What Are Imperial Systems: The Case of Cyprus c.1500 BC - 1960 AD[1]

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ABSTRACT
Reviewing the different empires that ruled over the island of Cyprus, this contribution takes issue with Anthony Giddens' contention that imperial systems were largely self-contained in political and economic terms. In fact, almost all the empires discussed here interacted with other sizeable political units; and Cyprus's trade links were normally not confined to any of the empires that happened to control it. However, Giddiness' concept of an imperial system can be maintained if it is, in the vein of Niklas Luhmann, re-conceptualized as being operationally closed but, at the same time, open to the environment. This perspective also allows us to distinguish modern imperial systems from pre-modern ones: while the latter were coupled with two structurally different types of society identified by Giddens (tribal and class-divided), in the case of the former it is three types (tribal, class-divided and capitalist). Thus, being more complex than their predecessors, modern empires are also more fragile.

Keywords: *Cyprus, Empire, Systems theory, Giddens, Luhmann.*

Introduction: Empires on the Edge of Chaos?

In the aftermath of the George W. Bush administration and its unilateral "war against terror", the term *empire* has once more become fashionable, whether among historians, international relations folks, or scholars-cum-journalists. A very recent example is an article by Niall Ferguson, which holds that, instead of going through a long-term cycle of rise and decline, empires tend to remain alive and well but then collapse suddenly and unexpectedly.[2] In many respects, Ferguson's argument is quite mainstream. Just like many other writers on empire,[3] he treats the term in a

[1]This paper presented at the Ninth METU Conference on International Relations. "The Mediterranean in the World System: Structures and Processes". Güzelyurt, 20-22 May 2010
[2] Niall Ferguson, 'Complexity and Collapse: Empires on the Edge of Chaos', *Foreign Affairs* (Vol. 89, No. 2, March/April 2010), pp. 18-32.
[3] To give three examples: Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); Alexander Motyl, *Imperial Ends: The Decline, Collapse, and Revival of Empires* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Herfried Münkler, *Imperien: Die Logik der Weltherrschaft vom Alten Rom bis zu den Vereinigten Staaten* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2005).

transhistorical way. Ultimately, different empires have similar characteristics, no matter where they are placed in space or time. Thus, the Americans should better watch out: What happened to the Romans in the early 5th century, i.e. a fast-track breakdown, may very well happen to them in the early 21st.[4]

What makes Ferguson's article unusual, however, is that he bolsters his claim up with reference to contemporary systems research, according to which complex systems – whether in the social or the natural sciences – are so complicated that they preclude predictions about their future state. Consequently, a small input may cause completely unanticipated consequences, including a sudden shift from an internal equilibrium to crisis and breakdown. Thus, there were contingent events like a mistaken monetary policy on part of the Federal Reserve that just now pushed the American empire into a fiscal crisis and possible demise.[5]

Staying within systemic approaches, we can juxtapose Ferguson's cyclical systemic account of empires with that of Immanuel Wallerstein's world-empire. The latter is a politically unified system under a bureaucratically organized centre that organizes a redistribution of goods from the centre to the periphery, and partially back. Throughout most of history, world-empires have been the dominant social system. Only the capitalist Modern World-System, operating since the 16th century, has resisted all attempts by would-be conquerors to turn it into a world-empire.[6] In other words, the contemporary world-system is of a fundamentally different character than the previous ones. With respect to empires this means that, in contrast to the cyclical perspective represented by writers like Ferguson, empires are now a thing of the past. Just like their British predecessors, the USA is not an empire but a hegemon, albeit a declining one.[7]

Another Historical Sociologist stressing the discontinous character of modernity and referring to the term system is Anthony Giddens. While distancing his approach from that of Wallerstein,[8] Giddens employs a terminology inspired by the former, namely with respect to world-empires and world-systems. Giddens' approach to history, including the history of empires, is more satisfactory than Wallerstein's approach. He avoids the

[4] Ferguson, op.cit. in note 1, pp. 27-28.
[5] Ibid., pp. 22-26.
[6] Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 17, 57, 98-99.
[7] Ibid., pp. 57-58.
[8] Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 168-169, 196-198; Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence: Volume Two of A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Polity, 1985), pp. 161-170.

double pitfalls of quasi-positivist reification (i.e. treating systems as objective structures beyond human control) and economist simplification (i.e. identifying unequal exchange at the root of everything) that the latter is prone to. Nevertheless, the way how Giddens treats empires as social systems shows that his own use of the term 'system' is deficient and it needs some refinement.

In the following, we will first summarize Giddens' way of characterizing different types of societies as well as his understanding of empires or, respectively, imperial systems. In the second step, Giddens' assertion that empires are self-contained units will be questioned, and found wanting, by reference to the case of the different empires ruling over the island of Cyprus. This, in turn, raises doubts about Giddens' cavalier way of adding the tack 'system' to empires. As a third step, it will be suggested that Niklas Luhmann's work on systems, namely the distinction between operational closure and environmental openness, can clarify why empires should indeed, as done by Giddens (and Wallerstein), be considered social systems. Fourth, combining the approaches of Giddens and Luhmann also helps us to highlight the differences between pre-modern and modern empires, thus challenging the transhistorical account advanced by Ferguson and others.

Empires According to Giddens

Giddens distinguishes three types of society, using their respective degree of human interaction across space and time (*time-space distanciation*) as major criterion. These three types do not replace each other in an evolutionary sequence but may exist side by side in what he calls *inter-societal systems.* Giddens has comparatively little to say about the first type, *tribal societies*. There, human interaction is limited to face-to-face contacts. Lacking separate administrative or coercive institutions, tribal societies are held together by kinship and traditions.

Giddens is more forthcoming with respect to his second type, *class-divided societies.* In their case, the use of writing extends human interaction across time and space. As the term indicates, there are classes in this type of society. The by far most numerous are peasants, which have direct access to the means of production (i.e. land) but are forced by threats of violence to hand over a surplus to the dominant class of landlords-cum-officials. Thus, what we today would call politics and economics are fused. Since the dominant class does not regularly interfere into the production process itself, class struggles - except for occasional peasant revolts - are rare. There are states, but their administrative and coercive apparatus is small and riven by divisions. Consequently, the state does not exert a

monopoly of power outside the walled cities; its presence in the countryside is limited to taxation.[9]

There are four types of non-modern inter-societal systems: tribal cultures, city-state systems, systems of feudal states, and – most importantly for our discussion - systems dominated by an empire. An imperial system is held together by the combination of military force, a legitimating ideology addressing the dominant classes only, and - to a lesser extent - by economic integration. For all the despotic pretensions on part of the rulers, the actual power of the imperial state is limited – as befits all states in class-divided societies. The imperial system consists of the empire itself, plus much less powerful states as well as tribal units surrounding it. There is some long-distance trade run by merchants that transcends the imperial system, but all important economic interchange takes place within it. Indeed, redistributive taxation is the main economic tie.[10]

By integrating class-divided and tribal societies into one inter-societal system, empires are an example of what Giddens calls time-space edges. Otherwise, his account of empires resembles that of world-empires sketched by Wallerstein. Indeed, before what Giddens calls the 'Early Capitalist World Economy' emerged, i.e. the Early Modern Period, "imperial world systems" dominated history.[11] One indication of all this is that empires were largely self-contained: they neither interacted with other political units on an equal basis nor had much significant economic contacts with areas outside their own realm. Another one is that with the emergence of the capitalist world economy, presumably from the 16th century onwards, empires lost their prominent place.

As for the third type of society, i.e. *capitalism*, mechanized transportation and electronic communication vastly increase time-space distanciation. In contrast to the other types of society, politics and economics have become separate realms. The dominant class does not govern, but directly controls and organizes the means of production and exerts power over propertyless wage labourers through economic, rather than coercive, means. Under these circumstances, class struggles are endemic. The most important political unit is the nation-state, whose developed bureaucracy and professional army not only enable it to exert a territorial monopoly of coercion but also to regulate the day-to-day life of its citizens. In return for accepting a high degree of state surveillance, citizens demand civil, political and economic rights; nationalism becomes an

[9] Giddens, *Contemporary Critique*, op. cit. in note 7, passim; Giddens, *Nation-State*, op. cit. in note 7, passim.
[10] Giddens, *Contemporary Critique*, op. cit. in note 7, pp. 103-04; Giddens, *Nation-State*, op. cit. in note 7, pp. 67, 79-81.
[11] Giddens, *Contemporary Critique*, op cit. in note 7, p. 168.

important legitimatory ideology addressing dominant and subordinate classes alike.[12]

Today, when capitalist societies have largely absorbed tribal and class-divided ones, we can speak of a world system. However, contrary to Wallerstein Giddens argues that it is not of one piece but consists of four elements: the global information system, the world military order, the world capitalist economy, and the global state system consisting of nation-states.[13] It seems that for Giddens, contrary to what Ferguson assumes, there are no longer empires in the contemporary world.

In the following, I will argue that Giddens' picture of empires as self-contained units leaves much to be desired. If we want to use the above criteria in order to identify empires in history, we will find very, very few. I will try to illustrate this claim by referring to the history of Cyprus during the last three and a half millennia. Cyprus is a good example because during this long period it was subject to an enormous multitude of political units normally called "empires", from the Ancient Egyptians through the Romans and Ottomans up to the British. In fact, there may be few spaces in the world that were subject to so many and so culturally different types of empire. For each case of imperial rule over Cyprus, the questions will be asked whether the respective empire really did "not adjoin other domains of equivalent power, as nation-states may do today",[14] and whether imperial expansion really tended "to incorporate all significant economic needs within the domain of the empire itself".[15]

The Late Bronze Age

After a long period of isolation, Cyprus entered the stage of the Eastern Mediterranean world during the Late Bronze Age (c. 1600 – 1050 BC). During that time, urban centers and writing appeared; the economy was based upon agriculture and mining. Foreign sources mention a state called Alašija. Its capital was probably in present-day Enkomi near Famagusta; it is not clear whether it controlled the whole of the island.[16] Alašija had two important neighbors: One was the so-called New Empire of Egypt, whose ruler, the Pharao, controlled most of the Nile Valley and exercised suzerainty over the major seaports and caravan cities of Greater Syria, which was maintained by occasional military campaigns. The second

[12] Giddens, *Contemporary Critique*, op. cit. in note 7, passim; Giddens, *Nation-State*, op. cit. in note 7, passim.
[13] Giddens, *Contemorary Critique,* op. cit. in note 7, pp. 276-277.
[14] Ibid., p. 81.
[15] Ibid., p. 80.
[16] Louise Steel, *Cyprus Before History: From the Earliest Settlers to the End of the Bronze Age* (London: Duckworth, 2004), pp. 149-186.

was the Hittite Empire, whose kings controlled central Anatolia and upheld suzerainty over most of the rest of Anatolia and the northern edges of Syria, binding the rulers of tributary states through personal oaths of loyalty.

In a sporadic fashion, Alašija seems to have been a vassal state of one or the other of these two empires: The Egyptian Pharao Tuthmosis III (r. 1479-1425 BC) received Alašijan tribute consisting mainly of copper. During the same century, Hittite archives likewise list Alašija as a tributary state.[17] On the other hand, in a letter to Pharao Amenophis IV (r. 1353-1336 BC), the king of Alašija addresses him as "brother", thus indicating equality, and promises to send copper in exchange for silver.[18] Later on, we again read of a subordinate status. The Hittite king Tudhalija IV (r. 1237-1209 BC) claims to have conquered Alašija and to have imposed a tribute, again including copper,[19] while one of his successors, the last Hittite king Šuppiluliuma II, destroyed Alašija's fleet in 1190 BC.[20] During the times of these two rulers, however, the Hittite Empire was already in the process of breaking down.

Cyprus was thus occasionally on the periphery of two imperial complexes, the Egyptian and the Hittite one. Contrary to what Giddens envisages for imperial world systems, neither of these two empires was isolated from each other. On the contrary, they interacted regularly through diplomatic and sometimes warlike ways - not only with each other but also with two other powerful empires: that of Mitanni at the Upper Euphrates and of Babylon in present-day Iraq. Martin Wight characterizes the Near East of this period as a *secondary state system*, which is composed not of states but of *primary state systems*, i.e. each of these four great powers and its respective satellites.[21] However, conceptualizing the region in both imperial and balance-of-power terms is a bit like having one's cake and eating it, too.

Then, as well as afterwards, Cyprus was together with the Taurus Mountains, the Sinai, Sardinia and parts of the Iberian Peninsula one of the major sources of copper in the Mediterranean. When combined with tin, copper turned into bronze, which was during this period the main metal

[17] Ibid., p. 184.
[18] Katia Hadjidemetriou, *A History of Cyprus* (transl. by Costas Hadjigeorgiou), 2nd ed. (Nicosia: [s.n.] 2007), pp. 33-34.
[19] James D. Muhly, 'The Significance of Metals in the Late Bronze Age conomy of Cyprus', in V. Karageorghis and D. Michaelides (ed.), *The Development of the Cypriot Economy: From the Prehistoric Period to the Present Day* (Nicosia: University of Cyprus and Bank of Cyprus, 1996), pp. 45-59, at p. 50.
[20] Costas P. Kyrris, *History of Cyprus* (Nicosia: Lampusa, 1996), p. 51.
[21] Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977), ch. 1.

used for weapons and instruments.[22] Contrary to Giddens' contention about empires keeping major economic exchange within their own realms, Cypriot exports of copper were not restricted to the lands under Alašija's overlords (or would-be overlords), i.e. Egypt, Syria and Anatolia, but seem to have spread throughout the Mediterranean, the Balkans and the Near East. In turn, the island imported pottery from Mycenian Greece.[23]

The case of Cypriot copper exports going beyond imperial domains might still be squared with Giddens' assertion by labelling it as an "insignificant" kind of exchange, i.e. an ephermal luxury good. This is true to the extent that the vast majority of the people of that time may never even have seen a piece of copper. However, bronze weapons and instruments made of copper and tin were hardly "insignificant" for the maintenance of the city-based power containers, which, as Giddens himself contends, were the formative axis of class-divided societies.

The Iron Age

From the 12th century BC onwards, Cyprus became subject to waves of immigrations by the Mycenian Greeks and later by Phoenicians from present-day Lebanon. Alašija disappeared at the end of the Bronze Age. In its stead a number of city-states under monarchical governments spread throughout the island.[24] In Giddens' terminology, Cyprus formed a city-state system. After some time, however, the island again entered several imperial complexes.

Between c. 709 and 669 BC, the Cypriot city-states submitted tribute, which did not include copper and was thus probably of a purely symbolic nature, to the Assyrian Empire.[25] The Assyrians were a militaristic people based in what is today Northern Iraq. During the period of their overlordship over Cyprus they ruled over most of the Ancient Near East, namely Mesopotamia, Greater Syria as well as edges of Anatolia. As in the case of their Egyptian and Hittite predecessors, the Assyrian kings turned some of the conquered areas into provinces under governors while others, like Cyprus, were merely vassal states under their own rulers. When the empire collapsed in the 620s and 610s, Cyprus had already left its orbit again.

One century after the end of Assyrian suzerainty, in c. 570 BC, the Cypriot city-states fell under the domination of Egypt, which then was just a

[22] Hartmut Matthäus, 'Kupferbergbau und –verhüttung', in Katja Lembke (ed.), *Zypern: Insel der Aphrodite*, (Hildesheim and Mainz: Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum and Philipp von Zabern, 2010), pp. 133-37, at p. 133.
[23] Muhly, op. cit. in note 18, pp. 47-49; Steel, op cit. in note 15, pp. 169-171.
[24] Hadjidemetriou, op. cit. in note 17, pp. 48-52, 75-79; Kyrris, op. cit. in note 19, pp. 44-100.
[25] Hadjidemetriou, op. cit. in note 17, pp. 52, 54-55.

pale shadow of the New Empire of one millennium earlier. Again, the Cypriots paid tribute and were otherwise left alone. Already in c. 545 BC, the Cypriots voluntarily switched their overlord.[26] This new suzerain, the Achaimenid (Old Persian) Empire, was the biggest of its kind the world had seen so far; it included Thrace, Anatolia, Greater Syria, Mesopotamia, Iran, edges of Central Asia and India as well as (intermittingly) Egypt. Most of it was provinces administered by governors and held together by an extensive road network. However, there were also a few vassal states, like the Cypriot cities.

During the first half of the 7th century BC, the Assyrian Empire did indeed not encounter an equal, although it still had to deal with formidable opponents like Uratu in Eastern Anatolia, Elam in Southwestern Iran, Babylonia and Egypt. When the latter exerted suzerainty over Cyprus, it co-existed with three other great powers, i.e. the Lydians in Anatolia, the Medes in Iran and the Babylonians. In contrast, the Achaimenids came close to make true their claim that their empire corresponded to the world as such. However, they ultimately failed to subjugate the Greek city-state system during the so-called "Persian Wars" of the first half of the 5th century BC. Athens even transformed a military alliance of the Aegean city-states, the Attic Sea League, into a naval empire that clearly was a serious challenger to the Achaimenids.

Different to all the previous inter-imperial conflicts, the Achaimenid-Greek wars directly affected Cyprus. True, the Persian suzerains of Cyprus were content with tributes and military support on part of their client city-states. The Greek and Phonician kings of these states were even able to mint their own coins. Nevertheless, there were a couple of uprisings against Persian rule which were supported by the Greek mainland. The reasons for these uprisings seem to have been less any oppressive actions on part of the Persian "king of kings" but, rather, local rivalries in which one side presented itself as 'pro-Persian' and the other as "anti-Persian". Furthermore, the Athenians several times invaded the island in order to "liberate" it (478, 459-58 and 449). The most famous of these uprisings was that led by the king of Salamis, Evagoras (r. 411-374 BC). Originally collaborating with his Persian overlords, he fell out with them when they opposed his attempt to subjugate the other city-states of Cyprus. The Achaimenids defeated Evagoras after a long battle but had to leave him the rule over Salamis.[27]

As for the realm of production and trade, iron had replaced bronze as the most important metal in warfare by the 1st millennium BC. Nevertheless,

[26] Kyrris, op. cit. in note 19, pp. 101-108.
[27] Hadjidemetriou, op. cit. in note 17, pp. 59-75; Kyrris, op. cit. in note 19, pp. 108-22.

copper production in Cyprus continued unabated as the metal was still used for the production of instruments and, increasingly, works of art.[28] Again, such copper-made products may have been ephermal for the rural mass of the population of the Ancient world, but their role in the reproduction of the class-divided urban civilizations must also not be underestimated. As during the late Bronze Age, Cyprus traded intensely with the Greek mainland, i.e. with areas outside of the Assyrian, Egyptian and Persian Empires, exporting copper and importing pottery. In fact, it was during the suzerainty of the Persians that Cyprus largely adopted the cultural traits of Hellenic Greece, namely the alphabet.[29] Thus, in terms of "political" and "economic" interaction, Cyprus was hardly insulated within a self-contained imperial system.

The Hellenistic and Roman Periods

When the Macedonian king Alexander III the Great (r. 336-323 BC) defeated the Achaimenids at the battle of Ipsos in 333 BC, the Cypriot kings quickly switched to his side. For once, the realm established by Alexander's was indeed an empire encompassing most of the world then known, with no other polity even remotely matching its extent. However, once the conqueror died his empire quickly broke up into several pieces as his successors fought each other. Cyprus became the battleground between two of Alexander's generals, Ptolemaios and Antigonos. When the former finally triumphed in 294 BC, the island became part of the Ptolemaic Empire. Already before his decisive victory, Ptolemaios had abolished all the city-kingdoms and subjected the island to his direct rule. He and his successors controlled the island for more than 200 years.[30]

The Ptolemaic Empire, which encompassed Egypt, Cyprus as well as parts of Greater Syria, of the Anatolian coast and of the Aegean, represented the fusion of the Greek and different Near Eastern cultures. A Greek-speaking elite living in newly-founded cities like Alexandria was ruling over a vast indigenous population but to a certain degree adapted some features of the previous Near Eastern kingship.

In Cyprus, the Ptolemaics were replaced by the Roman Empire in 58 BC. After another Ptolemaic interlude (38-30 BC), the Romans finally took it when they annexed the remains of the Ptolemaic Empire for good. Like their

[28] Matthäus, op. cit. in note 21, p. 133.
[29] Hadjidemetriou, op. cit. in note 17, pp. 55, 74-75; Kyrris, op. cit. in note 19, p. 114; Eustathios Raptou, 'Contribution to the Study of the Economy of Ancient Cyprus: Copper – Timber', in Karageorghis and Michaelides, op. cit. in note 18, pp. 249-259, at pp. 251-252.
[30] Hadjidemetriou, op. cit. in note 17, pp. 80-90; Kyrris, op. cit. in note 19, pp. 123-136.

predecessors, the Romans ruled Cyprus as a province.[31] The Roman Empire encompassed the whole Mediterranean world, plus the bulk of Western Europe. Originally a republic, it became ruled by emperors shortly after its second take-over of Cyprus. One of its legacies, in Cyprus as well as elsewhere is an extensive road network and, later on, the spread of Christianity.

The Ptolemaic Empire co-existed in often conflictual interaction with the other successor states of Alexander's empire, namely the Seleucids in Syria and the Antigonids in Macedonia. During the 2nd and 1st century BC, the Roman Empire increasingly became the leading power in the Eastern Mediterranean, swallowing up the post-Alexandrian entities one by one. At the height of its power, the Roman Empire came close to Giddens' assertion of an imperial unit not encountering any other polity of comparable strength. But just like the Achaimendis facing the Athenians, the Romans found their match in two subsequent empires ruling Iran and Iraq, i.e. the Arsakids and their successors, the Sassanids. The fierce battles waged again and again between these contending empires did not affect Cyprus much, however.

It was at least the ambition of the Ptolemaics to subject all economic activities to a state monopoly and, while promoting exports, to keep the empire as independent of imports as possible.[32] Had the empire succeeded in implementing its monopoly, we would have a strong counter-case against Giddens' assertion that the pre-modern state restricted its activities to taxation and did not interfere into the production process. However, it is very doubtful that the Ptolemaic ambitions could really be put into practice.

Under both the Ptolemaics and the Romans, Cyprus remained an important source of copper, now also used for minting coins. By that time, another important export was olive oil, hardly a luxury good but an important stable diet throughout the Mediterranean. The Romans ensured that sufficient supplies went to the capital and the army. This was originally done through private trade, although possibly subject to state regulation, and from the 3rd century onwards through bureaucratic means. To this, we have to add goods like wine and timber, the latter important for shipbuilding. Since most of Cyprus's trade was with the Mediterranean, Roman control over the latter meant that the island's economic connections indeed remained within the empire.[33] Thus, the Roman Empire fits quite

[31] Hadjidemetriou, op. cit. in note 17, pp. 94-110; Kyrris, op. cit. in note 19, pp. 137-138, 146-159.
[32] Demetrious Michaelides, 'The Economy of Cyprus During the Hellenistic and Roman Periods', in: Karageorghis and Michaelides, op. cit. in note 18, pp. 139-149, here pp. 140-141.
[33] Ibid., pp. 139-149; S. Hadjisavvas, 'The Economy of the Olive', in Karageorghis and Michaelides, op. cit. in note 18, pp. 127-136, here pp. 127-129, 135; Eustathios Raptou,

closely but - in view of its conflictual interaction with its Iran-based competitors - still not completely the picture Giddens draws of imperial systems.

The Byzantine Period

After Constantinople had been set up as an alternative capital (330) and the Roman Empire had been divided for good (395), its eastern parts became the so-called Byzantine Empire. The latter was from the beginning a Christian state; and the dominant position of the Orthodox Church during much of Cyprus's subsequent history derives from this period. The late Roman/early Byzantine Emperor showed specific presence when he helped to rebuild the island after it had been devastated by a series of earthquakes in the 4th century.[34]

In the 7th century, Byzanz lost Greater Syria and Egypt to the rising Islamic empires, which were the early Caliphate with its capital in Medina (632-661), the Umayyad Empire centered in Damascus (661-750) and the Abbasid Empire of Baghdad (750-1258). Because Cyprus was just in-between the realms of the Byzantines and their Islamic rivals, a unique political arrangement was put into force between 649 (or, according to other sources, 688) and 964. During that period, the Byzantine Emperors and the Caliphs exerted a joint overlordship over the island, which had to pay taxes to both empires. This arrangement did not save the Cypriots from repeated military campaigns by one or the other side but, during peacetime, seems to have given them a lot of autonomy.[35]

After the Byzantines regained full control of the island in 964, they seem to have imposed heavy taxation. This, in turned, encouraged occasional revolts. A more lasting heritage of the late Byzantine period was the arrival of Italian merchants like those of Venice from the late 11th century onwards. In the context of the crusades, they were given privileges to trade freely within the empire, including Cyprus.[36]

Just like the late Roman Empire, the early Byzantines had to contend with an eastern rival, the Sassanid Empire, until it fell victim to the Muslim conquest. The Byzantine-Ummayad/Abbasid co-rule over Cyprus is a particularly striking example of the fact that, contrary to Giddens' assertions, big empires do not necessarily exist in isolation from each other. After it had regained Cyprus, the late (and since 1071 much shrunken) Byzantine Empire

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"Contribution to the Study of the Economy of Ancient Cyprus: Copper – Timber", in Karageorghis and Michaelides, op. cit. in note 18, pp. 249-259, at pp. 252-256.

[34] Hadjidemetriou, op. cit. in note 17, pp. 121-128; Kyrris, op. cit. in note 19, pp. 160-175.

[35] Hadjidemetriou, op. cit. in note 17, pp. 129-140; Kyrris, op. cit. in note 19, pp. 181-202.

[36] Hadjidemetriou, op. cit. in note 17, pp. 141-165; Kyrris, op. cit. in note 19, pp. 209-211.

interacted with numerous Christian and Muslim neighbors. In the context of the crusades since the late 11th century, Cyprus was repeatedly involved both as a base of supplies and as a victim of raids.

The copper mines having been exhausted by c. 1000,[37] Cyprus during the 10th century was known for miscellaneous products, which it freely traded to both the Byzantines and their Abbasid rivals.[38] Under the conditions of the condominium, it was obviously not possible to restrict trading relations to one of the two empires.

The Lusignan Period

Between 1192 and 1489, Cyprus was under the feudal rule of the Lusignan kings, a Catholic dynasty that came from France. The Lusignans originally acted as a foreign ruling stratum and put the Orthodox Church into a subordinate position, although they adapted to Greek culture in time.[39] Their main legacies today are some impressive Gothic cathedrals in Nicosia and Famagusta.

The Lusignan kingdom itself was certainly not an empire. However, during its existence it became nominally subject to several empires. In order to assert their legitimacy, between 1197 and 1247 the Lusignan kings formally submitted to the ruler of the Holy Roman Empire.[40] The latter was a decentralized feudal entity, based upon personal bonds of loyalty between strongmen, from the Emperor down to the knight. Encompassing both Germany and most of Italy, its Emperor had a symbolic claim upon the leadership of Western Christianity. After an unsuccessful attempt of the Emperor to meddle into Cypriot affair, the Lusignans transferred their submission to the Pope in Rome.[41] One can argue that Cyprus for half a century was part of what Giddens calls a system of feudal states.

After having defeated the Lusiginans in a war, the Italian merchant republic of Genoa, which controlled several dependencies in the Mediterranean, took Cyprus's main port of Famagusta (1373-1464) and forced the kings to pay a high indemnity.[42] In 1426, the Lusignans faced another defeat, this time by the Mamluk Empire ruling over Egypt and Greater Syria. Again, they had to agree to annual tributes. From then

[37] Matthäus, op. cit. in note 21, p. 137.
[38] P. Gounarides, "The Economy of Byzantine Cyprus: Cyprus, an Ordinary Byzantine Province", in Karageorghis and Michaelides, op. cit. in note 18, pp. 175-183, here p. 176.
[39] Hadjidemetriou, op. cit. in note 17, pp. 166-222; Kyrris, op. cit. in note 19, pp. 212-242.
[40] Peter W. Edbury, "Franks", in Angel Nicolaou-Konnari and Chris Schabel (ed.), *Cyprus: Society and Culture 1191 – 1374* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), pp. 63-101, here pp. 67, 71.
[41] Hadjidemetriou, op. cit. in note 17, pp. 178-179.
[42] Ibid., pp. 198, 200, 209.

onwards, the dynasty was nominally subject to both the Pope and the Mamluk Sultan.[43]

Neither the Holy Roman Emperor, nor the Pope, nor the Mamluk Sultan efficiently controlled Cyprus during their respective suzerainties. Genovese presence was restricted to the control of one city. All these unities had to deal with neighbors as powerful as themselves. This episode once again shows that empires need not necessarily act as self-contained units and that there can even be a considerable overlap of zone of influence, as already seen in the case of the Byzantine-Umayyad/Abbasid condominium.

In economic terms, Cyprus was involved in transit trade between Europe and the Middle East. At the same time, it became an important exporter of sugar, which was then still a luxury good but much sought among the upper classes of the class-divided societies in Europe. Cypriot sugar exports were never restricted to the territory of any of the empires it was subject to but were sent to port cities throughout the Mediterranean. [44]

The Venetian Period

Between 1489 and 1571, Cyprus belonged to the merchant republic of Venice. Like the Genovese, the Venetians possessed a seaborne empire in the Mediterranean, which – together with Cyprus – included the Adriatic as well as Crete. The Venetians replaced the Lusignans with their own appointees but otherwise left the island's landowning ruling strata largely in place. Tributes were still paid to the Mamluk Empire and, after the latter's conquest by the Ottomans in 1517, to the Ottoman Sultan, thus upholding a *de jure* dual rule over the island.[45] The extensive, albeit ultimately futile, Venetian fortifications around the old cities of Nicosia and Famagusta are the main leftovers of that period.

As a merchant empire, the Venetian realm was anything but isolated. It existed together with vaster entities like the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, emergent nation-states like Spain and France, and its fellow city-states in Italy. Indeed, the struggle for supremacy in the Mediterranean between the Ottomans on the one hand and Spain and Venice on the other, culminating into the sea-battle of Lepanto in 1571, directly affected Cyprus: It was in this context that it was invaded and conquered by the Ottomans.

[43] Ibid., p. 205.
[44] Anthony Luttrell, "The Sugar Industry and Its Importance for the Economy of Cyprus", in Karageorghis and Michaelides, op. cit. in note 39, pp. 163-173.
[45] Ibid., pp. 223-235; Kyrris, op. cit. in note 19, pp. 243-250.

During the Venetian period, Cyprus's sugar production went down due to the competition of new sugar-growing areas at the Atlantic. Just as in the Levant and in Greece, cotton arose as a new type of cash crop. The Venetians demanded annual quotas to be delivered by heavily-taxed peasants. Moreover, the entire island's trade went through Venice. From there, however, it was re-channeled to other markets.[46] As a trading empire, the Venetians could hardly afford to keep its products within its own domains

The Ottoman Period

With the Ottoman invasion of 1570, Cyprus fell to an empire that by this time controlled the bulk of the Balkans and of the Middle East. It subsequently shrank, but when the British occupied the island in 1878, the Ottomans still held to large chunks of the above-mentioned regions. In administrative terms, the Ottoman Empire went through several phases. By the time they took Cyprus, the Ottomans had a - for that time – elaborate administrative apparatus backed up by a standing army. During the 17th and 18th century, a process of de-centralization set in, during which power was devolved to provincial strongmen. The 19th century saw a process of re-centralization overseen by a modern bureaucracy. This was accompanied by attempts to gain legitimacy among the Empire's people through the granting of citizenship rights and the fostering of Ottomanist, Islamist and, at the very end, Turkish national identities.

While defining itself as an Islamic polity, the Ottoman Empire was a multi-religious and multi-ethnic unity (as, in fact, almost all empires were). In Cyprus, the Ottomans restored the power of the Orthodox Church that had been diminished under the Lusignans. Another important legacy was the immigration of Muslim people from other parts of the empire, giving rise to the emergence of a Muslim/Turkish minority in the island. The ruling elite consisted of both Muslim Ottoman functionaries as well as Christian local dignitaries. The Ottomans provided a number of infrastructural projects like water supplies and, during the reformist final decades of their rule, set up a rudimentary public school system. In striking contrast to, say, the Roman period, the Ottoman rule over Cyprus is littered by a chain of revolts, which were originally directed against arbitrary taxation. The opposing sides, i.e. 'government' and 'rebels', normally cross-cut the religious divisions between Christians and Muslims. With the Greek war of independence in 1821,

[46] Benjamin Arbel, "The Economy of Cyprus During the Venetian Period (1473-1571)", in Karageorghis and Michaelides, op. cit. in note 18, pp. 185-191; Hadjidemetriou, op. cit. in note 17, pp. 228-230.

however, political conflict within the island took on a more ethnic character, thus foreshadowing later developments.[47]

One explanation for the revolts is that '(i)n contrast to other empires, the Ottoman Empire proved to be inefficient and corrupt in the administration of conquered countries'.[48] Particularly the praxis of tax-farming, whereby an individual pays a sum to the state and gains the taxation rights for a certain administrative area which he then tries to milk as much as possible, has been identified as one aspect of Ottoman "misrule".[49] However, it is important to remember that both tax-farming and rural revolts were far from uncommon in, say, absolutist France, which is normally – certainly by Giddens[50] – seen as a precursor of a modern territorial state. The frequency of uprisings during Ottoman period in Cyprus thus seems to be better explained by reference of the general turbulences during the Early Modern period, not least the prevalence of inflation during the 17th century.[51]

The Ottoman Empire rivaled the Roman one in terms of geographical extension. Also, for a long time the Ottoman Sultan did not recognize any other ruler as his equal, disdainfully calling the Habsburg Emperor "king of Vienna" and the Sultan of Morocco "shaykh of the Beduins". All this does not change the fact that even at the height of its power the Ottoman Empire had to confront rivals of equal strength – not only the despised Habsburgs but also the Savafid Shahs in Iran. As time went on, the emergent European nation-states like Britain, France and Russia overtook the empire in terms of power. By the mid-19th century, the Ottoman Empire in effect joined the global state system as a formally equal (but in reality subordinate) member.

Compared to the Venetian period, Cypriot cotton lost its importance in the island's economy and became just one among a number of miscellaneous agricultural products that were exported. Again, these exports were not restricted to other parts of the Ottoman Empire but covered the whole Mediterranean.[52] One may argue, however, that they were not terribly 'significant'.

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[47] Greek Cypriot scholars find little to admire in the Ottoman Empire, see: Hadjidemetriou, op. cit. in note 17, pp. 246-301; Kyrris, op. cit. in note 19, pp. 243-300. For a contrasting, rosy-red picture from a Turkish Cypriot point of view, see: Ahmet C. Gazioğlu, *The Turks in Cyprus: A Province of the Ottoman Empire (1571 – 1878)* (London: K. Rustem & Brother, 1990).
[48] Hadjidemetriou, op. cit. in note 17, p. 246.
[49] Ibid., p. 252.
[50] Giddens, *Nation-State,* op. cit. in note 7, pp. 83-121.
[51] Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
[52] Euphrosyne Rizopoulou-Egoumenidou, "The Economy of Cyprus Under Ottoman Rule With Special Emphasis on the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries", in Karageorghis and Michaelides, op. cit. in note 18, pp. 193-205.

The British Period

The British Empire, of which Cyprus was a part between 1878 and 1960, was quite different from the empires so far discussed. It did not consist of a coherent territory but was spread over all five continents. Its centre was not a dynasty (like the Ottomans) or a city (like Rome) but a modern, capitalist nation-state. Overall, the British Empire integrated capitalist societies in Britain and the Dominions with what at the beginning were still class-divided and tribal societies in Asia, Africa and Oceania.

For Cyprus, British rule meant a far-reaching economic and social transformation from a class-divided into a capitalist society, in which politics and economics were clearly separated. The mining sector revived due to the activities of a number of transnational companies. As private business confronted a unionized working-class, class struggle in the shape of strikes and the rise of the communist AKEL party (founded in 1941) ensued. The state involved itself into the day-to-day life of the people to a degree the pre-modern empires had never been able. True, agricultural production was not thoroughly reorganized and manufacturing remained a small-scale affair. Nevertheless, the infrastructure was vastly improved with the building of roads and ports and the provision of education and health. Usurious money-lending was curtailed through the establishment of agricultural cooperatives. Last but not least, tax collection became more regularized but also more efficient. Until its abolition in 1926, a particular bone of contention for the Cypriots was the annual 'tribute' nominally to be paid to the Ottoman Empire but in reality ending in the pockets of the (British and French) bondholders of the Ottoman Public Debt.

In response to the much greater state interference into the Cypriots' everyday life, the British had to grant some rights to their colonial subjects. Until its suspension in the wake of a major anti-colonial riot in 1931, an elected Legislative Council provided the Cypriots with some voice in the administration, although the British kept overall control by exploiting the emergent divisions between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Cyprus's internal policies were dominated by the spread of Pan-Greek nationalism demanding the annexation of the island by Greece (*enosis*). In response, the Muslim/Turkish inhabitants of the island increasingly oriented themselves towards the Republic of Turkey. This emergence of two competing ethnic nationalisms was an unintended consequence of the spread of state power. Of particular importance was the set-up of universal educational system, in which children of both communities were taught in Greek and Turkish, and by teachers coming from or having been educated in Greece and Turkey.[53]

[53] Rebecca Bryant, *Imagining the Modern: The Cultures of Nationalism in Cyprus* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004); Hadjidemetriou, op. cit. in note 17, pp. 302-351; Kyrris, op. cit. in note 19, pp.

With independence in 1960, the main legacy of the British Empire in Cyprus was the ethnic conflict between Greeks and Turks, the consequences of which still haunt the island. It is less known that there are some important residues of British rule in the shape of the Sovereign Base Areas as well as the British right to use a number of sites and installations nominally under Cypriot sovereignty.[54]

While the British Empire was arguably the hegemon within the global state system between the mid-19th century and World War I,[55] it operated as one great power among several within the global system of nation-states. In this respect, it was far removed as Giddens' image of a self-contained imperial system as could be. Likewise, Britain for most of the time favored a global system of free trade.

Cyprus kept on exporting different agricultural products of minor importance, thus continuing the pattern of the Ottoman period. However, mining products (copper and iron pyrites) had a spectacular comeback and on the eve of independence amounted to 2/3 of all exports. As during Ancient times, Cyprus again was one of the world's leading sources of minerals. Although the British Empire loomed large as a trade partner, Cyprus's exports went to Continental European and Levantine countries as well.[56]

Systems Analysis: Giddens vs. Luhmann

If we take Giddens' understanding of the term "empire", or "imperial system", literally, then it cannot, or at most with big reservations, be applied to any of the different large polities that controlled or claimed suzerainty over Cyprus throughout history. Whether the Ancient Egyptian, Roman, Ottoman or British Empires, all of them consisted in interaction with other polities of comparable size and power. Furthermore, for most of the time Cyprus was involved in significant economic exchanges which were not

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301-377; Heinz A. Richter, *Geschichte der Insel Zypern 1878 – 1949* (Mannheim and Möhnesee: Bibliopolis, 2004).

[54] Klearchos A. Kyriakides, 'The Sovereign Base Areas and British Defence Policy Since 1960', in Hubert Faustmann and Nicos Peristianis (ed.), *Britain in Cyprus: Colonialism and Post-Colonialism 1878 – 2006* (Mannheim and Möhnesee: Bibliopolis, 2006), pp. 511-534.

[55] Wallerstein, op. cit. in note 5, p. 57, locates the heyday of British hegemony at a somewhat earlier period. However, this underestimates the financial leeway that the City of London exerted over much of the world in the very decades before 1914. See P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688 - 1914* (London: Longman, 1993).

[56] Simoni Angelides, "The Cyprus Economy Under British Rule (1878 – 1960)", in Karageorghis and Michaelides, op. cit. in note 18, pp. 209-228; Hansjörg Brey, "The Cypriot Economy Under British Rule and the Economic Heritage of the British Period", in Faustmann and Peristianis, op. cit. in note 53, pp. 431-443.

contained within the realms of these big polities it was subject to. Thus, Cyprus never belonged to an empire as defined by Giddens.

Once might treat these findings as a (perhaps slightly pedantic) minor correction of Giddens' treatment of empires: Yes, his portrayal of them as self-contained units is a bit over the top, but so what? However, the findings do matter because Giddens treats empires not only as a type of pre-modern state but also as part of a social system, i.e. an imperial system. Now, what is this supposed to mean?

Giddens provides a terse definition of social systems. They are "(r)eproduced relations between actors or collectivities, organized as regular social practices".[57] Some pages later, he explains that social systems are characterised by interdependence among its components; a change in one part will produce changes in other parts which, in turn, effect changes in the part from which the chain of changes originated.[58]

This definition as such is so broad that almost any kind of human interaction can be characterized as systemic. For example, we have seen that Giddens distinguishes between several types of pre-modern inter-societal systems, among them city-state systems and imperial systems. According to this classification, the Greek city-states of the 5th century BC were one system while the Achaimenid Empire was another, separate one. However, given the "regular" interaction of the Greeks and the Persians both in terms of war and of trade, as is nicely illustrated by the case of Cyprus, why not treating both the Greek cities and the Achaimenid polity as part of one single inter-societal system instead?

Likewise, if we take Giddens' assumptions literally, then we should consider the Byzantine Empire and the Umayyad Empire of the late 7th and early 8th century as separate systems. However, in view of their close interaction, of which not only frequent wars but also the joint rule over Cyprus are prominent instances, we may equally treat them as part of one big system centered around the Eastern Mediterranean.

Of course, there is principally nothing wrong with identifying countless human interactions and calling them all systems. However, the question arises why then using the term "system" at all instead of talking about human interactions plain and simply. Ultimately, confusions arise because Giddens treats systems simply as composites consisting of different elements, in his case humans and groups of humans. Here, it is helpful to

[57] Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 66.
[58] Ibid., p. 73.

draw upon a quite different understanding of systems, whose foremost representative in the social sciences is Niklas Luhmann.

For Luhmann, systems do not consist out of components but out of the operations which create and maintain these very systems. In other words, systems are what they are doing, and they are producing themselves ("autopoetically", so Luhmann's neologism) through their own operations. In the case of social systems, Luhmann asserts that they consist of, and are created and maintained by, their operation, which is communication. Their "autopoetic" self-creation means that systems do not appear in a pre-existing environment, to which they have to adapt. Rather, by drawing the boundary between themselves and their environment through their operations, systems are creating their respective environment themselves.

Systems are *open to the environment*, which means that they can be causally influenced by factors originating there and even need environmental inputs for their very existence. To give two random examples: First, communication, i.e. the operation of social systems, can only take place if there is consciousness. Consciousness, in turn, is the operation of psychic systems, which belong to the environment of a social system. Second, the political system is a specific type of social system built upon the operation of exerting power. All other social systems, like economics, religion, science, etc., belong to its environment. Nevertheless, the political system could not exist without financial resources provided by the economic system. Luhmann calls this 'structural coupling' between systems.

At the same time, systems are *operationally closed*. This means that all inputs from the environment can only be proceeded within the operational modes of the system. Thus, psychic systems affect social systems through giving rise to talks or written exchanges, i.e. communication; but social interaction does not mean that we can get direct access to each other's thought. Likewise, money can be transformed into power, and vice versa; but political parties are not (normally!) business enterprises.[59] Notoriously, Luhmann claims that all a society can do about ecological problems is talking about them; this is simply because communication is the only operation a social system is capable of.[60]

[59] Niklas Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme: Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984). See also Niklas Luhmann, *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), pp. 92-97.
[60] Niklas Luhmann, *Ökologische Kommunikation: Kann die moderne Gesellschaft sich auf ökologische Gefährdungen einstellen?* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986).

Empires as Operationally Closed Systems

It is debatable whether, as Luhmann contends, it is communication that should be seen as the operation of social systems or whether, in the vein of Giddens, social practice[61] is the better candidate. For our topic, we can restrict ourselves to the following question: What is the operation that "autopoetically" creates and maintains an empire? The answer is simple: It is exactly what an empire is doing, i.e. creating and maintaining a hierarchical differentiation in terms of power and wealth between a centre (say, the Assyrian and Persian homelands, the capital cities of Rome or Istanbul, or the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland) and a periphery (Cyprus, in our case). This operation includes the transfer of resources from the periphery to the centre, but also partially back.

Curiously, Luhmann echoes Giddens in the assumption that empires tend to be self-contained. According to him, imperial expansion represents the attempt of the imperial centre to regain control over communication that has reached out beyond the imperial realm, namely in the shape of military campaigns and trade. There is thus the attempt to contain all communicational links within the empire.[62] This, however, need not necessarily the case.

Operational closure does not contradict the fact that an empire is also environmentally open. As we have seen in the discussion of the case of Cyprus, empires are affected and sometimes even maintained by diplomatic and warlike interaction with other social systems (like competing empires or city-states, tribes, etc.) as well as by foreign trade. However, these environmental inputs did not change the systemic operations as such. For example, in the 5th century BC Cyprus was at times a battleground in the Greek-Persian wars, but this did not shake up its position as a periphery of the Achaimenid Empire. Another example would be the replacement of sugar by cotton as the island's main export during the 16th century, which did not change Cyprus's subjugation to Venice. If other systems fundamentally affect the operation of the imperial system, then they do so only in a destructive vein. Examples would be the conquest of the Achaimenid Empire by Alexander the Great (which made Cyprus end up as part of the Ptolemaic Empire), the termination of Venetian rule over Cyprus by the Ottoman invasion, or Britain's granting independence to Cyprus due to international pressure.

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[61] Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity, 1984), p. 2.
[62] Niklas Luhmann, *Einführung in die Theorie der Gesellschaft* (1992-93) (Heidelberg: Carl-Auer-Systeme, 2005), pp. 66-67, 256-259.

Thus, making use of Luhmann's, rather than Giddens' understanding of systems clarifies how an empire can be conceptualized as a social system. The point is not, as Giddens seems to assume, that imperial systems have little political and economic contacts with its environment. On the contrary, such contacts can be quite substantial. What makes an empire a system is its autopoietic operation, i.e. the maintenance of centre-periphery relations, which as such is not changed by contacts with the environment.

Conclusion: *Modern* Empires on the Edge of Chaos

Giddens' distinction between different types of society as well as his integration of systems analysis remains a useful tool for Historical Sociology, including the study of empires. However, his understanding of systems as the sum of interacting parts is less helpful; in this respect, Luhmann's definition of systems in terms of autopoietic operation and of the system-environment distinction is superior. Drawing upon this "Luhmannized" Giddens has enabled us to see the continuity between the different cases of empire claiming suzerainty over Cyprus.

Thus, like all the other empires discussed here, the British Empire was a social system built upon centre-periphery operations, of which the siphoning-off of Cyprus's taxes for the benefit of foreign bondholders was just one of many examples. In other words, contrary to what Giddens (and Wallerstein) indicate, empires remained alive and well during the Modern period. At its heyday, Britain was not just the hegemon within the global political system but, at the same time, an imperial system in itself. Thus, whether one talks of the Assyrians, Ptolemaics, Ottomans or British, they all had in common that they can be characterized as imperial systems.

This seems to provide support for the article by Ferguson discussed at the beginning. As we have seen, Ferguson likewise uses the term empire in a systemic and, at the same time, transhistorical way. This enables him to state that the Americans should draw lessons from the Romans. However, there is a crucial difference between Ferguson's approach and the one used here.

Giddens considers empires as inter-societal systems; however, using Luhmann's understanding of systems, it is perhaps better to see empires as being structurally coupled with other social systems in their environment, i.e. the societies of their respective centres and peripheries. Now, in the case of all the empires discussed here *with the exception of the British Empire*, these societies had either tribal or class-divided character. In contrast, the British Empire consisted of tribal, class-divided and capitalist societies.

Capitalist societies generate resources that can be used for increased surveillance and military power.[63] A capitalist nation-state that is simultaneously the centre of an empire thus has a much bigger leverage over its peripheries. Indeed, the British managed to transform Cyprus to a degree and at a speed none of their imperial predecessor has been able to. At the same time, capitalist societies sponsor the emergence of nationalism,[64] which undermines imperial rule in the peripheries. A case in point is the pan-Hellenic *enosis* movement among the Greek Cypriots (as well as its Turkish Cypriot clone springing up later) that contributed to the termination of British rule in 1960. Indeed, compared with the Ptolemaics, Romans, Byzantines and Ottomans, the British ruled Cyprus for only a comparatively short time.

This shows that modern empires – not only the British, but also the contemporary American one – are more dynamic but also more fragile than pre-modern ones. In some respects, this only mirrors modern, capitalist societies as a whole. To give the last word to Luhmann: Contemporary systems are more complex than those earlier in history. However, this need not be seen in terms of progress; it simply means that the complexity of modern systems is of such an amount that they can easily break down.[65] The same goes for modern empires. They are more complex than their predecessors because they are structurally coupled with three, not just two, different types of society. Thus, Ferguson's diagnosis of 'empires on the edge of chaos' (the subtitle of his article) is much more relevant for modern empires than for pre-modern ones.

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[63] Giddens, *Nation-State,* op. cit. in note 7, pp. 172-197.
[64] Ibid., pp. 209-221.
[65] Niklas Luhmann, *Einführung in die Theorie der Gesellschaft* (1992-93) (Heidelberg: Carl-Auer-Systeme, 2005), pp. 193-194.