This translation was created for the purposes of archiving and does not originate from the original creators of the text.

Mediterranean: the remainder is Cyprus (Transcripted Presentation and Discussion)

Historical Note

> In the summer of 1994, while the war in the former Yugoslavia was going on and Greek nationalism against Macedonia was at its peak, the annual three-day festival of Radio Utopia (a self-managed social radio station in Thessaloniki) was devoted to internationalism/anti-nationalism. Fellow anarchists from Turkey and Cyprus had been invited and participated in the events. The text “Mediterranean: the remainder is Cyprus” is the contribution of Andreas P. (then member of the magazine “Traino” in Cyprus) and the discussion that followed. The transcription and editing was done by Sabotaz magazine, which published the text in the autumn of 1994.[1)]

Content

Mediterranean: the remainder is Cyprus

Andreas (from the magazine "Train"):

I will focus my contribution on the Cypriot experience. First of all, I speak neither as a Greek Cypriot nor as a Turkish Cypriot. I speak as a Cypriot. I do not mean that there is a Cypriot nation, I am not interested in that. I am interested in my geographical and historical experience.

Cyprus is an expensive plot of land in the global capitalist system. It happens to be north of the Suez Canal, it happens to be next to Jerusalem which is an important semiotic space, it is also commercially useful today, thus we have six armies (English, Greek, Turkish, Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot, and the UN) we have bases, we have one normal state and one semi-state (the Turkish Cypriot one), the bases are also two semi-states...

With all this, the natives, 800,000 all together, live in a society where the threat of war is constantly hanging over them. But what hovers over Cyprus most strongly, at least as long as I have been alive, is the 'national problem'. In Cyprus it is impossible (or at least until very recently it was impossible) to articulate a speech about anything if you do not talk about the Cyprus problem at the same time. I imagine that those of you living in northern Greece will have a similar experience: any speech must be articulated in relation to the Macedonian issue.

This was the starting point of our team. The group was formed in the late 70s - early 80s. They were the last of the resistance generation (against the coup, fascism, etc.), people influenced to some extent by May '68. Our attempt was to articulate a discourse of questioning within Cypriot society that

was not concerned with the national, transcending national unity.

As many of us were students at the time, we were back in Cyprus in '84-'85, and we started a reflection and a discussion within the group on how to deal with the problem of the “national”. There were two perspectives, which I will present because they relate to dilemmas that we more or less re-confronted along the way and I think they concern the anti-authoritarian alternative milieu in general.

Dilemma one: the “national problem” is nonsense, we shouldn't bother with it. The second perspective, which eventually prevailed: if the “national problem” is something that people experience so intensely and power projects it so strongly, there is obviously something at the end of the garden. It is not possible for an ideology to be so strongly dominant and have no basis in fact.

We then did a historical analysis. Our basic thesis was that the nation is not just an ideology of power. That is, to say that the bourgeoisie or its state created the nation because it suited them is a simplistic view. The nation is a much more comprehensive culture of power, it is a civilization - at least that's how we put it.

There are things that are striking about the nation. For example, when I was coming on the plane to Thessaloniki we flew over the Aegean Sea. It is impressive that the fishermen of Lesbos, for example, when they see the coast opposite them, they don't just see a coast. They see a Turkish coast. That is, the land is “coloured”.

In Cyprus the same has happened. There is Pentadaktylos, a mountain range in northern Cyprus. Well, the Greek Cypriots insist on seeing it as the most heroic, the most beautiful mountainside in the world - while it is a crude mountain. But the national imagination has coloured this crude mountain that they see every day as the most blooming, anemone-filled, and I don't know what else, mountain in the world. On the other hand, the Turkish Cypriots, in order to mark the land, to put a stamp on it, have painted on the mountain a huge flag with stones.

So I think the nation starts from the subconscious of people and fixes their gaze. It is of course an ideology of the state, the ideology of the state par excellence, and it is also the ideology that capitalism uses: a “national unity” in which there are no class conflicts is an ideal market for capitalist accumulation. But I insist that nationalism is not just an ideology. It is a civilization. And if we are to confront nationalism, we must confront it by making a critique of civilization, not just a class theory or a political theory.

With this in mind, in a small society that is of course rapidly modernizing but was and is living with all these armies and threats around it, we started with the struggle for the recognition of diversity as the main edge of our practice. It was a struggle to open up the boundaries of Cypriot society. Various initiatives were undertaken, the “Train” magazine came out later...

Through these experiences, which had to do both with the Turkish Cypriots that were still living in southern Cyprus, and with the history of Cyprus, we found out another thing that we had not grasped from the beginning: how nationalism works like colonialism.

In Cyprus, we didn't actually have only one colonial power, the English one. We had three colonialisms. One political (the English) and two cultural: the Greek and the Turkish. For example, during the English occupation the school curriculum was determined by the Ministry of Education in Athens and the Ministry of Education in Ankara.

The Cypriots were “ethnicized”. For the traditional Cypriots of the 19th century did not belong to

nations but to religious communities. They were Orthodox Rum -as they were called- i.e. Christians, they were Muslims, and there was a large community in between, the Linobambaki, who were Christian-Muslims. This community was split vertically and by force. Most of them became Muslims and the rest became Christians.

This process of “nationalisation” through the transformation of religious beliefs into national identities (Christians = Greeks and Muslims = Turks) favoured English colonialism. Because since Cyprus is a valuable plot of land within the global capitalist system, the last thing the colonialists needed was for the natives to claim the plot. It is much more useful to convince the natives that they are accidentally on that land, that they are colonists of Athens or Ankara, that they are something else anyway, and that they therefore belong to that something else.

There is of course the history of these natives that shows the opposite. In the 19th century there were common peasant revolts - before the English descended. When the English came they divided the religious communities administratively, vertically, as ethnic communities. With different schools, different languages, etc. This process of segregation continued, but modernist movements intervened already in the 1920s, such as the workers' movement, which later evolved into a communist movement, and was common to all Cypriots.

In the 1950s nationalism was clearly an attempt to break the workers' movement. EOKA, for example, which our people and yours are praising, apart from fighting the English, had the clear aim of fighting the workers' movement. EOKA killed more Greek Cypriots than Englishmen. They killed many leftists, even by stoning them, entering their homes etc. On the other hand, the Turkish Cypriot nationalist organisation, TMT implemented exactly the same plan. Using exactly the same methods, perhaps even worse, since the Turkish Cypriot working class was smaller in numbers, hence weaker. Thus, while on the Greek Cypriot side the working class managed at some point to resist EOKA's terrorism, forcing it to stop, on the Turkish Cypriot side the TMT's action had results, as it continued from '57 to '62.

In the '60s Cyprus was granted a strange independence: that is, England, Greece and Turkey sat down and made a constitution of “independent Cyprus” and gave it to the Cypriots saying “this is your constitution, and if you don't accept it we'll let you be killed” - so we “accepted” it. Anyway, this constitution of the 60s contained a part of the Cypriot historical experience. That is, it admitted that the two communities in Cyprus, as separated by English colonialism, had a strong interdependence. They did not live in different places - there were common villages everywhere, and there was a common movement of 30 to 40 years. So the constitution of the '60s obliged the two elites (Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot) to depend on each other in the administration of Cyprus.

The Greek Cypriot elite, feeling perhaps a numerical superiority, tried in '63 to get rid of the obligations they had under this constitution, tried to change the constitution, and essentially launched a massive attack against the Turkish Cypriots. So the Turkish Cypriots from '64 to '74 were essentially in a state of confinement. Being 18% of the population they inhabited 4% of the territory.

This does not mean that the majority of the population approved of this practice. It is significant that even today if you talk to either Greek Cypriots or Turkish Cypriots, the events of '63-'64 are not described as war, conflict, etc (as the official ideology says) but as “the troubles”: “some people came and made trouble”. Some people... Turkish Cypriots, however, in those years were clearly in an unfavourable position.

Moreover, the presence of the Greek military division in Cyprus since then was a NATO order, in order to counter the possibility of communism in Cyprus. Note that at that time Cyprus was the only country

in the eastern Mediterranean that had a legitimate communist party of the 45% range. Thus the Greek division was experienced by the common people (both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots) as a neo-colonial army. It was withdrawn in '67, when some talks began, with a Greek Cypriot shift towards independence. Maintaining, however, the arrogance of the majority.

I will make a parenthesis here to recall the anchors created by the “national discourse”. The Greek Cypriot nationalist thus says: “but we are 80%. Why should the 20%, the Turkish Cypriots, get in our way?”

This is the logic of Greek Cypriot nationalism. But by the same logic, if you look at it from another angle, you will see that Cyprus belongs to the geographical space of Turkey. Cyprus is 40 miles from Turkey. Therefore, by the same logic, one could always say “but you are a tiny minority within the Turkish geographical space”. It depends where one draws the border, in one's imagination: if you want to cut the border so that you imagine Cyprus as an autonomous island in Alaska, then yes, Greek Cypriots are a majority. But then, of course, the other side can also recall the geography, and remind you that Greek Cypriots are a Christian minority in a sea of Muslims.

The other thing that is striking about nationalism in Cyprus is that Greece and Turkey, as NATO countries, wanted to avoid war. But the nationalism that they themselves had cultivated was now leading them into uncontrollable situations. It is the case that nationalism, as a culture, is no longer controlled by the elites who initiated it.

I come back to the history. In '74 two things happened in Cyprus. A coup by the Greek army aided by the Greek Cypriot far right, followed, on July 20, by the Turkish invasion. The Americans and the English wanted to get rid of Makarios with this coup, because on the one hand he allowed AKEL to exist, while on the other hand he was following an independent policy, having included Cyprus in the non-aligned countries. Greek Cypriot and Greek nationalism made their own calculations for complete control of Cyprus.

There were massacres on both sides. Both by the Helleno-centric nationalists in the first phase, and by the Turkish army afterwards. But there were also touching moments of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots protecting each other.

Through these experiences, seeing all this, we began to reflect that we should perhaps place our resistance to nationalism partly on the basis of a common class tradition, since in Cyprus there is a class movement of 70-80 years which was and is anti-nationalist.

Moreover, we began to understand that nationalism plays on people's need for community and identity. Nationalism appeals to the cultural sphere, offering identity, meaning in existence. This is why, after 200 years, neither liberal nor socialist ideology has been able to match the 'charm' of nationalism - we see it clearly nowadays.

So we started discussing the possibility of creating cultural identities that are anti-nationalist. One thing that most of the group found was that we felt neither Turkish nor Greek. We felt Cypriot, Cypriot in the sense of '74: then, after the coup, there was an armed pro-independence uprising, a popular uprising, which had taken over Paphos, and had created a fiercely pro-independence spirit.

The discussion expanded. There was also a TV discussion that created a huge scandal in Cyprus. It extended to the question of Cypriot consciousness, Cypriot identity, etc. The logic that we tried to formulate as a more comprehensive proposal was against the national fantasy that we are all one family, that we are all brothers… We are not all brothers. We are different. The notion of diversity that

was our activist edge in the 1980s was thus transposed into a different context: to contrast nationalism with pluralistic identities. Not promoting against nationalism another 'nationalism', something equally univocal. So we are saying that it is possible for there to be Turks, Greeks and Cypriots in Cyprus today. But the logic of majority rule must be broken, the logic of national uniformity and levelling must be broken.

Through this problematic we see how power is established in everyday life. Simple things: why is the language I speak every day banned by all the media, by school, etc.? I like Cypriot [Greek], but I don't particularly care if it survives. The important thing is that it is banned. The kid goes to school, raises his hand, and says “je”. And the teacher replies “shut up, there is no such thing, there is only ke”. This is violence, a semiotic violence, through which power is established. It is something that not only Cypriots experience. It is experienced by all non-metropolitan peoples, all subcultures, all dialects that do not belong to the dominant culture.

I want to make two final references, to independence and to federation. I am pro-independence because I am an anarchist. That is, I believe that small societies function more democratically. And it is obvious that the Cypriot society is, even now, more democratic than if it was annexed to the Greek or Turkish state. I also support federation from an anarchist point of view. The anarchist proposal against the nation-state, against the national homogeneity where the metropolis imposes a uniform law everywhere, must be federation. The bizonal federation that is likely to be eventually implemented in Cyprus is not the best solution. More practical would be the multi-regional one that existed before '74. But at the moment that is what we have.

So, as far as I'm concerned, living in a country that has a population two-thirds the size of Thessaloniki and the area of Chicago, and despite its smallness is divided in two by absurd walls, what I think is urgent is to close the Cyprus dispute as a problem. So that we can move on.

At this time it seems, or at least that is how we in Cyprus understand it, that those who created the Cyprus problem because of the value of the Cyprus plot, have understood that it is impossible to convince Cypriots to separate. Because there are powerful forces on both sides who insist on reunification of the island in one way or another. So there is a process to solve the Cyprus problem. This process is reinforced by the choice of the Americans and Europeans to make the Athens-Ankara axis functional again. It does not bother me whether the solution to the Cyprus problem is promoted by the UN or the Americans. I am interested in solving an unnecessary problem. This problem was not created by the Cypriots, by the natives. It was created by others against the natives. To understand the absurdity: at this moment, if I were in Cyprus, I would not be able to communicate with Murat and Ahmed, because the state to which I belong and the state to which they belong are not recognised by each other. I would have to send a letter to Greece, and from there it would go to Turkey, and on the way back it would have to go the other way round.

When Turkish Cypriot Salih Askeroğlu refused to join the army, a joint team of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots was formed to defend him. So half of the group was sitting in southern Nicosia, the other half in northern Nicosia, a hundred meters from each other, and in order to communicate we had to call London, from London they had to call Ankara, from Ankara to northern Cyprus, and back again. To communicate within a hundred meters… And that's that.

Q: Do you have stable contacts with Turkish Cypriots?

AP: After the last elections in northern Cyprus, Denktaş (who is a classic nationalist of the “let's put a stamp on the land, let it stay ours, let it stay Turkish” kind) was forced under social pressure to kick out the most extreme ones from his government, and give seats to the largest party of the left. After

that there was an unofficial “opening” of the “borders”. We estimate that two hundred people a week come and go between the two areas, typically illegally of course, but under some discretionary tolerance from both authorities.

We had our first contact with Turkish Cypriots in northern Cyprus with the Salih affair. It was certainly a difficult contact, but the ordinary people received his case well, even though the courts are 90% controlled by nationalists. Now we are planning to set up an Eastern Mediterranean research centre together, to reposition Cyprus culturally in its geographical space. To understand that Cyprus is next to Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, and not south of London, east of Athens, or south of Ankara. We are in the eastern Mediterranean, mate...

If Varosha opens, it'll be the first city since '74 where we can meet properly. But in the last six months there's been much more contact than before.

I should also note that there is an increased desire of rapprochement by professional associations: doctors, lawyers, engineers, architects. Such parts of the elites on both sides are in frequent contact. We are in contact mainly with the group that publishes the magazine 'Eleftheria' [Özgürlük] in northern Cyprus, who are moving in the leftist space, and with the anarchistic poet Neşe. The students in England, who live together, are also a field of contact.

Q: Can you tell us more about this research centre?

AP: This Eastern Mediterranean Research Centre is an initiative started by people involved in the Train magazine, as well as others involved in our various initiatives.

I said earlier that one of its aims is to reposition Cyprus in its geographical space. In our view, the eastern Mediterranean starts from the Balkans and goes all the way to Iraq, the Arab world. So we have as another goal to promote events and networking among alternative efforts in these countries, or at least in the countries closest to us, namely southern Turkey, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Egypt. On the other hand, we are interested in doing serious analytical work, in understanding the dynamics in this area, in finding out how this region fits into the global system. What does Islamism mean, why is the world reacting in this way? What alliances should we build between, for example, the Kurd (third world proletarian we call him in the Train), the feminist fighting against Islamism in Egypt, the Cypro-centric in Cyprus, an insurgent youth in Turkey, an anti-militarist in Izmir, a Marxist here, an anarchist there, a homosexual somewhere else. These are all subjects, figures, who can potentially challenge various forms of authority, but usually step on each other. We need to imagine the ways in which a total contestation of power can be achieved, as a synthesis and alliance within a geographical space.

Q (Aykut): Until 1965 there was a trade union that included Turkish Cypriots. Are there any possibilities today to reorganize this people together and to formulate an anti-nationalist - anti-authoritarian politics?

AP: The trade union to which the comrade is referring to is PEO, the communist trade union, which exists to this day, of course, as a Greek Cypriot trade union. It started as a non-ethnic trade union, but was hit with assassinations by both EOKA and TMT. In '65 the Turkish Cypriots left completely. It is now taken for granted that there are two workers' movements in Cyprus, one Greek Cypriot and one Turkish Cypriot, but they are fraternal, and they mean it. Let me give you an example: when the 'confidence-building measures' were being discussed, all Cypriot politicians and all parties were against them, except for Clerides. On the contrary, all the polls showed that at least 55% of Greek Cypriots were in favour of the measures - but Clerides is not that popular. Well, the explanation lies in

the fact that a large part of the social base of the left is in favour of these measures, precisely in order to have a solution. In the base of the left-wing parties, both among the Greek Cypriot leftists and the Turkish Cypriot leftists, there is the memory of the common struggles that Aykut referred to.

Q: A question to the comrades from Turkey: How has the Cyprus problem been experienced in Turkey?

In the growth of Turkish nationalism, the Cyprus issue is somewhere in third or fourth place, in terms of evaluation. The peak of nationalism in Turkey is currently Bosnia. Also for the last 5 or 6 years the Kurdish issue has been in the first place, where an entire ethnic group is being accused of being “terrorists”. It goes without saying that when there is talk about the Cyprus problem in Turkey, it is about the views of Turkish Cypriots. The anarchists and anti-militarists are now beginning to address the issue, on the occasion of the Salih affair.

Q: I want to ask a double question: to what extent does Helleno-centrism (and Turkish-centrism respectively) represent the entirety of the bosses in Cyprus expressing -through a political dependency- their economic interests? Couldn't we assume that at least a part of the bourgeoisie there nowadays sees its “national” emancipation from both Greece and Turkey in a favourable light? And on the other hand: can your own problematic of Cypriot identity, clearly hostile to Greek (and Turkish) nationalism, be countered by another ideology of the bosses, the cosmopolitanism of capital? If the restoration of the unitary state entity of Cyprus finally happens, under the auspices of this non-nationalist, non-colonialist, cosmopolitan Cypriot elite, in what position will you find yourself socially, politically against this new (by current standards) authority?

AP: First of all, the nationalism of the Cypriot elite does not necessarily stem from its economic interests. Cyprus is the remnant of a division between Greek and Turkish nationalism. Under logical circumstances, all the conditions for the creation of a nation-state existed in Cyprus. It is good that it was not created. But in Cyprus several things were anchored: a triple colonialism, two national visions. At the same time, an endogenous, inter-communal workers' movement was created. Eventually we were led to a schizophrenia, which we as a group tried to analyse.

Nationalism dragged down the two elites, who normally would be said to have different interests. And indeed there are wings in both elites that insist that the Cyprus problem be solved. But nationalism has served them as a way of eliminating each other. Nationalism also serves to create slaves. I said it from the beginning: nationalism is not just an ideology of the elite for us. It is the ideology of the slave. As soon as you join this imaginary family of the nation, as soon as you submit to the imaginary father-state, as soon as you accept that the oppressor is your brother, and the neighbour becomes your enemy, well, then the bourgeoisie of both societies in Cyprus has a great interest in maintaining and extending these conditions, no matter if sometimes there are consequences for its own interests from other sides. Ultimately bot the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot bourgeoisie have much to fear from the strata that now support them, if these people are disengaged from the national discourses. Because underneath the nationalism many accept to suspend rights because of “national threats” etc. So nationalism is not only economically useful, in a narrow sense. It functions and serves in a more complex way, creating subordination. And the hatred shown towards the Cypro-centric discourse even by those parts of the elites who are in favour of rapprochement with each other is typical. It is an unquenchable hatred: not to hear the words “I am a plain Cypriot”. At the moment, Cypriot consciousness is experienced as something strongly questioning the way power is structured in Cyprus. Because it accepts that we can all live together, but not on the basis of religion or language, and not, on the other hand, on the basis of a partnership, an anonymous company. It is a pluralist model. As for cosmopolitanism: I personally am a cosmopolitan, that is to say, I consider myself a citizen of the world. But I understand that you mean something different with the

cosmopolitanism of the bourgeoisie.

It is difficult to provide you with an answer. On the one hand, the unification of the planet is something that generations of revolutionaries have dreamed of, will capitalism achieve it? I don't know. On the other hand, again, this cosmopolitanism levels out - indigenises, as we say - the local cultures through which the world finds meaning. This leveling creates nationalisms that benefit local elites. We must confront this cosmopolitanism with other cultural identities, local, geographical, but pluralistic. In other words, in the face of the leveling out of Anglo-Saxon culture, we must contrast, for example, the Eastern Mediterranean, a pluralistic culture. A vision of a multifaceted world.

Q: How do the youth in Cyprus react (if they react) to nationalism?

AP: Youth has changed radically, compared to the not too distant past. I must tell you first of all that until '74 the schools and the educational system in general were a colony of the Greek and Turkish ministries of education. Just as the English had set them up a century before when they had come to Cyprus. Just to get an idea, when I went to school we didn't learn Cypriot history. We were forbidden to speak Cypriot [Greek] at school. We did not have a map of Cyprus either. We had some maps of Greece, which had a box on the edge with Cyprus in it... It's an interesting visual symbol, these maps, because they annihilate distances. You get the impression that Cyprus is a little bit above Rhodes!!!

Anyway. After '74, because of the intense pro-independence atmosphere, they decided to at least keep up appearances: they made maps of Cyprus where you can see the island in its normal position, they put a Cypriot history lesson in schools. But, basically, they continue the same fairytale: we are descended from the first Greek settlers who... came in 600 BC - try to figure it out... But come on, Cyprus has a history of 8000 years, since there was an indigenous civilization before the Phoenicians and the Greeks - forget it, let it go...

With all this, society has developed what I think is an amazing immune system against national discourse. And the youth are the most indifferent: they don't care, one way or the other. This youth is the first postmodern generation in Cyprus, who, when they come across the “news” about the occupation, the Cyprus problem, etc., shrug their shoulders and moves on. In essence, behind it the youth still carries the ideological baggage of their family. There is the left-wing youth who oppose nationalism, there is the right-wing youth who think that the Greek flag is the moment of the ultimate orgasm, and there are some currents of rock culture.

In general, however, there is a postmodern attitude. For example, a few months ago they wanted to hold a rally for Macedonia in Nicosia. So they went to the young people in the schools and said to them, “You're going to the rally, aren't you?” We'll miss class...“ So they gathered 15,000 students from all the towns and villages of Cyprus, and sent them by bus to Nicosia. The next day all the newspapers wrote “scandal”. Why? Because out of these 15000, 2000 came back. The others went to the rally, and then took to the streets and walked around Nicosia. Where is the scandal? Why should they care about the “national cause”? They wanted to go for a walk. They went to the rally to do their duty, and then they took to the streets.

The bad thing is that when these young people see the parties converging on something, they say “that's fine, let's do it” - as happened with the Macedonian rallies. In other words, although they have an indifference to the “national problem” in substance, they can take part, in the end, in a nationalist frenzy, which for them is not a nationalist frenzy, of course, it is something like a duty. A youth consciously kept in a state of childishness is easily led here or there, without much understanding of what they are doing, and perhaps without much concern for understanding. I hope that at some point they will find a more conscious path.

Needs Turkish Translation, Unclear Archiving, Train in the City (Group), Decade 1990-1999, 1994, Other Material, Thessaloniki
[1)]

Source:Sarajevo magazine

From:
https://movementsarchive.org/ - **Κυπριακό Κινηματικό Αρχείο**
Cyprus Movements Archive
Kıbrıs Sosyal Hareket Arşivi

Permanent link:
https://movementsarchive.org/doku.php?id=en:other:ekdosistraino:traino_mesogios

Last update: **2025/07/15 13:46**