

The National Movement of the Greek Cypriots During the Last Period of the British Occupation 1950-1960

[Το Εθνικό Κίνημα των Ελληνοκυπρίων κατά την Τελευταία Περίοδο της Αγγλοκρατίας 1950-1960]

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Athens, 2017 [pp. 584]

ISBN: 978-618-82884-2-3

The national movement of the Greek Cypriots during the period of the British occupation has been in the epicentre of various research studies, constituting one of Cypriot historiography's most controversial fields due to its multilevel consequences. Dr Sophia Argyriou's book focuses on the development of the Greek Cypriot nationalism in its most crucial phase; the last decade of the British colonial period. As the author states at the very beginning of her book, the primary aim of the publication is to present the postwar Greek Cypriot national movement, taking account of all its dimensions, as a massive, anti-imperialist, national struggle. Furthermore, Argyriou clarifies that her effort is to display the imperial context (the political, social and ideological conditions) of the period, that led to the rise of the Greek Cypriot nationalism.

The book, which consists of four parts, begins with a theoretical approach vis-à-vis nationalism. By presenting various theories and approaches on the specific phenomenon (citing scholars such as Anthony Smith, Miroslav Hroch, Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm and Elie Kedourie), the author focuses on the case of Cyprus. The first part of the book also serves as an overview of the Greek Cypriots' national movement, as well as a synopsis of the British imperial rationale. Argyriou's approach is based on Miroslav Hroch's theories. Underlying the vital role of the Greek Cypriot education, the press and the Church, the author provides a brief, yet comprehensive context of nationalism during the British era. Additionally, as already stated, she focuses on imperialism as a social and political phenomenon, and on the post-imperial theories, suggesting that there is an essential affiliation between the nature of anti-colonial struggles and the colonial regime (its structure and institutions).

The second part of the book concentrates on examining the era between the end of the Second World War and 1950. Argyriou considers these years as a period of

intensification of the national movement in Cyprus due to the massive participation in political activities. This was, partly, a result of the disillusionment of the Greek Cypriots following the end of the War, which aggravated the local population's animosity towards the British Government. The various declarations of the Allies during the War had reinforced Cypriots' aspirations regarding the implementation of the right of self-determination. In addition, as a result of the War and the Greek-British alliance, the severe political restrictions (imposed by the Government of Cyprus in the aftermath of the 1931 riots [*Oktovriana*]) were abolished. Thus, a new social and political context was shaped and nationalism gained momentum. Another critical development of that time was the foundation of the Cypriot Left political party AKEL (Progressive Party of the Working People). In consequence, a fierce competition commenced between AKEL and the Cypriot Ethnarchy, both claiming the leading role of the national struggle in a period when Greece was ridden with a brutal civil war. This situation resulted in a tense political atmosphere, rendering the national problem (the question of *Enosis* [Union of Cyprus with Greece]) as the predominant issue of everyday life.

The national aspirations of the 1940s culminated in the 1950 plebiscite for *Enosis*. The event was a watershed in the history of the Greek Cypriot national movement, serving as an official statement of people's will and presented as the apex of the peaceful national campaign. With the plebiscite as starting point, the third part of the book deals with the large-scale national campaigns in Cyprus and abroad. Besides the plebiscite, another momentous development of the period was the election of Makarios III as the Archbishop of Cyprus, hence head of the Cypriot Ethnarchy (the political and religious leader of the Greek Cypriots). As Argyriou mentions, Makarios' election was crucial for the advancement of the national movement, as he introduced a modern communication policy. In the meantime, several measures adopted by the British authorities in order to suppress the national manifestations and to prevent the radicalisation of the national sentiment, irritated the Greek population and provoked harsh reaction.

The author states that, under these circumstances, a sense of cultural nationalism developed among the Greek Cypriots by means of defending their national identity and dismissing the British attempt to legitimize colonialism in terms of cultural mission. In this sense, Argyriou illustrates the way by which the elements of history, literature, language and folklore culture were used by intellectuals to enhance Greek national claims. Particular emphasis was given to Education as a vital factor for the

preservation of national consciousness. It's on this basis that the author interprets the zeal of the Greek population for the protection of Education's Greek character, against what was perceived as a British effort for dehellenisation.

In addition, Argyriou points to another factor of national agitation; Britain's fiscal policy. The heavy taxation (especially the 'Tribute'), the lack of agricultural infrastructure, the Government's negligence vis-à-vis relieving the rural population of usury and the absence of a welfare state, exacerbated hostility towards the regime.

An important characteristic of the book is that the author opted to concentrate her research, not only on the intra-Cypriot developments, but to also consider the international situation. This approach derives from her perception of the Cypriot problem and the strategic value of the island as directly interrelated with Cold War, the post-war decolonisation, the Greek civil war, the intense Middle East conflicts of the time and the rise of Turkey as a regional power. In this context, Argyriou examines the efforts of the Greek Cypriot and the Greek leadership to internationalize the *Enosis* question. The frustration of the island's Greek population, due to the British intransigence regarding their national demands (despite the declarations and the liberal manifestations of the previous years), resulted in considering the United Nations as the sole refuge for a fair solution. This was an important turning point, as Cypriots came to the realisation that they would eventually have to act on their own, pursuing the satisfaction of their pleas. But what turned out to be an unsuccessful UN appeal proved important for another reason; the political setback left no other option to the Greek nationalists but to radicalise their struggle.

The radical phase of the Greek Cypriot national movement, the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters' (EOKA) guerrilla warfare, and the British counterinsurgency campaign is the main field of analysis in the last part of the book. As Argyriou puts it (p. 316), 'when the "normal" procedures of negotiation and protests are eliminated, resistance and disobedience seem to be the only solution, and violence rises as a tactic of the conflict'. The author analyses the emergence of EOKA, its objectives, structure and operation. Through a thorough examination, Argyriou explains how the insurgency transformed into a massive national campaign, with the participation of guerrillas, civilians, students and clergy.

Additionally, more complicated issues are examined, as the author provides an analysis regarding the frictions between EOKA and AKEL, the controversy among the political and the military leader of the Cypriot struggle (Makarios and Georgios Grivas-Dhigenis) and the bicomunal conflict of the period (with reference to

the British role, instigating the discord). Furthermore, she investigates the gradual abandonment of *Enosis* as the main slogan of the national movement, explaining that this development resulted as a political manoeuvre in order for the Cyprus issue to be aligned with the decolonisation movement (and to not be considered an act of imperialism on behalf of Greece).

An additional important contribution of the book to Cypriot historiography is the presentation of the negotiation process and the plans for the solution of the Cyprus problem between 1955 and 1959. Moreover, Argyriou attempts to trace the roots of the territorial partition, an issue which still dominates the political life of the island.

The book concludes with the abandonment of *Enosis* as the aim of the Greek Cypriot national struggle and the reluctant acceptance of the foundation of an independent Cypriot state as the solution of the long-lasting crisis. The author, presenting the public discourse regarding the contingent Cypriot independence, depicts how the specific plan had been proposed since 1957 and how it gradually emerged as the sole feasible solution.

In order to enrich her work and underpin her argumentation, Argyriou makes use of a wide variety of sources. Besides the extensive usage of literature (Greek and English), she appears to have comprehensively researched the Greek and the Greek Cypriot press. Moreover, she turns to archival sources in order to shed light on several aspects of the research object and to disclose unknown material. Some of the archives Argyriou uses are: 1. The Secretariat Archives of the State Archives of Cyprus; 2. The Diplomatic and Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Greece; 3. The Contemporary Social History Archives (ASKI), Greece; 4. The National Archives, UK; and 5. The Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive (ELIA). The author has also managed to enhance her conclusions with information gleaned from interviews conducted with prominent figures of the Greek Cypriot national movement.

Utilising the aforementioned sources, Argyriou uses an interdisciplinary approach, combining historiography with theories from the area of political sciences and sociology. In this way, she consolidates her argumentation and offers a very good piece of research, useful in multiple scientific fields. Her work is insightful and essential in comprehending the nature and the evolution of the Cyprus problem in its complexity and its current *status quo*.

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