

University Seminar #703: Modern Greek Studies

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Speaker: Alexis Rappas (with respondent Lidia Santarelli)

Topic: "National Allegiance and Imperial Loyalty: Greeks Under European Colonial Rule"

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Attendees: Ipek Celik, Gerasimus Katsan, George Fragopoulos, Nikki Leger, Christos Tsiamis, Will Stroebel, Valerie McGuire, Nikolaos Laaris

Summary of Presentation:

Rappas's talk brought together micro-analyses of cases drawn from Cyprus under British rule and the Dodecanese under Italian rule during the 1930s in order to explore the conflicting imperatives of national allegiance and imperial loyalty, and the ways in which the boundaries between rulers and ruled are contested and redefined in this period. These are two cases in which "Greeks" were being ruled by colonial powers from elsewhere in Europe, and the Cypriot subjects as well as the Dodecanesian elites contested this status by claiming to be on the same footing with Europeans, and therefore not people who should be subjected to colonization; they tried to present their situation not as a colonial question but as a question of nationality. These arguments involved three rhetorical strategies, which claimed: 1) an affiliation with ancient Greece; 2) a cultural affinity with European Christian nations; and 3) the demand for *enosis*, or political union with Greece, which had been accepted as a sister state by other European nations in 1830. Whenever a power went into a territory where the people identified as Greek, they became embroiled in these issues of nationality, identity politics, geopolitics and international law: the concept of *res* (or *terra*) *nullius*, which had justified the scramble for Africa between European powers in the late 19th century, could only be very problematically applied in these cases. As the British found out in 1815-1864 occupation of the Dodecanese, colonial rule in the Ionian Islands depended on the British ability to deny the cultural links with Greece claimed by the local elite, and to represent their subjects as "European Aborigines."

Rappas explored the differences between the British and Italian reactions to Greek irredentism: though similar dilemmas were faced by the two occupying powers, their reactions were very different. The British were comparatively loose in their governance: they granted liberty of the press, subsidized Greek-language schools whose curriculum was modeled on that of schools in mainland Greece, and created semi-representative institutions. The Italians, on the other hand, were much stricter: within a year of their occupation of the Aegean Islands in 1912, they had introduced martial law, prohibited assemblies, forbidden the display of the national symbols of Greece, meddled in the affairs of the local Orthodox Church and deported some of the most vocal champions of *enosis*. However, the 1930s marked a clear authoritarian turn in the colonial policies of both Britain in Cyprus and Italy in the Aegean Islands: in both cases *enosis* became

illegal, as did the display of the national symbols of Greece, while censorship was imposed and the semi-representative institutions in both places were abolished and education was brought under colonial control.

Yet these parallels, Rappas claims, remained superficial, since the British were not nearly as thorough as the Italians in their attempts to eradicate *enosis*: the schools on Cyprus were still teaching in Greek, for instance, while in 1937 the Italians had declared that all education in the Dodecanese take place in Italian. If, in the 1930s, both the Italians and the British sought to transform their Greek-Orthodox subjects into loyal colonial subjects, they understood the concept of imperial loyalty very differently. The British felt that Cypriots could never become British, though neither should they be encouraged to present themselves as Greek; the Italians, on the other hand, tried to make their Greek subjects Italian citizens, and therefore recognized them as higher in the colonial hierarchy than the Libyans, the Eritreans and the Ethiopians. For instance, the British in Cyprus discouraged from marrying locals, while the Italians did not forbid mixed marriages.

Rappas then went on to question the notion of “Greekness” in dealing with these two populations; he stated that most historiographic accounts tend to collapse social, regional, and ideological differences between such “Greeks” into that single category. In the 1930s, he noted, there were 694 hamlets, villages and towns in Cyprus, 252 of which were inhabited by both Greek and Turkish Cypriots; the question thus arises of how *enosis* is to account for the differences between the inhabitants of isolated villages and the Athens- or London-educated elite of Nicosia. He also noted the cultural diversity and international contacts of many of the Dodecanese, as well as local antagonisms between the islands. Greekness, he suggested, was at the time only one of many available concentric circles of self-identification for these individuals. Rappas pointed out that the categories of ‘national allegiance’ (*ethnikofrosini*) and ‘loyalty’ (which the Italians called *lealismo verso il Governo*) were bureaucratic categories in use by these regimes, suggesting a framework in place for gauging colonial subjects’ loyalty.

The Treaty of Laussane, signed on July 24, 1923, meanwhile, made Cypriots British subjects and Dodecanesians Italian citizens. This change in status had little direct impact on the lives of Greek Cypriots, though in the wake of the 1931 uprising, nationalism became an instrument of control meant to sever the links between Cypriots and mainland Greeks. The most thorough expression of this is found in the 1939 law that declared that all residents of Cyprus fell under two categories: British subjects and aliens. An earlier 1936 immigration law had tried to bar the entry of “undesirable” persons, including communists, prostitutes, criminals, and nationalists. Thus a system of indexing political agitators was introduced. But the British understanding of loyalty seemed to be simply an absence of sedition, an absence of irredentist activity. By contrast, Dodecanesians were issued identity cards, and there was a centralized attempt to collect information about individuals, including with regard to their political and ethical mores. The difference between the two colonial regimes lay, Rappas asserted, in differing understandings of the concept of loyalty. To British rulers loyalty required of their Cypriot subjects to avoid displaying publicly what was called secessionist allegiances, principally to the Greek state; to the Italians, loyalty was something that needed to be proved in the most routine,

practical, even private activities. Yet by the mid-1930s, both British and Italian colonial authorities considered their subjects no longer as members of a community (Greek, Turkish, Jewish, Armenian) but as individuals accountable for their choices, actions and words—and this process of individuation is what Greek irredentists in Cyprus or the Dodecanese tried to impair, by creating a sense of solidarity among individuals.

Rappas cited the case of Styllis Savva, assistant chief warder at the central prison in Nicosia, who was dismissed in November 1931 because he had been asked not to be given the responsibility of eminent Greek Cypriot political prisoners, stating that, being a Greek, “if I were in charge of [the Bishop of Kyrenia], the warders might imply that I was carrying messages from him to outside persons.” The governor found Savva’s reference to his Greekness unacceptable, but the Colonial Office in London intervened, seeming to perceive his request as a gesture of honesty. This ambivalence around the identity of Greek Orthodox colonial subjects was not present in the Aegean Islands, where any claims to Greekness were interpreted as acts of sedition.

In conclusion, Rappas suggested that this points to a central difference between the two systems: the attention of British colonial authorities was more focused on the public, how claims to Greekness might foster agitation. For Dodecanesians, on the other hand, it was impossible to declare one’s patriotism and work with the Italians, both with regard to the Italian colonial authorities and with regard to the Dodecanesian diaspora. Rappas suggested that there were two reasons for this. First, Britain had much more experience with the colonial enterprise, and had developed a more sophisticated means of governance that involved a flexible balance of involvement and aloofness. The Italians, by contrast, were very new to the colonial game, and their form of imperialism was less mature and less confident. Secondly, in the 1930s Britain was still an empire “with a conscience,” and the kind of authoritarianism we see in the Italian Dodecanese would not have gone over well at home.

Summary of response (Lidia Santarelli):

There are several reasons why I am enthusiastic about Alexis’s work on Cyprus and the Italian Dodecanese. As an Italian scholar dealing with Italian colonialism, I welcome the comparative perspective in which Alexis is working. It’s very fruitful to understand and deprovincialize the historical understanding of Italian colonialism, which for a long time has been seen as not comparable to other colonial models. We are facing two paradigms for the colonization of places which at this point have not yet been part of the Greek national state, nor is it taken for granted that they belong to the imagined, real, or presumed space of Greece as a national community. And I think the other main issue in this project is the methodology of network analysis, I don’t know if you would consider yourself as working under that rubric, Alexis, but I think this is a major aspect of your methodology; it allows you to reframe and reconceptualize the polarization between resistance and collaboration under colonial rule and to provide a much more nuanced representation of colonial relations.

There is great potential in this work not just for those interested in Modern Greek or Italian history but also for rethinking the history of the Mediterranean in the 1930s, which is your main focus, and in the first decades of the 20th century when the Ottoman Empire collapsed and new nation states were formed; Greece and Italy are two examples of the advent of imperial nationalism. Your research evokes this incredibly unstable domain of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean, and it's a historical period in which nothing can be taken for granted. This is a time and space that is very unstable, where national frontiers are mobile, with the Balkan Wars, World War I, the Treaty of Lausanne, the dilemma of what to do with the partition of Asia Minor. These two cases you treat are related not just because they were both inhabited by Orthodox Greeks (and of course it's an issue who these people are, it's hard to know what to call them, "Greeks" doesn't seem quite right), but because at least from the Italian point of view the Dodecanese was perceived as a counterpart of Cyprus in international diplomacy: the argument was, We will renounce the Dodecanese when the British give Cyprus back to Greece. There is also the fact that the British had a long-term tradition and experience in colonial rule and domination. Despite any ideological conflict with Great Britain and its imperialism in the Mediterranean, the British empire and British colonial strategies were models and examples for latecomers like Italy; we have a mirrored image of the Italians who are looking to the British precedent and model.

One of the similarities is the search for mediators, and I think you could say more about the different responses to conflict in the Dodecanese and Cyprus. I also want to make two more points. First, paradoxically we see the same devices used by the national discourse, the people trying to expand the Greek nation-state or fight for *enosis*, and by the colonizers: the continuity with ancient Greece, the fact that both Dodecanese and Cyprus are part of a larger imaginary space of Europe. The Italians went so far as to be saying the colonization of the Dodecanese is linked to antiquity: It's part of our national history, we're just reappropriating. The British are engaging in a similar rhetoric when they attribute a European character to the colony of Cyprus. This is something we can also find in French colonialism in the Mediterranean, that it was the place where western civilization was born, so it is always a kind of reappropriation. The problem, of course, is who is the authentic inheritor of this tradition. The answer to this is not immaterial, because if the true inheritor is not the Greek nation-state but the European powers, it means the modern Greeks have nothing to do or share with ancient Greeks. We should think about how this impacts the reshaping of Greekness, what impact these colonial discourses had on the local populations in terms of their self-identification. And my second point is, I think that there is something here but not quite made explicit about the historical context, with the politicization of the Greek national idea in the 1930s. You focus on the church, but what about other institutions? What about political radicalism in Cyprus, trade unions, the Communist Party? Whose nation are we talking about when we say *enosis*, and were there other projects for Greek national political sovereignty which didn't coincide with the project of *enosis*?

Summary of Discussion:

Q: I'd like to emphasize this last point and ask Alexis to speak to that, specifically the role of trade unions, the Communist Party, or other political forces in this.

A: In Cyprus, the 1930s is an interesting period, we see the rebirth and expansion of the trade unions, through the influence of the covert Communist Party. But it's an atypical type of communist activity. In 1939 the lawyers who were trying to speak the language of the colonizer in their attempt to bring about the national project offer a constitution to the British that asks for dominion status for Cyprus; this was a collaboration between the church and left-wing forces. When that breaks, it's in two phases, first of all with World War II and the events that took place during the war, especially the fact that the communists were belated in supporting the resistance because they supported the German-Soviet pact, but also in 1943 when municipal elections were reintroduced, the communists emerged as the main political force. But there were alternative projects: even in the 1920s there was a short-lived Cyprus Agricultural Party which advocated the creation of an independent republic of Greek and Turkish Cypriots. But the 1930s was the most interesting period, I think, with this convergence of the church and the left.

Q: Given this description of Cypriotism in the 1920s and 1930s as something that was interjected by the British to combat Greek nationalism, I've seen a bit written on the infusion of the issue of Cypriotism from the late 1940s on, but how is it initiated? Is it a British injection?

A: It's not really a British invention. They try it once, in the 1930s, by forbidding terms such as "Turkish," "Greek" and so on to be used, in an attempt to foster Cypriot identity. But among Cypriots it's an issue that resurfaces many times. Within the Greek-Cypriot community, prior to 1909, with the old orthodox elite that saw itself as a continuation of millet system; they did not have a radical nationalist agenda because they believed in the Orthodox ecumeny rather than in a nationalist agenda—thereafter the nationalist party emerged as the main force, ever since the church has identified itself with the national cause. Then we have ideas of Cypriotism and intercommunal collaboration with the other communities that were the creation of the Communist Party and the Agricultural Party. This can be explained with reference to the shared social practices and life of the Cypriots: most villages were intercommunal at that time, and what you find in the literature is that Turkish Cypriots would speak the Greek dialect, though the reverse seldom happened. As far as the British intervention in this is concerned, the British were not very enthusiastic about the project; they didn't have the means, they didn't want to invest too much money, in contrast to the Italians in the Dodecanese, who lavishly created schools and so on. They thought at some point of introducing a common history book to be written by Sir George Hill, but this is the only time they thought of this seriously. Ever since they came in 1878 they considered the communities as separate and created institutions based on that separation, with schools administered by two separate boards of education and so on.

Q: In the mid 1950s there's the next attempt from the British to play with Cypriotism, during the struggle. And at that time, thinking of Durrell, in the end he claims that it is precisely Britain's abdication of the issue of education which lost Cyprus, the fact that

they were not more proactive in civilizing the Cypriots in a particular way. It's interesting that that's what Durrell bemoaned in the end.

A: They created one institution, the English school, which was successful in Anglicizing Cypriots who came from all different communities and backgrounds. It was a good school and the pupils would usually end up working for the colonial administration, but it was very circumscribed. In the 1950s they might have tried rhetorically to play with the idea of Cypriotism, you also see the creation of the police force solely drawn from Turkish Cypriots, which polarized people.

Q: Could you answer a factual question? I never understood how it was that the Italians came into possession of the Dodecanese in 1912.

A: They were at war with the Ottoman Empire over Tripoli, and occupied the Dodecanese in order to make the Ottomans yield, because the islands are so close to the coast. After that they just decided not to leave.

Q: I was interested in a comment that Lidia made, about who is the author of a narrative. We assume there's an intellectual process going on here, but what if we consider the narrative at that period being similar to what Bush did in Iraq, hard power and money. You gave an intellectual component which might not really be there.

A (Lidia): You mean you think that it's our projection as scholars? The Italians were quite obsessed with this, it's absolutely part of the conversation at the time, the idea that the Italian Mediterranean was justified by the idea that the Italians had been there and they had to go back. It can be just a symbolic pattern, an idea, but these ideas did have an impact on material possessions. Even Greece had the similar idea, the idea of the Diaspora, that we have to go back and incorporate into the national state what had been ours in the past.

Q: So it was apparent in the political discourse at the time?

A (Lidia): Yes, it was. Something I think might be a difference between the British and the Italians is that with the Italianization there is a proximity between the colonial and the national, whereas for the British we don't see this so much.

Q: But British colonialism is so far-reaching that you can't see that cultural projection.

A: In the case of Cyprus a book recently came out that said that when the British first occupied Cyprus they were thinking of Richard the Lionheart, they were keyed into this Romantic idea.

A (Lidia): The Italian latecomer colonialism was more a political than a material one, it was more about cultural constructions of borders than it was about material gain.

Q: What you said about the similarities between Italian imperialist motives and Greek ones, with the Greek case of irredentism they had the ammunition of having Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians in the areas they wanted to recolonize. Were there Italian-speaking Catholic communities in any of the places the Italians were trying to reappropriate, as you say?

A: In Rhodes there was a sizeable Catholic population, and the argument was constructed around the knights, the lingering presence of these Italian structures that they left.

A (Lidia): Yes, the urban planning in Rhodes involved building a fake Italian town, with the castle and everything.

Q: At the same time there was a large Catholic population on Syros, but it's also well known for the huge revolutionary publications in the early 19th century, so you can't quite say that hellenophone Catholics don't identify with the revolution.

A: No, but once they settled in the Dodecanese, the Italians themselves say that there were traces of them being there since time immemorial. It's a question of rhetoric more than of fact.

Q: What was the reaction of hellenophone Catholics in the Dodecanese?

A: In the historiography they are presented as the natural collaborators of the Italians, but I haven't found traces of how the Greeks at that time would react to that, or how they saw them. It's something that interests me but I haven't found traces yet.

Q: What were the economic means of the Catholics at that time? On Naxos they had quite a lot of power through the 19th and 20th century, and there were all kinds of animosities for that reason.

A: Sometimes they were landowners, but they weren't really eminent. One of the most economically sound communities until the 1930s was the Jewish community in Rhodes, which had a system of financial institutions which reached broadly across the region, and they controlled a great deal of trade, especially the sponge trade out of Kalymnos. But we're talking about small populations of Catholics on these islands, which were bolstered by the arrival of the Italians.

Q: I was wondering about whether not knowing the rules can sometimes be a form of protest, and if you'd been thinking about it in those terms at all, with these instances of people protesting colonial rule but not in an open or a public way.

A: I don't know if in this case we can call it resistance or evading colonial rule, because that would mean that certain things were done consciously. In the archives I found traces of behavior which seems to suggest it was not always a conscious act. For instance an Italian officer on Kalymnos who complains about how people keep changing their names, living together, take the name of a father-in-law, and he complains about not being able

to trace them. And sometimes because they Italianize their Greek names in a non-systematic way, they can't keep track of these incidents. I don't think it's an act of resistance but a system which basically is impaired by its own thoroughness, in a way.

Q: Did you find in your archival research any initial reactions from the Turkophone population to the British authorities? Was it as split as the Greek population?

A: When the British first came, what the archives suggest is that the reactions of the Turkish-speaking population were not monolithic but were unanimous. The first newspapers in Turkish in Cyprus were created by Armenians, especially after 1908 and 1915 when they were fleeing from the genocide. So I think this is an issue of language, it should be seen in terms of language: you have Armenians who spoke Turkish, and then you have Turkish Cypriots whose native tongue is the Greek Cypriot dialect. There were also social differences, but the real political difference comes in the wake of the Greek-Turkish war and the emergence around the Turkish consulate of Kemalism in Cyprus, this conflict between old Ottoman elite and new, young, nationalist Turkish community.

Q: Let's go to the Dodecanese now. What was the reaction of the Turkish Muslim minority in Rhodes? As far as I understand in Kos there was a small community of Islamized Cretans. Did they come to Kos during the Italian years?

A: I think it was earlier than that, after the Cretan War in 1887 or 1867, I think they migrated to avoid persecution. As to the reaction of the Turkish community to the establishment of Italian rule, I can't really answer that question.

Q: Lidia says that in this comparative perspective, you present a deprovincialized Italian colonial rule. But in some ways in terms of their colonial strategy what you're saying actually provincializes them a great deal in comparison to the British. The story you told about the prison warden sounds to me like he could have been always working for the British, otherwise why would he come to speak out against this posting? The British were masters at this kind of game of loyalties, they were happy to take part in this circulation of loyalties.

A: You mean why would the warden speak out? The context was the October 1931 uprising, which was exclusively Greek Cypriot and which led to a repression which was quite thorough. The prisoners that he was given to oversee were the bishops, the leaders of the community, so I think at that point he probably thought it was conflicting with his duties, or at least he was afraid this would be seen as a conflict by his British superiors.

Q: But how would his act of protest be seen by the Greek nationalists at this point?

A: I wouldn't know, but that's an interesting question because prior to 1931 Greek Cypriots who worked for the administration were seen in an ambivalent way. It was an envious position, a stable job that came with power and knowledge, sometimes they were in a position to help their compatriots. But I think 1931 introduces something else: for the Greek nationalists it becomes clear that anyone who works for the government has made

a political choice. This guy's career was not terminated, because the British office intervened, but he was perhaps considered afterward by his compatriots as not reliable.

Q: There is also an atmosphere of fear here, because the situation of the mediator is a tricky situation, the conflict radicalizes the self in a very difficult way. It's very difficult to read loyalties.

Q: Yes, but I thought Alexis was reading it from the point of view of the British office only, and needed to think also about the Greek nationalists.

A: At this point, too, the British had realized that about 95% of their force was Greek Cypriot. Part of the British imperial venture was to bestow decorations on good officers, and if you see how many are given to Greek Cypriots before and after the revolt, the number triples. I also found the case of a Greek Cypriot who had good grades in his confidential reports, and one of the British officers suggested he be promoted, but he also asked British friends if they can tell him about the coffee houses he frequents, his friends, and so on. These people have very important roles. There is also the role of translators, the British suspected that they were never translating exactly what was going on. It's hard to have a grip on the country and these people became really instrumental. In the 1950s we then evolve from this regime to a security state, with occupying British forces, auxiliary Turkish forces and a police which is being depleted of its Greek Cypriot element.

Q: Is this meant by the Italian influence? In the end you laid out how British colonialism created one kind of nationalism, and Italian colonialism another, but in the beginning you said that the British colonialists, even though they have long tradition of colonialism, looked to the Italians to see how their administration was working? What did they take or appropriate from the Italian administration?

A: In the late 1920s, the governor of Cyprus invited the Italian governor of the Dodecanese to Cyprus, to exchange tips of how to rule Greeks. The subsequent British governor, Palmer, gave a lecture in 1939 saying that we messed up in Cyprus, we should have acted as the Italians did, taken much more radical measures. But this was not possible within the British imperial system mainly for two reasons. One was that with Greece in 1930s there was competition between Germany and Britain about who would make Greece its ally. Also the Greek orthodox church in Cyprus had strong ties with the Anglican church, and considering the role that the Archbishop of Canterbury played in the crisis of the throne, when Edward VIII lost his throne, we see that those ties were extremely influential. So the British couldn't do exactly what they wanted in Cyprus, though these two governors would have liked to. Imperial policy is monitored from London at this point.

Q: You both studied in Florence, Lidia has a book coming out in Italian but is now a professor in New York, and Alexis is working on a project now in his first year in the U.S. I was wondering about how you go about pitching this project from the perspective of your understanding of the U.S. Are there things that get emphasized in the U.S.

differently than what might be emphasized in Europe? I would think that the racial element would be attractive to an American publisher. Has your perspective on your own work changed through contact with the American system?

A: Well, now I'm in the process of writing job applications, and I have to talk about my project, and if it's completely focused on Greek nationalism and British rule it might not be very relevant here. So its has changed a bit because now I'm trying to focus on intercommunal relations in both of these settings under the influence of colonialism, and also trying to put it into a wider Mediterranean context at the time, which might be more relevant.

A (Lidia): Sometimes I feel that since I moved to the U.S. I have been going through a metamorphosis. The world seen from here is a different one, and it all relates to imperial perceptions of peripheries. There is the racialization for sure, but in my case I have benefited from including the American perspective on that period. There are a lot of sources, and I realized here how much Italian fascist ideologists were interested in the expansion of the American empire, in the U.S. as a diff model of neo-imperialism. The Mediterranean and Europe are not just enclosed spaces, it's a problem of meta-mapping, to incorporate it and transform it in our perception.