

Cypriot Nationalisms in Context: History, Identity and Politics

Nikos Christofis and Thekla Kyritsi (eds.)

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Debating and interrogating the development of nationalisms in a historically conflict-ridden place like Cyprus is a daunting task. The present situation on the island and the hegemonic dominance of certain interpretations of national identity on the island makes fruitful dialogue difficult. Furthermore, the public and scholarly focus on key turning points in the modern history of the island, like the 1960 Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Cyprus, the 1963-64 intercommunal strife and the 1974 invasion, among others, have overshadowed the social and historical processes which have contributed to the very culmination of these turning points. Nonetheless, historians and social scientists working on the evolution of nationalisms in Cyprus have offered important contributions that challenge the hegemonic narratives on both sides of the Green Line.¹

The edited volume by Nikos Christofis and Thekla Kyritsi is a welcome and much-needed addition to this line of scholarship. The book successfully offers an overview of the current state of the art. Moreover, some contributions break new

¹ There is a long list here but some of the most important contributions include Costas M. Constantinou, "Aporias of identity: Bicomunalism, Hybridity and the 'Cyprus Problem'," *Cooperation and Conflict* 42, no. 3 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836707079931>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0010836707079931>; Niyazi Kızılyürek, "Modernity, Nationalism and Secularization: The Turkish Cypriot Case," in *Religious Communities and Modern Statehood: The Ottoman and post-Ottoman World at the Age of Nationalism and Colonialism*, ed. N. Michael Michalis, Verdeil Chantal, and Anastasiadis Tassos (De Gruyter, 2020); Caesar V. Mavratsas, "National Identity and Consciousness in Everyday Life: Towards a Sociology of Knowledge of Greek-Cypriot Nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 5, no. 1 (1999), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1354-5078.1999.00091.x>, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1354-5078.1999.00091.x>; Caesar V. Mavratsas, "The ideological contest between Greek-Cypriot nationalism and Cypriotism 1974–1995: Politics, social memory and identity," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20, no. 4 (1997/10/01 1997), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1997.9993986>, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1997.9993986>; Yiannis Papadakis, "Greek Cypriot Narratives of History and Collective Identity: Nationalism as a Contested Process," *American Ethnologist* 25, no. 2 (1998), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1998.25.2.149>, <https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1525/ae.1998.25.2.149>.

ground and offer pathways for further research. At the same time, for reasons explained in the following paragraphs, the book does not fully live up to its own claim of presenting ‘a range of perspectives on the broader canvas of the Cypriot Experience’.²

The book is split into four parts; i) ‘Early Agents of Nationalism’, ii) ‘Moments of a Mass Movement, iii) ‘National Identity and the Development of Prejudice’ and iv) ‘The Local and the Global’. In the following paragraphs, I will briefly summarise these four parts. I zero in on the most important contributions in each of these sections. Finally, this review ends by offering some points of critique.

The book’s first part focuses on the first decades of the island’s post-Ottoman period, which began in 1878. The key characteristics explored in this part relate to the encounter of Cyprus with British colonialism and, in turn, with the modern state, exemplified by the introduction of the Legislative. This sets the context in which the contributions track the nascence of nationalism on the island, focusing on the impact of men educated in the Greek university system, the gradual transition of the Church into an agent of nationalism, the utilisation of the Legislative Council as a platform for the promotion of the interests of both communities on the island and, finally, the role of Greek Cypriot women as agents of Greek nationalism. The last contribution by Thekla Kyritsi (ch. 4) is a novel and welcome one, since the role of women in developing and disseminating nationalist ideas in Cyprus has been overlooked by scholars so far. Kyritsi’s chapter is a much-needed attempt to fill this gap in which many more questions about the role of women and gender ought to be asked in connection to the rise of nationalism in Cyprus. Kyritsi’s work in this chapter is a step in the right direction.

In the second part of the book, the focus shifts towards the interwar years, where the idea of nationalism trickled down from the elites to the masses, culminating into the *Enosis* movement among Greek Cypriots. The chapters in this part track the gradual conflation of de-colonialism to Greek nationalism on the Greek Cypriot side, the role of Grivas’ ‘Organisation X’ in Cyprus, the failure of two reunification attempts by the Greeks and Turkish Cypriots at different historical periods. The work of Alexios Alecou (ch. 7) on the presence of ‘Organisation X’ on the island offers an original contribution on a matter that has not received enough scholarly attention so far and draws another link between the divisions and politics of the Greek civil war and their

² Nikos Christofis and Thekla Kyritsi, “Introduction,” in *Cypriot Nationalism(s) in Context*, ed. Thekla Kyritsi and Nikos Christofis (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 12.

repercussions on Greek Cypriot politics at the time.³ Despite its merits, the chapter by Alecou spends most of the article on developments in Greece, which are certainly key to his argument, and only devotes a few pages on the organisation's actions on the island (pp. 145-150). Instead, it would be more useful to the reader if Alecou delved further into 'X's actions in Cyprus and their impact, and less time on setting the scene.

The third part of this volume that zeroes in on the development of identities in the aftermath of the 1974 invasion and the island's *de facto* partition is arguably the strongest out of the four. The chapter by Sossie Kasbarian (ch.9) is the only chapter in the book that does not grapple with notions of either Greek or Turkish nationalism on the island. Kasbarian here overviews the development of the Armenian identity on the island, how its relations with the Armenian diaspora impacted the Republic of Armenia, and the flows of Armenian migrants who arrived on the island at different times. Furthermore, the chapter by Çıraklı (ch. 10) offers an interesting analysis of how migration in the so-called 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' (TRNC) has been portrayed by different segments of the Turkish Cypriot Press. In particular, the chapter highlights the way in which Turkish Cypriot identity among the left-leaning members of Turkish Cypriot society views the Turkish settlers as a threat to their existence, describing the latter as backward and uncivilised. Finally, Alekos Varnava's (ch.12) contribution on the writings and work of the late Rolandos Katsiaounis offers one of the first appraisals of the work of one of Cyprus' most prominent historians.

The fourth part is arguably the most innovative one in both theoretical and empirical terms. In specific, the contributions here take a comparative approach to the historical experience of Cypriot nationalism. The chapters compare Cyprus' experience and that of Malta, Latin America and the Greek and Turkish Left. The chapter by Palieraki (ch.15) stands out because it has managed not only to compare the Cypriot case with Latin America, but also to unearth the linkages between the Cypriot decolonial movement and EDEK with Latin American actors and the Greek socialist left of Andreas Papandreou and PASOK under the rubric of Third World Nationalism. These linkages have not been scrutinised in an academic manner before, even though they are widely known to the public.

However, the volume comes with a number of key shortcomings.⁴ The first is the

³ This chapter builds on Alecou's own work in Alexios Alecou, *Communism and nationalism in post-war Cyprus, 1945 -1955 : politics and ideologies under British rule* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁴ Some of these shortcomings have also been pointed out in this review "Book Review: Cypriot Nationalisms in Context: History, Identity and Politics edited by Thekla Kyritsi and Nikos Christofis," LSE

poor proofreading at times within the text.⁵ The second deals with the failure of the book to meet its own threshold of writing an interdisciplinary work on Cypriot nationalisms that moves beyond the Greek-Turkish divide (pp. 5, 12). The book offers a number of historical contributions to Cypriot nationalisms. Hence, the criterion of interdisciplinarity is not met. The exception is the chapter by Ioannou and Kassianos (ch.11), which deals with studies on child psychology among Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot children. Moving on, except for Kasbarian's chapter on the experience of the Armenian minority, all the other chapters deal with other Greek or Turkish experiences of nationalism. Therefore, the experiences of the island's two other minorities -Maronites and Latins- are left unaccounted for. The role and historical experience of Cyprus' minorities is an area of research that needs further scholarly attention, as well as that of the interaction of these three minorities with the two dominant ethnic groups in the period following 1878.

In conclusion, despite its shortcomings, the work of Christofis, Kyritsi and the other contributors is essential, and it can serve as an ideal starting point for anyone interested in studying Cypriot nationalisms. As has been outlined above, some of the contributions are innovative and open ground for further research, while the less innovative ones offer solid historical narratives of critical developments in the rise and development of nationalism in Cyprus. Finally, the book will also be a helpful tool to anyone who wishes to understand contemporary political dynamics on both sides of the Green Line, the historical origins of the Cyprus Problem, or even to contemplate Cyprus' future.

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Review of Books, 2020, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lserewiewofbooks/2020/02/27/book-review-cypriot-nationalisms-in-context-history-identity-and-politics-edited-by-thekla-kyritsi-and-nikos-christofis/>.

⁵ For examples read the review in the previous website.