

ETHNIC VERSUS CIVIC NATIONALISM IN BIETHNIC AND MULTIETHNIC STATES

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I write as an historian and social scientist, and as a foreigner to Cyprus.

The promise of social science is that it can provide useful guidance based upon comparison. Social science attempts to derive valid generalizations from a variety of cases, and based upon those generalizations, to create classifications that are supposed to be useful. Social science proceeds by trying to then fit particular cases into some scheme of classification: classifications such as civic nationalism versus ethnic nationalism, or “bi-ethnic states,” or “multi-ethnic states.” If we say, for example, that Cyprus should be classified as a bi-ethnic polity, we are implicitly promising that there are other cases of bi-ethnic societies that are analogous, and by saying that they are analogous, we are implicitly suggesting that there is something significant to be learned from them. So too, when we use the term “multi-ethnic states.”

But there is a problem with social scientific analogy —and that lies in its relationship to empirical reality. It often seems that the less you know about a particular case, the more it seems to resemble cases that you *do* know. That is why foreigners are so ready to dispense advice, and why they are so facile in doing so.

But the more you know about a particular case, the more aware you are that it is *not* analogous to other instances, instances that seem quite similar when seen from a distance.

That is why you should beware of foreigners bearing advice.

So let me begin with some disappointing news: I will not present you with a solution to “the Cyprus problem.” Rather, what I hope to be able to provide are some broad historical perspectives and conceptual distinctions that are relevant to thinking about the modern history of Cyprus.

How we think about Cyprus (indeed how we think about almost *anything*) depends on the historical framework into which we put it. And that historical framework has changed with the end of the Cold War and its aftermath.

In 1984, when Christopher Hitchens published his widely-read book, *Hostage to History: Cyprus from the Ottomans to Kissinger*, he treated the division of Cyprus and ethnic separation that had occurred there as an exception. His book was based on the implicit assumption that cooperation between ethnic groups is the norm, and that one therefore needed an elaborate explanation of why Greek and Turkish Cypriots were not living together in peace and harmony. For Hitchens (as for other British leftists, such as Perry Anderson), the explanation was ready at hand. The problem lay with external powers, especially with the British, — who had split the Greek and Turkish communities with a policy of divide and rule (as they had supposedly done in India and Palestine as well) — and the Americans, above all Henry Kissinger, who had subordinated the needs of Cypriots to those of America's Cold War allies, especially Turkey. There are many variations of this theme: what they have in common is the tacit assumption that ethnic cooperation should be regarded as the norm, and that ethnic conflict is thus in need of special explanation. I've chosen Hitchens' book because his broad perspective seems to be widely shared in the Republic of Cyprus.

But this view was grounded in a perspective that was foreshortened, both geographically and chronologically. Hitchens writes, for example, that "Cyprus was the only part of Europe to be part of a modern European empire." But that is quite wrong. Much of central and Eastern Europe in the twentieth century was part either of the Habsburg empire, or the Romanov empire, or — at the time Hitchens was writing — of the Soviet empire.

How did Hitchens and those like him account for inter-ethnic conflict in Cyprus: for the intercommunal violence of 1958, 1963, of 1974, and the large scale ethnic transfers, above all the expulsions of Greek Cypriots from the northern zone, but also of course the movement of Turkish Cypriots from the south to the northern zone? All of this was seen as anomalous, unexpected, exceptional, judged against

the experience of Europe since 1948 or so, which was seen as the relevant time frame, Here Hitchens was in many ways echoing common wisdom in Western Europe and the United States. The reigning assumption was that ethnic nationalism was a detour from the main road of modernity, which led, inevitably and desirably, to civic nationalism. By civic nationalism we mean a form of belonging which includes everyone within the borders of the state, regardless of their origin. Civic nationalism was defined by adherence to a shared set of laws or ideals, however minimally defined. It was said to be oriented to the future, not to the past. Ethnic nationalism, by contrast, was based upon shared origins: of blood, religion, or language. Civic nationalism was seen as characteristic of the United States, Britain, France, and increasingly of the rest of Europe —and in the future, of the rest of the world as well.

Today our perspective has changed. After the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the events that followed in the former Soviet empire, and the new attention of historians to other elements of twentieth century history, we are more likely to see what occurred in Cyprus as a rather *typical* example of post-imperial ethnonational disaggregation, stretching from the era before WWI through the end of the century. As Niall Ferguson pointed out in his history of the twentieth century, *The War of the World*, (2006), the twentieth century was the bloodiest in modern history. Among the reasons for this was the decline of empires, and the ethnic conflict that often followed in its wake.

Why was ethnic conflict so frequent? Much of it has to do with a change of collective expectations. In empires, there is no expectation of the likeness of ruler and ruled. In empires, such as the Ottoman empire, or the Romanov empire, there is no assumption that those who rule will be fundamentally similar to those who are ruled. As Elie Kedourie pointed out, these earlier political understandings were upset by the doctrine of collective self-rule, or self-determination, that is, by the doctrine of democracy. But the doctrine of democracy cannot answer a fundamental question, namely “Who is the demos?” That is, what group is to be included in the polity and what group isn’t? Or to put it another way, who is the “self” in “self-government”?

The most frequent answer to this question was that self-rule was the rule of a particular ethnos. Hence the primacy in modern history of ethnic nationalism, defined in a variety of ways, some more liberal and inclusive, others more exclusive and intolerant. In areas of mixed ethnicity, the spread of the doctrine of collective self-determination frequently led to conflict over which group would dominate.

In recent years we have seen the decline of the assumption that the end of empires meant triumph of civic nationalism. Indeed, historians have increasingly called the very dichotomy between civic and ethnic nationalism into question. It has been pointed out that civic nationalism was most dominant in areas of Europe that already had a high degree of cultural homogeneity, such as England, Sweden, France: countries that had long been under a single ruler and had gone through processes of cultural homogenization. Sometimes their relative homogeneity was grounded in the fact that large minorities had been expelled; think of the French expulsion of the Huguenots in 1685.

To some degree, ethnic and cultural homogeneity seemed to be a *prerequisite* for liberal democracy. That, at least, that was the opinion of many liberal thinkers before the twentieth century. Take this example:

“Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people – a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs...who...have nobly established their general liberty and independence.”

Now this may read like a classic enunciation of ethnic nationalist doctrine. In fact, it stems from John Jay, an American, and one of the authors of *The Federalist Papers* writing in 1788.

Or consider this view and its author:

“Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feelings, especially if they read and

speak different languages, the united public opinion necessary to the working of representative institutions cannot exist...”

This comes from John Stuart Mill, perhaps the greatest British liberal thinker of the nineteenth century, writing in 1861.

A comparative perspective shows that beyond western Europe, civic nationalism was most prominent as an ideal in what are sometimes called settler states, where the indigenous population had been wiped out or marginalized, in countries such as the United States, Australia, and Canada. And when thinking about historical comparisons, it remains essential to keep in mind that the United States and Australia, while made up of people of multiple ethnic origins, are *not* multi-ethnic in the way that India, or Nigeria are; nor bi-ethnic in the way that Cyprus is. For a key factor in the United States and Australia is their mono-linguality, that is, the fact that there is one dominant language, which everyone either speaks or aspires to have their children speak. That creates a basis for common understandings and for ease of communication that one does not find in bi-ethnic societies, and certainly not in multi-ethnic states that are also multi-lingual, such as India or Nigeria or Pakistan.

When we look at the history of Europe and of the post-colonial societies beyond it during the twentieth century, what we find is a history of ethnic disaggregation, often violent, stretching from milder forms of coercion through forced expulsion and ethnic cleansing and, at the extreme, genocide.

Massive ethnic disaggregation began on the frontiers of Europe on the eve of the First World War. In the Balkans, wars to expand the nation states of Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia at the expense of the ailing Ottoman empire were accompanied by ferocious inter-ethnic violence. During the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, almost half a million people left their existing homelands, either voluntarily or by force. Muslims left regions under the control of Greeks, Bulgarians, and Serbs; Bulgarians abandoned Greek-controlled areas of Macedonia; and Greeks fled from regions of Macedonia ceded to Bulgaria and Serbia.

Under the impact of World War I, the three great turn-of-the-century empires all broke up, unleashing an explosion of ethnonationalism. In Turkey, mass deportations and murder took the lives of a million members of the suspect Armenian minority, in an early attempt at ethnic cleansing, if not genocide. Shortly after the war came the massive exchange of ethnic populations between Greece and Turkey, formalized in the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923. In the process, the Turks expelled almost 1.5 million ethnic Greeks from Turkey into Greece; the Greeks, in turn, expelled almost 400,000 Muslims from Greece into Turkey.

Out of the breakup of the Romanov and Habsburg empires there emerged a multitude of new nation states. Many conceived of themselves as ethno-national states (though they were actually multi-ethnic), in which the state existed to protect and promote the dominant ethnic group. Generally, nationalist governments openly discriminated in favor of the dominant nationality, and against minority groups. Thus, inter-war eastern Europe became a cauldron of ethnic tensions.

The politics of ethnonationalism took a yet more deadly turn during the Second World War. The National Socialist regime tried to reorder the ethnic map of Europe using means more violent than had ever been contemplated. The most well known act of the regime was its most radical: the attempt to eliminate the Jews of Europe by murdering them all — a policy in which the regime largely succeeded. Beyond this, the regime made use of the ethnic German minorities in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and elsewhere to enforce Nazi domination. All of this would have tremendous repercussions when the war ended.

The defeat of the Axis powers set the stage for another massive round of ethnonational transformation. The wave of ethnic expulsions in the second half of the 1940s was larger than any other before or since. The political settlement in central Europe that followed the First World War had been achieved primarily by moving borders over populations to bring about national homogeneity.

At the end of World War II, this attempt to move borders around people was judged a failure. Instead there was massive movement of people across borders to realize the same goal. From the autumn of 1944 to mid-1945, five million Germans fled westward from the eastern parts of the German Reich in the face of the conquering Red Army. From 1945 to 1947, the new, post-liberation regimes in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia and Hungary expelled another seven million ethnic Germans. The collaboration of the German diasporic minorities in eastern Europe with the Third Reich made them the objects of hatred. In total, over twelve million Germans were expelled westward, the largest such population movement in European history. The few surviving Jews who returned to post-war Poland were met by a wave of anti-semitic murder, and most made their way to the new Jewish home in Israel. In addition to the ethnic Germans and surviving Jews, another seven million refugees from other ethnic groups were evicted from their homes and resettled after the war. In order to make the ethnic population correspond to the new borders, 1,500,000 Poles living in areas that now became part of the USSR were deported to Poland. 500,000 ethnic Ukrainians living in Poland were sent to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. Yet another exchange of populations took place between Hungary and Czechoslovakia, as Slovaks were transferred out of Hungary to Czechoslovakia, while Magyars were sent from Slovakia to Hungary. A smaller exchange took place between Hungary and Yugoslavia: Magyars went from Yugoslavia to Hungary, Serbs and Croats moved in the opposite direction. Thus, a few years after the end of the Second World War, the ethnonational ideal had largely been realized in most of Europe, as each state was comprised of a single ethnic group.

From 1945 through 1989, the few exceptions to this rule included Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and of course the Soviet Union. Their subsequent fate demonstrated the ongoing vitality of ethnonationalism. After the fall of communism, East and West Germany were unified with remarkable rapidity. Czechoslovakia — the model bi-ethnic state—split peacefully into Czech and Slovak republics. The Soviet Union was disaggregated into a series of nation states. Another multi-ethnic state, Yugoslavia, saw the secession of Croatia

and Slovenia, and then descended into ethnonational wars over Bosnia and Kosovo.

Much of the history of the post-colonial world is one of ethnonational struggle in the wake of the colonial empires. There were frequent bouts of inter-ethnic violence, often followed by partition, and by forced expulsion and “voluntary” migration, that was often a response to perceived threats brought on by actual violence. The end of the British Raj in 1947 brought about the partition of the colony into India and Pakistan, and an orgy of violence between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, that took hundreds of thousands of lives. Fifteen million people became refugees: Muslims who found homes in Pakistan, and Hindus who migrated from Pakistan to India. The post-colonial multi-ethnic entity of Pakistan subsequently dissolved in 1971 into Pakistan and Bangladesh.

In the former British mandate of Palestine, a Jewish state was established in 1948, with plans for an Arab state as well. Jewish sovereignty was opposed by the Arab world, and was greeted first by revolts by the indigenous Arabs and then by invasion from the surrounding Arab states. In the war that resulted, regions that fell under Arab control were cleansed of their Jewish population. Arabs fled or were coerced from many of the areas that came under Jewish control, Some 750,000 Arabs departed, primarily into the surrounding Arab countries, while the remaining 150,000 became a minority in the new Jewish state (comprising more than a sixth of its population). In the several years that followed, nationalist-inspired violence against Jews in Arab countries led to the end of this second locus of Jewish diaspora life, and over 700,000 Jews left their lands of origin in the Arab world and emigrated to Israel.

When we look at modern history through these lenses, what happened in Cyprus during the period of British colonial control and after seems typical, namely the redefinition of group identities along ethno-national lines. That is not because ethno-nationalism was a backward ideology foisted upon Greek and Turkish Cypriots by the wily British. It was because ethnonationalist ideology was deeply intertwined with becoming modern. For modern ideologies are grounded upon the idea of self-

determination. And the spread of the idea of self-determination necessarily raised the issue of who was included in the group that was to do the determining, and that was defined, as so frequently was the case elsewhere, in terms of ethnic identity. What happened after the end of British rule in Cyprus does not seem anomalous; sadly, it was all too typical.

The comity and peace of contemporary Europe, seen through these lenses, was due not so much to the triumph of the ideals of civic nationalism as the realization of the ethnonationalist ideal in so much of Europe. That seems to have led to a waning of ethnic nationalism (though by no means its disappearance), which may have been a prerequisite for the development of the European Union.

Ethnonational and civic national states each have their own advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of ethnonational states often include a greater sense of solidarity, of common fate. That, in turn, is often linked to increased trust, which diminishes transaction costs, such as extensive (and expensive) legal guarantees that are required when trust is missing. The advantages of civic national states include the potential for greater mutual fructification of ways of life, a greater ease of borrowing from one group to another that may be culturally creative. Civic nationalism also has the ability to link a wider range of people. But civic nationalism can't just be created *ex nihilo* – must have a basis in historical experience. And this brings us back to the issue of bi-ethnic and multi-ethnic states, states usually constituted by one or another form of federalism.

There is by now a huge literature on federalist constitution-making. But as the wisest analysts of federalism have noted, constitutions are rarely the source of political success or political failure. For constitutions reflect political will at a particular point in time. Political will, like political identity, is of course dynamic. The desire to live in one polity rather than another is often influenced by economic and political factors. This may change, not through a single act of constitution-making, but by the build-up of trust over time, as each side comes to see the advantage of co-operation with the other.

Citizens within a democratic federation may in theory have dual but complimentary political identities, for example, as Cypriots and as Greeks, as Cypriots and as Turks. But that is in theory, and the reality may be quite different.

The British political theorist, David Miller, has distinguished three models of multi-ethnic state arrangements. There are states that involve ethnic cleavages within a single polity (as in Switzerland), There are states composed of rival nationalities, each of which are inward-looking and exclusive (as in Czechoslovakia, or Israel.) And then there are federal systems based on nested identities: of multiple territorially-based political communities, which are themselves part of a larger nation-state (as is the case of Catalonia in Spain, Scotland in the United Kingdom, or Quebec in Canada.) Which of these models applies — single state with ethnic cleavages, rival nationalities, or nested identities —depends in part on the degree of cultural overlap, mutual economic advantage, and interwoven positive history between the groups in question. It seems to me that Greek Cypriots would like to think that the model of nested identities applies to Cyprus. But it may well be a case of rival nationalities – more like Czechs and Slovaks, or more probably like Israelis and Palestinians, than like Scots and Great Britain or Catalonia and Spain.

When looking at multi-ethnic states, and especially at bi-ethnic states, I think that what is striking is the ongoing uncertainty and constant renegotiation built into such structures. In the case of Czechoslovakia, a bi-ethnic state ended through a peaceable break-up. In the case of Belgium, tensions between the two main ethnic groups recently led to a year-long stalemate in forming a government. Take the most favorable case, of Canada, where there are 7 million Quebecois (83% of whom are French speaking) versus 24 million Anglophone Canadians. The meaning of federalism, there as elsewhere, is itself a matter of ongoing debate and ambiguity, perhaps a strategic ambiguity, in which each side is more content because the other sides differing understanding of the situation is not made fully explicit.

And so, as promised, I have no solution to “the Cyprus question.” But perhaps these historical and comparative reflections will help you to see it in a slightly different light.