance and potentially an exclusionary view of the people whereby, along with elites, other 'evil minorities' or 'parasitical others' are denigrated. At the most basic level, populism is thus the equivalent to communicating or rhetorically casting a struggle between two sides, the 'in-group' and its enemies. As a fully fledged political phenomenon, populist mobilisation has included personalistic appeals through a charismatic leader, demagoguery or emotion-based language, loose linkages to masses of heterogeneous voters, references to a crisis as well as a moralisation of politics.[4]

According to extensive empirical research, populism is a chief feature of the far right, used to stylise xenophobia and extremism but it can also be left-wing or centrist. Markedly different from right-wing populism, populist rhetoric and strategy on the left constructs the people as a progressive, forward looking, inclusive and emancipatory force and not as an exclusive, ethnically pure subject, the product of nativism, racism and anti-immigrant sentiments.[5] At the same time, it is not simply rhetoric, ideas or actors that can be studied in relation to populism but also societies or political systems; it is then logical to search for populism at the national level since the phenomenon can be diffused across the political realm. In this vein, scholars have investigated the place of populism in various European countries, both the political system and political culture or democracy more broadly.[6]

3   C. Mudde 'The populist Zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (2004), 543.

4   For a review see N. Gidron and B. Bonikowski, *Varieties of populism: Literature review and research agenda*, Weatherhead Working Paper Series, No. 13-0004 (2013); see also M. Roodjuin, 'The nucleus of populism: in search of the lowest common denominator', Government and Opposition, Vol. 49, No. 4 (2014).

5   Y. Stavrakakis and G. Katsambekis, 'Left-wing populism in the European periphery: The case of Syriza', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2014); C. Mudde and C. Kaltwasser Rovira, 'Exclusionary vs. inclusionary populism: Comparing contemporary Europe and Latin America', *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2013).

6   For example, A. Chrysoggelos, 'The people in the "here and now": Populism, modernization and the state in Greece', *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (2018); T. Pappas, 'Populist Democracies: Post-Authoritarian Greece and Post-Communist Hungary', *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 2014; C. de la Torre de la Torre, 'Populism and democracy: Political discourses and

This essay adds Cyprus to the list, first in order to provide larger ground for comparative country-level analyses of populist supply and second in order to discuss a buzzword in domestic Greek Cypriot politics which, albeit its frequency and own native meaningfulness, has never been put to the test of analytical scrutiny. Taking a historical look at the multiple ways in which populist-like schemas have manifested themselves in Greek-Cypriot political discourse, this essay lays out a number of arguments about the history and place of populism in the Republic of Cyprus. More specifically, it makes the case for the relative absence of fully fledged populism as currently understood in relevant scholarly analyses of the phenomenon, rather identifying populist frames of rhetoric, which are not forcefully combined into a single, populist above all, institutional agent, but which are nevertheless fragmented across the political spectrum and present throughout the island's contemporary history. The essay concludes that the pervasiveness of nationalism and the centrality of the national cleavage in political competition may be responsible for the absence of fully fledged populism.

Populism in the Shade of Nationalism on the Centre and Right

The establishment of the independent Greek state (in 1828) inspired, in the 'unredeemed' Greeks of the periphery with no mono-national state, movements in which the idea of freedom was identified with that of union *(enosis)* with Greece, the state of the Hellenic nation. Cyprus as an area where there existed relatively concentrated Greek populations – like Macedonia, Smyrna-Kydoniae, Kappadokia and Pontos – had fertile ground for the development of irredentist nationalism, also promoted and financed by the Greek state. Yet, in the first period of British rule (1878-1930), *enosis* as a political goal in the Greek Cypriot community was not the primary issue creating political tension with the colonial administration. In this period *enosis* had served as a symbol of the Great Idea (Megali Idea), but it was not until the 1930s that the demand for *enosis* challenged the colonial legitimacy and created mass political and organisational loyalty towards the desired goal.[7] Importantly, separate educational systems on the island contributed to nationalism, instilling a sense of person-hood into the two communities that was methodically ethnicised.[8]

From the 1930s, in so far as 'the struggle' was now unification with the 'rest of the nation', itself constituting an imagined *heartland* rather than a constitutional entity that exists or existed, British colonialism provided the background against which

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cultures in contemporary Ecuador', *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (1997).

7   See C. Pericleous, *The Cyprus Referendum: A Divided Island and the Challenge of the Annan Plan* (London: I. B. Tauris 2009); M. Attalides, *Cyprus, Nationalism and International Politics* (London: Macmillan 1979).

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

notions of the people and its enemies were to be constructed by the main forces which expressed Greek Cypriot nationalism. These forces were composed of groups that dominated Greek Cypriot politics, more specifically the urban bourgeoisie, the clergy, and the Greek educated intellectuals.[9] In its role of 'Ethnarchy', the Greek Cypriot Church was a very powerful institution, organizationally articulated and economically strong through a wide network of clerical committees and very wealthy monasteries, owning large areas of land and exercising privileged authority over the Greek educational system. In the context of the anti-colonial struggle, otherisation, emanating from the Church and other Greek Cypriot elites, expanded 'upwards' and was cultivated in political rhetoric through an anti-British language, underpinned by the steadily increasing propagation and popularity of *enosis* with Greece among the Greek Cypriots.

Especially under the late colonial rule, the anti-British dimension was a key element in constructing and communicating the heroic character attributed to EOKA (between 1955 and 1959), the guerilla 'ethnic communal independence' movement against the British. The EOKA insurgency was communicated by its leaders as the material expression of a national struggle that long pre-dated 1955; its people were Greeks and its goal was Greek Cypriot self-determination and subsequently unification with Greece. But the struggle had both an external and an internal 'other'. EOKA, and more broadly the Church during the 1940s and 1950s, did not view the Greek Cypriot community as an organic whole. Strong anti-communist views that saw the forces of the Left as 'enemies of the Church' or 'non-Greeks' were a key part of political polemics and of the motives behind the persecution of leftists. The Left-Right cleavage in Cyprus has its origins in the 1940s, when intra-communal ideological conflict manifested itself into multiple arenas of social life – journalism, sports, the labour field, the spheres of production and consumption – once the forces of the Right coalesced into a counter-force to the emerging dominance of the Left as an organised, mass political space.[10]

Archbishop Makarios, the first President of the Republic of Cyprus, established in a conflictual climate in 1960 under the external 'guarantees' of Greece, Turkey and the UK, did not diverge from the mainstream myths by and about EOKA and projected himself as the sole elected and thus true leader of the people, above and beyond parties, classes and interests, in a struggle of justice against foreign powers, chiefly

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9   P. Kitromilides, 'The dialectic of intolerance: ideological dimensions of ethnic conflict', *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1979).

10   See Y. Katsourides, *History of the Communist Party in Cyprus: Colonialism, Class and the Cypriot Left* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014); G. Charalambous and C. Christophorou 'A society within society: Linkage in the case of the Cypriot Communist Party', *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 18 No. 1 (2013).

Turkey, the UK and the USA, but also, at times, the Greek government. The very poor institutional and electoral structures in the newly founded Republic, complicated as they were by the political dynamics between the two main communities on the island, encouraged personalistic politics, based on charisma, clientelism and populist language. In accordance with the entrenched discursive myths about the Makarios era, 'the people' was the Greek Cypriot people and Makarios was its Ethnarch (Εθνάρχης).

Religion was a crucial binding force in casting the people, as after all Makarios was a cleric and political relations were forged largely through the Church, especially before the 1940s but also after. His national pride, religious rank and aesthetic, combined with an appealing oratory blended in well with a plea to the Greek Cypriot community as a whole; the Greek Cypriot social masses were largely a pre-modern, conservative and uneducated community, a religious and ethnically proud 'in group', which through a combination of factors that led to ethnic polarisation, became ingrained with a strong sense of Greekness. Vividly indicative among many other examples of populism as a rhetorical style or mode of communication is Makarios' last public speech in 1977, when he spoke to his audience in the second person like he always used to, as follows:

> Greek Cypriot people … In spite of all these [misfortunes], you stand up and up always you will remain at the fronts of struggle. Proud of you, proud for the privilege to be your elected leader, I direct to you the greetings of my love. I salute with feelings of honor and admiration your unslaved conviction and your militant spirit. I admire your greatness, which confronts the heart's warming up and the strength in the many challenges, in which you survived and did not kneel, heroic and great martyr, Cypriot people.[11]

After 1974, through Makarios and his followers, Greek Cypriots identified themselves with 'a just cause' in public discourse within the context of disseminating widely the notion of a 'struggle for liberation' (αγώνας για απελευθέρωση) or the 'struggle against occupation' (ο αντί-κατοχικός αγώνας). Dominant narratives overshadowed or even simply ignored the fanaticism and violence initiated by Greek Cypriot paramilitaries against Turkish Cypriots and communists, and the de facto division of the country since 1963 when, during a climax of violence and political tensions, Turkish Cypriots abandoned the state that had been established four years earlier. The dominant Greek Cypriot understanding of the so called Cyprus Problem is not only ethnocentric it is also oversimplified, twisted and biased, politicizing historical trauma and encouraging collective amnesia. The rights of the people, their passions and insecurities, their culture and customs, as well as their historical traumas, are those

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11   Phileleftheros, 'Η τελευταία προφητική ομιλία του Εθνάρχη Μακάριου' [The last prophetic speech of Ethnarch Makarios], *Philenews.com* (2018, September 30), available online at http://www.philenews. com/eidiseis/politiki/article/587891/i-teleftaia-profitiki-omilia-toy-ethnarchi-makarioy.

of the Greek Cypriots alone. So strong and pervasive through education and religion is this ethno-communal perspective on politics that the other minorities on the island such as the Maronites and Armenians have been deeply imbued with a spirit that sees Greece and Hellenism and not their own 'motherlands' as the source of their national identity.

Like for Makarios, as for the more contemporary Greek Cypriot politicians of the right and the centre (the right-wing DISY and the centrist DIKO and EDEK), the classic populist binary of ordinary citizens who are done injustice by established interests appears in a modified form. On the centre and the right, the elites have been predominantly construed as being external, namely Turkey, as an expansionist and barbaric state, and its allies, and the people have been ethnically defined. A popular-national versus elitist-supra-national antagonism developed, according to which 'foreign elites are the elites of the dominant nation in multinational states … the colonizers, and the non-national elites that use supra-national politics to go against the sovereignty of the nation'.[12] Any sort of organic unity among 'the people' akin to the populist persuasion can only materialise among the ethnic group of either Greeks or Turks, but hardly across the communal divide. Ethnic antagonism as a dominant discursive logic, as a frame of electoral and social mobilisation and as a political resource is the main binary in Cyprus. Since and because of the events of 1974, this binary is circumscribed by ascertaining the right of states to territorial integrity and by condemning the politics of contested statehood in the northern part of the island, but at core, ethnic antagonism boils down to an exclusive conception of who and what constitutes 'the people' of Cyprus.

In so far as ethno-communal appeals are the primordial property of people-centrism, as it is framed in the Greek Cypriot community, our case affirms mostly a form of exclusive ethnopopulism rather than the classical populist dichotomy between the people and the elites or establishment. Ethnopopulism reflects more accurately the populist framing of ethnic appeals, construed as appeals to the true people, the ethnos, the 'centuries old' 'in group'. Above all, the forces of the Right and Centre are largely nationalist forces and only then populists. While nationalists mobilise along 'in-out' horizontal cleavages, pitting the national self against the national other, seeking to narrow the horizontal boundaries of the imagined sovereign to exclude out-groups, populists mobilise along 'up-down' vertical cleavages that pit 'the people' against the elites or the establishment.[13] As Jenne argues, 'although both discourses

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12   B. De Cleen and Y. Stavrakakis, 'Distinctions and articulations: A discourse theoretical framework for the study of populism and nationalism', *Javnost – The Public*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (2017), 14.

13   R. Brubarker, 'Why populism?', *Theory and Society*, Vol. 46, No.5 (2017); De Cleen and Stavrakakis, 'Distinctions and articulations'.

serve to reframe sovereignty more exclusively, populists seek to lower the sovereignty's imagined borders (excluding 'elites' representing domestic and international power structures from political representation)'.[14]

Interestingly but unsurprisingly, in comparative terms, the politicians of the right-wing and (to a lesser extent) centre space have always constituted the actual Greek Cypriot establishment, the one designing policy, occupying key posts in the public sector, owning the means of production and sustaining wide social networks. Hence, populism as a counter-hegemonic force to the state, the few or the privileged was structurally impossible within these political spaces; how could the actual socio-economic elites of Cyprus construct the enemy of the people as an establishment from within? Instead, the otherness entailed in the politics of the Greek Cypriot centre-right has been reflected in the form of rhetorically, habitually and institutionally excluding out-groups, mostly the Turks, the Turkish Cypriots, but also other minorities, such as immigrants from non-European countries, foreigners more broadly, homosexuals, atheists, or those resisting military conscription. Hence, populist framing in the centre-right space, by both leaders and members, politicians and supporters, points also to 'downward' otherisation tendencies, in parallel to 'upward' blame-shifting towards external elites. Both forms of otherisation are historically important. Indeed, if populism as a struggle against powerful, foreign interests can be considered to be a product of the Cyprus Problem, then the populist denigration of minorities is the deeper, structural cause of the Cyprus Problem itself, which from the perspective of in-groupism, stems from the lack of tolerance on issues of ethnic identity, sexuality and religious belief within each of the two main communities on the island.

Cypriotness, Greekness and 1974

The Greek junta-instigated coup and subsequent Turkish invasion in Cyprus, the 'double crime of 1974' in political discourse, shifted public and political conveyances of 'the people' and their cause. One of the considerable effects of the 1974 division was the decline of Hellenic nationalism at the expense of Cypriotism, an ideology that emphasised the common features of the two communities: 'the common land of Cyprus', 'a common state', 'past peaceful coexistence' and especially 'the political independence of the country'.[15] With the 1974 events, there arose a novel argument, situated in Cypriotism, that Turkey as a foreign power came and invaded Cyprus, occupying its land and restricting the rights of an independent Republic. This argument was a novel one because, earlier the demand for independence of the Republic was

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14   E. K. Jenne, 'Is Nationalism or Ethnopopulism on the rise today?' *Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 17, No. 5 (2018), 2.

15   See C. Mavratsas, 'The ideological contest between Greek-Cypriot nationalism and Cypriotism 1974–1995: Politics, social memory and identity', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1997).

not a widespread one among Greek Cypriot officials and the idea of *enosis* dominated Greek Cypriot politics at least until 1968.

Inevitably then, as moral boundaries were redrawn into shape after the events of 1974 and, before then, during the paramilitary antagonism with the Makarios government and the establishment of the terrorist EOKA B, new divisions were generated within Greek Cypriot understandings of 'the people'. Relatively fresh social fault lines emerging in the 1960s crystallised after the events of 1974 and cut between the 'junta supporters' (χουντικοί), 'fascists' (φασίστες) or 'traitors' (προδότες) and the 'patriots' (πατριώτες), 'Makarios supporters' (Μακαριακοί), 'those who resisted' (αντιστασιακοί), or more narrowly 'leftists' (αριστεροί). This line of discourse has been inter-generationally transmitted and sustained for decades, at least within party circles. Its enablement derives from the organisational consolidation of the Left, the Centre and the Right as political spaces throughout the post-1974 period, as well as from the institutionalised commemorations of events and people related to the anti-colonial struggle, ethnic division, inter-communal violence, the events of 1974 and more broadly the Cyprus problem.

Because of the key role of its leader, Glafkos Clerides, as a political persona, the establishment of the Right as a distinct political party, DISY, in the mid-1970s, cut across the lines between Cypriotism and 'motherland nationalism'. A liberal tendency has existed ever since within DISY that is non- but not always anti-nationalist, which is sometimes projected as aligned with the legacy of Clerides himself, and argues strongly in favour of bi-communal rapprochement and a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation as the form the solution of the Cyprus Problem should take. Cosmopolitan in perspective and tolerant of cultural and ethnic diversity, this is a tendency in part reflecting the educational, age, as well as class differences that exist among the supporters of the Right. It has been vocal at times but inconsistent across time, as apparently it can be easily suppressed or co-opted by government and internal party dynamics.

In the public vocabulary of state officials as well as politicians in the Greek Cypriot community, the narration of trauma echoes a mono-communal view of the Cyprus Problem, concentrating on the defense of the rights of the Greek Cypriots, or as frequently expressed in a more absolute manner, of 'Cypriot Hellenism (Κυπριακὸ Ἑλληνισμὸ). However, albeit underpinned by a strong sense of nationhood, the terminology used and emphasised by nationalist forces, diverts attention from the national and appeals to the universal or panhuman, through the usage of international terms connected to the violation of human rights, such as 'the right to property' or 'the right to return', or 'refugee' (πρόσφυγας), 'missing person' (αγνοούμενος) or 'relative of missing person' (συγγενής αγνοουμένου).[16] The ethnic element that drives much

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16   See V. Roudometof and M. Christou, '"1974" and Greek Cypriot identity: The partition of Cyprus

of the conflict is thus often concealed through legalistic or technocratic language; nevertheless, it remains culturally and institutionally embedded in an exclusive Greek Cypriot rather than an organically united Cypriot 'we-ness'.

The events of 1974 constituted one of the most important founding elements of a 'new homeland' for both the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots. The consolidation of the territorial partition, entailed a large-scale population division along ethnic lines, more specifically the massive displacement of people from the south to the north and vice versa.[17] This spatial dimension of the new state of affairs in Cyprus further consolidated otherisation processes, shifting their relevance from politics to social life, everydayness and identity and creating conditions in which the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, spatially alienated as they were now, could be more easily casted as a contentious pair. Indeed, the unilateral establishment of the unrecognised 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' ('TRNC') by the Turkish Cypriots in 1983, elevated Greek Cypriot narratives of otherness, blame, opposition and confrontation from the social and political to the constitutional realm. Ever since, the Turkish Cypriot state has been casted as a 'pseudo state' in dominant discourse. Seen as an 'imperial formation', the power structures in the north of Cyprus from 1974 onwards created zones of exclusion and states of exception.[18] In the context of the discussion about otherness, the space of exception can be interpreted as a social construct between an 'in group' and an 'out-group', whereby the people of each community and their political institutions maintain and commemorate this distance in order to protect what they perceive as the 'normal'. The Green Line, which demarcates the Greek Cypriot Republic of Cyprus from the north, is a product of language discourses, internalised by individuals, and favorable to the creation of a common identity, which was 'to produce and enforce a clear division between the "superiority" of a nation's domestic "us" and the "inferiority" of the foreign "them"'.[19]

The Resurgent Extreme Right

As a final argument regarding the nationalist forces, the more explicit manifestations of contemporary populist politics in Cyprus that fit well within the wider European picture are today to be found on the far right of the political spectrum. ELAM, the

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as cultural trauma', in *Narrating Trauma: Studies in the Contingent Impact of Collective Suffering*, eds J. Alexander, R. Eyerman and E. Breese (Boulder: Paradigm, 2011).

17 See N. Moudouros, 'The new "homeland" and Turkish Cypriot opposition in the 1974-1981 period', *The Cyprus Review*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2017), 139.

18 C. M. Constantinou, 'On the Cypriot states of exception', *International Political Sociology*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2008), 158.

19 G. Popescu, *Bordering and Ordering the Twenty-first Century: Understanding Borders* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 36.

extreme right party, which was established in 2008 and won two seats in parliament in 2016, is today the most representative example of populism in the Republic of Cyprus both within and outside of the context concerning the Cyprus Problem. As an ultranationalist far right party, ELAM has capitalised on the socially deteriorating and politically fluid environment of the post-crisis period (2012-) in all the ways that are familiar from countries like France, Greece, the UK and the Netherlands. In its repertoire, one can find the people exclusively understood ('Hellenes of Cyprus'), the corrupt elites (viewed as both internal and external), an emphasised acknowledgement of political disaffection, as well as an urgent call to 'wake up' in the midst of social, political, economic and national emergency.

The enemies of the far right fit well into the broader European picture: internally, they are chiefly the 'παλαιοκομματικό κατεστημένο' (the old party establishment – DISY, AKEL, DIKO) and the 'τοκογλύφοι τραπεζίτες' (loan shark bankers) and externally, 'Turkey' or 'the Attila' and other foreign interests, such as large hedge funds. Clearly moralistic because it is 'predicated on the evaluation of the fundamental worth of entire categories of people',[20] ELAM's rhetoric is defined by the prevalence of ethical codes over meaningful programmatic analysis. The former are situated appropriately within the politics of symbols and myths characterising the extreme right. More generally moralisation in the case of ELAM's rhetoric, just like that of other parties on the far right, invokes an 'uncorrupted ethos', an 'innocence', or 'ordinariness', which is pure in its morale and ethically self-legitimizing but empty in analytical content or the articulation of coherent ideational reflection.

Although the chief ideological foe justifying the party's identity is the national one, and popular sovereignty translates directly into national sovereignty, anti-political establishment rhetoric is now ELAM's key distinctive feature among the Greek Cypriot nationalist forces. In its rhetoric, the national enemy is frequently associated with a larger framework of elitist and oligarchic behaviour by foreign powers and organisations at the expense of the people's interests and desires, while at the same time the others are not only higher up in the 'social pyramid'. As a more extreme form of ethnic and nativist otherness from that expressed in the centre-right space, ELAM vocally excludes from the organic unity of 'the Greeks', the Turkish Cypriots and minorities, such as immigrant communities from non-European countries.

These 'out groups', are casted as potentially vast majorities on the island, threatening the native way of life and its cultural and belief systems. In the mythology of the extreme right, these others have specific characteristics – for example, they 'smell', or they are 'dirty', or 'less intelligent' – which in turn reflect their value in the 'hierarchy of races'. Obviously then, to the extent that ELAM is utilizing populist frames, it does

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20   Gidron and Bonikowski, 'Varieties of populism', 24.

not only emphasise hostility to 'oligarchies' and 'establishments', but is also voicing an exclusive, authoritarian and nativist populism, reminiscent of fascist representations. Populist framing does not replace extremism but rather acts as its communication arm, the medium through which extremist forces can attempt to normalise their anti-democratic leanings and maximise their electoral appeal.

Imaginaries of the People and the Elites on the Left

On the left, the notion of people-centrism is reversed, since, unlike the nationalists, progressive forces have evoked the notion to address and include both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, as well as the three other local ethnic communities; that is, to embrace all Cypriot people independent of their ethnicity and with a view to bi-communal peace. AKEL, the left-wing party, established since 1926 (as the Communist Party of Cyprus, or KKK, until 1944), has been the chief actor in calling for the reunification of the island and bi-communal rapprochement. The communists had a different 'we' than the rest of the Greek Cypriot community, which cut across ethnic lines but at the same time stopped short of including a significant part of the ideological other; especially because of actual prolonged periods of persecution, the communists formed 'a people of their own' and ingrained it with immaculate organisational articulation, intended to function in a counter-hegemonic fashion and in essence forming a 'society within a society'.[21]

Still, AKEL's version of Cypriotness and thus its conceptualisations of 'we-ness' was a fluid one in earlier years and contrasts highly with its post-1974 stance, to the extent that the *enosis* period can be seen as a 'spectre haunting the party'.[22] After its establishment, AKEL declared its support for the principle of 'self determination' and, in its 2nd congress in 1942, it defined *enosis* as the basic demand of Greek Cypriots, transforming the earlier analysis of its predecessor, the KKK. To this day AKEL's support for *enosis* and more broadly its relationship to nationalism remains an internally contested issue and story on the Left, precisely because the communist 'we-ness' was replaced with an ethnocentric one and this change created problems with the party's efforts to bring together Greek and Turkish Cypriots in the unions. The adoption in 1947 of self-government as a first step towards *enosis* signaled evolving intra-party dynamics on the Left as well as the changing balance of power between the Left and the Orthodox Church.

The rise of Ezekias Papaioannou to the leadership of AKEL by the end of the

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21   Charalambous and Christophorou, 'A society within society'.
22   L. Karakatsanis, 'Repositioned/re-signified: Echoes of violence, aporias of solidarity between Cyprus, Turkey and Greece', in *The politics of Culture in Turkey, Greece and Cyprus*, eds L. Karakatsanis and N. Papadogiannis (London: Routledge, 2017), 93.

1940s was accompanied with a change in party line from 'self-determination-*enosis*' to 'immediate *enosis*' (or, '*enosis* and only *enosis*') in 1949, which subsequently led to the party's fully fledged support to an envisioned, just, national (not simply popular) goal in the 1950s. The complete erasure of *enosis* from AKEL's discourse was not to come until 1974.[23] During the 1960s, *enosis* in AKEL's discourse had a legitimising element which saw better conditions for the communists than their being excluded from power in a united Cypriot state.[24] *Enosis* still meant different things on the Left and the Right; while for the former it was a tactical position, always riddled with tensions within AKEL, for the latter it carried a 'messianic' aura, a clear, sacred desire.[25] Yet, within the wider narrativisation of Cypriotness, AKEL's 'in-group' shifted between applying class criteria in official ideology, which by definition transcend ethnicity, and national ones, which highlight connections with Greece and Hellenism.

If today the Greek Cypriot left applies anti-nationalist and inclusionary people-centrism to the Cypriot peace process, it also utilises populist-like schemas to social justice struggles. As a self-proclaimed defender of lower and working class interests, the party has diachronically identified an economic and political establishment, or elite, within and outside of the island, blending social justice with political modernisation and patriotism with anti-imperialism. The most frequent terms are ones that allude to a mass, but more often than not this is a mass embedded in labourism and its many occupational interests: above all, 'the working people' and then 'the farmers', 'the new employees', 'the hotel employees' and various other types of industry-based workers' interests. At the same time, as a reformist party, AKEL has systematically prioritised, especially during electoral periods, a rhetorical appeal to the 'common people', above a vocal defence of particular classes or sections of society. Indeed, class is much less of a signifier in AKEL's discourse than 'the people'. The latter is a very common frame in the left's slogans in the 1980s and 1990s: 'ΑΚΕΛ, ΑΚΕΛ. Το κόμμα σου λαέ' (AKEL, AKEL. People, your party); 'Ο λαός δεν ξεχνά τους φασίστες και τα τανκς' (the people do not forget the fascists and the tanks); 'Ο λαός απαιτεί, πρώτο κόμμα στη Βουλή' (The people demands, first party in parliament); 'Λαέ μην σκύβεις το κεφάλι, με την Αριστερά αντίσταση και πάλι' (People don't lower your head, with the left resistance again); 'Ο λαός είναι εδώ, ενωμένος δυνατός' (The people is here, united and strong); 'Λαός ενωμένος, ποτέ νικημένος' (People united, never defeated). The 'we' of the left, its people, did change according to the issue at hand, from alluding to party supporters

23   Karakatsanis, 'Repositioned/re-signified', 93.

24   S. Tombazos, 'AKEL: Between nationalism and anti-imperialism', in *Nationalism in the Troubled Triangle.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 227-229.

25   See A. Panayiotou, 'Border Dialectics: Cypriot Social and Historical Movements in a World Systemic Context', in *Beyond a divided Cyprus: A State and Society in Transformation*, eds N. Trimikliniotis and U. Bozkurt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 87-88.

to those condemning the 1974 coup and Turkish invasion, to encompassing the whole of society. It is a relatively flexible 'we', yet it is also non-discriminatory in ethnic or other cultural terms, progressive in outlook and inclusive in scope.

AKEL's relation to populism can be differentiated from the so called archetypical cases of left-wing populism, such as Podemos in Spain, the Labour party in the UK, France Insoumise in France or SYRIZA in Greece, on the basis of four features of the Greek Cypriot left that concern both the party itself and the broader context in which it has operated recently: First, AKEL hesitates to designate an all-encompassing establishment, while otherisation is less accentuated in electoral periods where coalition building (traditionally with the forces of the centre) is considered necessary. Additionally, AKEL has not been in the post-1974 period a 'true outsider'; rather it is a party navigating the thin line between protest and the establishment.[26] Both the exclusivity of its 'we-ness' and the antagonism implied in its anti-elitism are constrained by its reformism and more specifically its connection to the state since the late 1980s.

Second, the crisis environment in Cyprus entailed a different sequence of events, very dissimilar to those in Greece, Spain or the UK. On the one hand, the events of 2011-2013, involving the bail-out of the Cypriot government by the troika (IMF, ECB and European Commission), included wide and intensified use of the people-elite binary by AKEL, casting the 'average person', the 'common man', the 'consumer' or the 'loan-taker', as members of a political body upon which the private banks bestowed a debt for which it has no responsibility. In the context of debate over the crisis and the distribution of blame over the exclusion of Cyprus from the international markets, AKEL disseminated a strong element of anti-establishment discourse. The Left's 'others', who bore responsibility for the crisis, were big financial capital and mainstream media outlets. While the centre-right, DISY and DIKO, who were in opposition to the government, narrowed down the scope of its otherisation processes to alternative distinctions, such as between the 'hard-working and tax-paying private employees' and the 'lazy public servants', the only true beneficiaries of an 'overblown state'. Yet in the first years of the crisis, AKEL was the central party in government, and in fact its former leader, President Dimitris Christofias, applied for financial assistance from the troika. In a context where the Left could be perceived as the de facto elite or establishment, fully fledged populism by AKEL could have been casted by the opposition as a contradiction in terms.

Finally, a third reason why AKEL is not really a populist force is that Marxism-

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26 G. Charalambous and C. Christophorou (2015) 'The Cypriot communists between protest and the establishment: A second look at AKEL's linkages with society', in *Party-Society Relations in the Republic of Cyprus: Political and Societal Strategies*, eds G. Charalambous and C. Christophorou (London: Routledge, 2015).

Leninism, prominently present in the party's organisational and ideological identity, sits uncomfortably with the people as an organic unity from which one can deduct a 'general will'. In the Leninist understanding, it is the working class (or the working people) who are the prime agent of progress and system change. The poststructuralist elements entailed in the strategic articulation of left-wing populism signal a radical democracy that appears foreign to the Bolshevik notion of the vanguard or the organisational logic of democratic centralism, upon which AKEL has functioned in practice until today. To the extent that class struggle and class analysis avoid the dichotomy between the people and the elites and in so far as 'the people at large' can never be an organic unity, AKEL's profile resembles more a 'populist temptation', analogous to that of communist parties in earlier decades, such as the 1930s or the Eurocommunist years in the 1970s and 80s;[27] rather than populism as the central political strategy inside the communist Left.

Conclusion

Although the populist phenomenon in Cyprus can neither be understood nor explained without reference to the Cyprus Problem, Cyprus is, like many other cases, a country of manifold populist frames across both time and political space. Populist rhetorical schemas or populist-like narratives are to be found across church, state and party actors; across the political system through the pattern of left-wing inclusionary and right-wing or nationalist exclusionary appeals to a people; as well as in the presence of unspecific, vague, catchy but crude and oversimplified political language characterizing public dialogue and the mainstream media.

Moreover, populism is a phenomenon conjoined with nationalism, whereby there is a general hesitation in the utilisation of absolute dichotomies that move beyond ethnic lines or the Cyprus Problem. Nationalism, both a factor and a product of inter-communal conflict, has been widely present in the political arena, institutionalised in educational and administrative practices and widely disseminated by clerics, opinion leaders and intellectuals to the extent that both the embrace of a collective people's will and the antagonism against 'the others' has been more often than not mixed with nationalist and religious allegiances. At the macro-historical level, therefore, populist framing has been articulated on the island by both Left and Right mostly, although not exclusively, within the context of ethnic division, violence and efforts to overcome conflict between the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots and to unify the island.

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27 Y. Balampanidis 'Historicizing the populist temptation: the case of Eurocommunism', in *Left Radicalism and Populism in Europe*, eds G. Charalambous and G. Ioannou, London: Routledge, forthcoming; F. Escalona, 'Social democracy and the temptation of populism between the world wars: France in a comparative perspective'. In *Left Radicalism and Populism in Europe.*

These particularities have diluted the appearance of populism to the extent that Cyprus stands out among southern European countries in so far as it has both a strong Left and a powerful Right and Far Right, but there has not emerged a single populist player in the political playing field, at least yet. Populist mobilisation with its traditionally accompanying features of a charismatic leader with loose ties to voter masses who evokes a struggle by the people against a heterogeneous and evil oligarchy with orthogonal distinction from the sovereign subject and who speaks of urgencies and uses simplistic, crude language is not the chief behavioural or identity trait of each of the main political actors. Hence Cyprus is not a good example of a successful populist challenge, either during these times when the sense of populism is everywhere, or earlier. But it is yet another example of multiple locally specific populisms. Both people-centrism and otherness cut across ideological lines and political spaces and vary over time in terms of defining either the 'in-group' or the 'out-group'.

The high salience of the ethnic cleavage and consequently its constraining effects on the supply of populism may be a useful explanation for the relative absence of populists close to the ideal type, or put differently, fully fledged populism. This 'crowding out' hypothesis would assume that nationalism as a belief system is embedded in the Cypriot polity in such a way as to produce patterns of social conflict and political competition conducive to populist moments and performances but obstructive to a single, forceful populist political agent, which is firstly populist and only then nationalist or leftist. Comparative, empirical studies of populism in ethnically divided countries or in situations of ethnic conflict would be one way to advance the issue further.

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