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Cyprus in British Parliamentary Debates in 1955: Violence, Negotiation and Colonial Narrative

Abstract

This article analyses the Cyprus debates in the British parliament in 1955 using methods of discourse analysis and shows the contradictions of colonial legitimation strategies. After the armed resistance of the EOKA on 1 April 1955, concepts such as 'terrorism', 'law and order', 'loyalty', and 'legitimate defense' became the focus of the security-oriented discourse, while demands for constitutional reform were either accepted with reservations or rejected. Based on 97 parliamentary debates, in particular those of 5 May and 5 December 1955, the study shows how the tension between the two was resolved. Using the debate of 5 December 1955, the study shows how the tension between the security and reform discourses persisted throughout the year and how sovereignty was redefined through an ethical discourse based on themes such as 'moral responsibility', 'civilizational duty', and 'geopolitical necessity'. As a result, 1955 was regarded as a significant milestone in the post-imperialist process, both from the point of view of the discursive consolidation of colonial administration and from the point of view of the establishment of the underlying grounds for the tougher policies of 1956.

Keywords: Cyprus, British Parliament, Colonial Discourse, EOKA, Security.

1955'te İngiliz Parlamento Tartışmalarında Kıbrıs: Şiddet, Müzakere ve Sömürgeci Anlatı

Öz

Bu makale, 1955 yılında İngiliz parlamentosunda Kıbrıs konusunda yapılan tartışmaları söylem analizi yöntemlerini kullanarak inceler ve sömürge meşrulaştırma stratejilerinin çelişkilerini ortaya koyar. 1 Nisan 1955'te EOKA'nın silahlı direnişinin ardından, 'terörizm', 'kanun ve düzen', 'sadakat' ve 'meşru savunma' gibi kavramlar güvenlik odaklı söylemin odak noktası haline gelirken, anayasa reformu talepleri ya çekincelerle kabul edildi ya da reddedildi. 97 parlamento tartışmasına, özellikle 5 Mayıs ve 5 Aralık 1955 tarihlerindeki tartışmalara dayanan çalışma, bu ikisi arasındaki gerilimin nasıl çözüldüğünü göstermektedir. Çalışma, 5 Aralık 1955 tarihli tartışmayı kullanarak, güvenlik ve reform söylemleri arasındaki gerilimin yıl boyunca nasıl sürdüğünü ve egemenliğin 'ahlaki sorumluluk', 'medeniyet görevi' ve 'jeopolitik gereklilik' gibi temalara dayanan etik bir söylem aracılığıyla nasıl yeniden tanımlandığını göstermektedir. Sonuç olarak 1955 yılı, hem sömürge yönetiminin söylemsel olarak sağlamaştırılması hem de 1956 yılındaki daha sert politikaların temellerinin atılması açısından emperyalizm sonrası süreçte önemli bir dönüm noktası olarak kabul edildi.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kıbrıs, İngiliz Parlamentosu, Kolonyal Söylem, EOKA, Güvenlik.

1. Introduction: The Year Violence Entered Political Discourse (1955)

The year 1955 marked the beginning of an irreversible period for Cyprus. The island had been under British rule since 1878 and officially became a British Crown Colony in 1925. During this period, Britain pursued an administrative approach that prioritised stability and loyalty to the British Crown over far-reaching structural reforms (Özmatyatlı & Özkul, 2013). The administration between 1878 and 1950 was characterised by cultural transformation initiatives and administrative interventions (Ioannides, 2018). By the mid-1950s, Enosis and calls for constitutional change indicated that the status quo was untenable (Kelling, 1990). However, the real turning point came with the armed struggle of the EOKA on 1 April 1955, which not only set the political balance in Cyprus on an irreversible path, but also triggered a review of colonial doctrine in British domestic policy. This date is considered a point of no return for the British colony of Cyprus and the beginning of a different political environment (Dodd, 2010; Gazioğlu, 1998; Gürel, 1985; Scarinzi, 2021; Sonyel, 1995; Xydis, 1967; Yorgancioğlu, 2020; Yorgancioğlu & Kıralp, 2019).

This organisation, which sought unification with Greece, was labelled 'terrorist' in official British discourse and 'heroic' in Greek national memory. This article does not assess the activities of the EOKA from an ethical or political perspective, but rather how these actions were portrayed in the British Parliament and how they functioned as part of the discourse that legitimised colonial rule. It is vivid that any action directed against civilians is terrorism. For a detailed examination of the organisation's strategic decisions, see Karyos (2021).

The main aim of this study is to analyse the discursive patterns of the debates on Cyprus in the British Parliament in 1955 and to show how colonial legitimation strategies, political positions and ideological ruptures were shaped. In particular, the beginning of the armed activities of the EOKA and the political reactions to them radically changed the tone and direction of the debates. In this context, the study will focus on the following research questions: "What issues were at the forefront of parliamentary debates on Cyprus in 1955? How was the discourse on violence, security and order constructed? How was the tension between demands for reform and negotiation and the priorities of security presented? And how did the various political parties and individual MPs position themselves discursively?"

The most important data set for answering these questions are the Hansard documents, the official records of the British Parliament. Over the course of 1955, the Cyprus question was discussed directly or indirectly in the House of Commons (96 sittings) and the House of Lords (one sitting) under a total of 97 session titles, resulting in a discourse of some 106,979 words (see Hansard, 1955 Parliamentary debates). This data shows not only a numerical density, but also the extent to which the issue has become a political priority. An increase of around 85 per cent compared to 1954 (see Hansard, 1954 Parliamentary debates) shows not only the growing importance of the topic, but also the increasing tension and escalation. Of course, the number of words is not meaningful in itself, but it is nevertheless a striking indicator. In addition, the topic has only recently been dealt with in an international context. In particular, the two major general debates of 5 May 1955 (Hansard, 5 May 1955 col 1910-1971) and 5 December 1955 (Hansard, 5 December 1955 col 32-156) (approx. 77% of the text) form the main axis of the analysis and carry the discursive weight of this study. The remaining 90 sessions were consulted during the research but are not included here as they do not contribute to the main narrative of the text.

In terms of its limitations, the study can be categorised into three categories. Hansard documents contain only official speeches. Direct access to extra-parliamentary debates is limited. Since the texts are transcribed, they cannot reflect extra-textual elements of communication. Since the focus is only on the year 1955, discourse continuities or breaks only partially refer to the contexts of 1954 and 1956. Statements from newspapers and other media on the Cyprus question are not included. However, the role of these sources, especially in the formation of public opinion, could be analysed comparatively in another study (see Novo, 2010).

In this study, the methods of critical discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis were favoured. Discourse analysis enables a deeper understanding by examining not only what is said, but also the context, the actors, the ideological codes and the forms of representation in which these discourses are produced (Fairclough, 2001). In this way, it becomes clear how discourses reflect and reproduce social structures. In this context, colonial discourse theory also forms the theoretical background of the study. Colonial discourse theory examines the legitimisation of colonial power through ideological codes such as the “civilising mission”, “the inadequacy of the indigenous population” or “external threats” in texts and speeches (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988). This approach is instructive in understanding how issues such as security, loyalty and sovereignty are constructed and how dissenting claims are delegitimised. One of the fundamental components of our analysis is the concept of intertextuality. Political discourses often refer to previous texts, cultural codes or historical events. As Kitaeva and Ozerova (2019) emphasise, conducting an intertextuality analysis allows us to decode these implicit or explicit references and thus gain a more comprehensive understanding of the ideological meaning of the discourse. In this analysis of the Hansard documents, we focussed on specific themes, word frequencies, conceptual clusters and differences in discourse between the parties.

Specifically, the following technical steps were applied. Discussions under 97 headings were categorised thematically. Key terms such as “security”, “terrorism”, “loyalty”, “sovereignty”, “reform”, “self-determination”, “cooperation”, “threat”, “foreign intervention” were scanned. The minutes of the two busiest plenary sessions of 5 May and 5 December 1955 were analysed in detail. The differences in discourse between parties, individual MPs and government representatives were analysed. This method reveals not only the superficial content of the discourse, but also the underlying power relations, colonial ideas and political positions (Anderson, 1993; van Dijk, 2001).

2. The Reorganisation of the Parliamentary Agenda in 1955: Institutional Considerations on the Crisis

The year 1955 is a period in which the debates on Cyprus in the British Parliament entered a new phase, not only quantitatively but also discursively. The sharp increase in the volume of debates compared to 1954 is not only an indication of the reactions to the developments in the colony, but also of the importance that the Cyprus question was acquiring in British domestic politics. On 1 April 1955, the outbreak of violence by the EOKA radically changed the framework of parliamentary debate and led to the rapid emergence of a security-centred discourse. Terms such as “terrorism”, “law and order” and “public order” are now used alongside “reform”, “constitution” and “self-government”. Cyprus was thus redefined not only as a colony, but also as an “extremely

important strategic position”¹ in which security had to be guaranteed. In this context, the parliamentary speeches provide not only a transmission of information but also strong indicators of how colonial authority was redefined and legitimised in the face of crisis (French, 2015; Ker-Lindsay, 2011).

2.1. Discursive Positions of the May and December Sessions

The two comprehensive plenary sessions held in 1955 on the Cyprus question — 5 May and 5 December 1955 — are important discursive moments, both in terms of their content and the political atmosphere. The meeting of 5 May 1955 (Hansard, 05 May 1955) took place immediately after the armed actions of the EOKA, i.e. under the impression of the first shock, and discourses such as “to combat terrorism”, “law and order” and “agitation” were particularly present. In this session, the government’s main argument was that the suppression of violence, the restoration of authority and the transition to civilian rule were only possible if security conditions were met.

In contrast, the meeting of 5 December 1955 (Hansard, 05 December 1955) took place after a period of institutionalisation of security measures and the extension of the instruments of the state of emergency. What is special about this session is that, despite the intensification of the security discourse, constitutional reforms, the participation of the local population and efforts to respond to international pressure were also discussed. In this context, the reform discourse was again on the agenda, but this time it was presented as a conditional welfare state: It was emphasised that reforms would be possible once the violence ended and the population showed a ‘responsible attitude’.

When these two sessions are analysed together, it becomes clear that the Cyprus question was not dealt with exclusively on the security axis throughout 1955, but that the search for reforms became visible from time to time in a framework shaped by the security discourse. During the Cyprus debates of 1955, there was constant tension between security and reform rhetoric. The government’s prioritisation of security was often criticised by the opposition parties. In particular, calls by members of the Labour Party to return to the constitutional process were generally rejected as ‘ill-timed’ or ‘naively optimistic’.

As a result, the Cyprus debates of 1955 can be seen as an ideological battleground where a security-centred approach dominated, but which did not completely ignore the possibilities of negotiation and reform.

2.2. Limited Interventions from the House of Lords

The only session of the House of Lords on Cyprus in 1955, which began on 6 April 1955 (Hansard, 06 April 1955) with a question from the Earl of Listowel, assesses the discursive nature of the period in response to the armed movement started shortly before by the EOKA just as coolly as in 1954. The attacks, described in Lord Lloyd’s statement as “malicious activities”, were presented as attempts to undermine “law and order”. At the same time, it was emphasised that the

¹ These words said by a Conservative MP Sir Charles Mott-Radclyffe: “*Cyprus occupies an extremely important strategic position for N.A.T.O. in the Eastern Mediterranean. [...] Although [...] Members opposite have consistently talked about Cyprus as a base, it is not so much a base as a headquarters. But it is in an extremely important strategic position, and, other considerations apart, I cannot imagine a worse moment than the present, when N.A.T.O. is being built up, for us to become involved in a discussion about the sovereignty in Cyprus.*” (UK, Hansard, HC Deb 05 May 1955 vol. 540 c1946).

constitutional proposal was open to 'bona fide parties', but this statement also implied that reform was presented as a privilege rather than a right. The discourse here was constructed within a paternalistic framework, emphasising that reform could only take place if violence ceased and the conditions for cooperation were created. In the lower house, such discourses were more open and strident, and the EOKA was portrayed not only as a 'local threat' but also as an extension of communism, as publications from Athens and as external actors.

3. In the Shadow of Violence: The Rise of the Security Discourse

In 1955, with the violent actions of the EOKA, the Cyprus debate took a new direction in British parliamentary discourse. Concepts of security, order and counter-terrorism became the most important means of restoring the legitimacy of colonial rule. The attacks perpetrated by the EOKA on 1 April 1955 reinforced the dominance of language associated with violence, particularly in the general debates in May and December. The parliamentary discourse expressed not only a concern for security but also a reaction to the fact that colonial authority over Cyprus had been undermined.

3.1. EOKA and Resistance on the Parliamentary Agenda

Throughout 1955, the armed resistance of the EOKA in Cyprus was mainly labelled as "terrorism" in debates in the British Parliament. In particular, the simultaneous bombings of 1 April 1955 were discussed at length both in the House of Commons and in a single debate in the House of Lords (Hansard, 06 April 1955). Lord Lloyd's detailed report for this session dealt not only with the technical details of the acts of sabotage perpetrated by EOKA and the material damage caused, but also with the frightening effect of the organisation on the population. The events were described by Lord Lloyd as "wicked and malicious activities", "attempted to disrupt in this way public order in Cyprus" (Hansard, 06 April 1955, col 320), while by the Earl of Listowel as "inexcusable acts of violence" (Hansard, 06 April 1955, col 321).

According to Lord Lloyd, these attacks were interpreted not only as damage to property but also as rebellion against the foundations of colonial authority. Responsibility for the attacks was explicitly attributed to a secret organisation called the "National Organisation of the Cypriot Struggle" (EOKA), which was described as an ideological apparatus that both "recruited students" and 'provoked the population with illegal publications and leaflets'.

EOKA's actions were not even defended by the opposition parties, but some MPs attributed the emergence of the organisation to the deprivation of constitutional rights and the lack of a political solution. In this way, the discursive representation of resistance became not only security-orientated, but also an element that revealed the colonial administration's crisis of legitimacy.

3.2. Security Forces and the Rhetoric of the State of Emergency

The capacity of the security forces and the introduction of extraordinary powers was one of the issues most emphasised in the parliamentary debates. The attacks, which intensified from October onwards, led to the declaration of an official state of emergency on 26 November 1955 (Hansard, 28 November 1955 col 1932-5). This state, declared under the provisions of the "*Emergency Powers Orders in Council*", led to wide-reaching powers for the Governor and the extension of law enforcement powers. Practises such as curfews, collective punishment and detention without trial were legitimised in order to restore colonial order. These practises were also criticised in

parliament, with opposition parties in particular warning that they could bring the population closer to the EOKA.

3.3. Prioritising Security Over Democratic Demands

Throughout 1955, the Cyprus debates in the British Parliament created a political framework in which security concerns, rather than democratic demands for rights, took centre stage. In this context, the ‘security first’ paradigm was both explicitly and implicitly defended by the government, and expectations of constitutional reform were either postponed or invalidated by attaching security conditions to them. This situation can be understood both as an attempt to respond to the colonial administration’s crisis of legitimacy and as a discursive order that led to the criminalisation of popular demands for political participation.

For example, in the debate of 5 May 1955, Secretary of State for the Colonies Lennox-Boyd argued that security threats were an obstacle to reform, stating that “the Cypriot people must join with us in taking the first steps towards managing their own affairs” (Hansard, 05 May 1955 col 1997). Statements such as

“in our belief, our survival, Greece’s survival, the survival of Turkey and the N.A.T.O. nations and, indeed, the free world depend; to maintain law and order and promote economic advance; we have the will and the means to do all those things and we also want orderly constitutional development” (Hansard, 05 May 1955 col 1992),

made at the same meeting, show that democratic processes are seen as a conditional privilege and not a matter of course. In this approach, constitutional reform is not seen as a right but as a reward for stability.

At the plenary session of 5 December 1955, initiatives to extend the measures for security reasons and to legitimise these measures more comprehensively were explained. A frequent argument in the discussions was that political demands such as those for constitutional reform could not be achieved only after the violence had ended, but by strengthen the relevant actors against the violence. Although Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Harold Macmillan did not emphasise security as a priority in his opening speech, he defined the feasibility of reform as conditional – “*some time, and in certain conditions*” – and stated that the establishment of self-government in Cyprus was a priority. This rhetoric suggests that self-government is not presented as a fundamental right, but as a privilege granted in return for certain norms of behaviour.

Contributions from the Conservative Party in particular emphasised that cooperation could be achieved with loyal and reasonable elements rather than direct representation of the people. This points to a political filtering process in which groups that are in harmony with the government gain a ‘voice’ rather than the people as a whole becoming a political subject. For example, Captain Waterhouse explicitly rejected self-determination, stating that such demands under the current conditions of unrest were a dangerous tendency that would tear the empire apart;

“We are prepared for you to have your self-determination. You may go out of the British Empire, you may go out of N.A.T.O. Do what you like and go where you will.? [...] I am afraid that to give self-determination will solve nothing” (Hansard, 05 December 1955 col 57).

Voices from opposition ranks directly criticised this conditioning. In particular, in the face of the riots, Labour’s Samuel Silverman asked, “*A very poor service indeed to democracy all over the*

world by these constant endeavours to make people believe, what is certainly not true, that the Communists are the only supporters of good causes all over the world?" (Hansard, 09 March 1955 col 436-74) John Dugdale of the Labour Party was quite harsh when he said that self-determination would never be granted: "In fact the Government do not apparently intend to grant self-determination, except under conditions which are unspecified, at a time which is unspecified; and we think that, in fact, the Government do not intend to grant self-determination at all" (Hansard, 05 December 1955 col 64). In his view, offering such limited, selective, and even ambiguous democratic representation is in clear contradiction with the United Kingdom's foreign policy values.

As a result, the security-oriented discourse that prevailed in 1955 aimed not only to curb violence, but also to limit the visibility of the people as a political subject. Democratic reforms were presented as privileges that could only be considered on the condition that security was guaranteed and that there were actors who were willing to co-operate and had proven their loyalty. Within this framework, the "security first" approach became the colonial administration's most effective rhetorical tool for solving its legitimisation problems. Thus, the demands of the population were reduced from universal rights to a limited possibility that depended on the approval of the central authority.

4. The Unnegotiable Crisis: Reform and Persistence

During these discussions, the government frequently repeated its promises of reform, but these were usually linked to security conditions, which repeatedly postponed the possibility of political progress. Opposition parties criticised this approach, and argued that reforms should be seen as a fundamental right and not a favour. However, the prevailing discourse limited the scope of reforms by excluding non-loyal actors. At the same time, the positions of external actors such as Greece and Turkey were frequently discussed in parliament and the influence of these countries on Cyprus was labelled with the notion of security and order. The demand for Enosis was presented either as a dangerous agitation or as an outdated ideal; its legitimacy was questioned by linking it to issues such as the church, communism and nationalism. All these elements deepened the discursive fissures and diplomatic dilemmas surrounding the Cyprus question in both British domestic and foreign policy.

4.1. Colonial Constitutional Initiatives and Reactions

Throughout 1955, constitutional reform efforts in Cyprus were essentially based on a colonial administrative logic and involved limited and conditional offers in response to popular demands for self-government. Government officials promoted a new constitutional settlement, referring to the 1948 constitutional proposal, which they claimed had remained 'unanswered' for six years. These efforts were not presented as reforms, but rather as a means of restoring legitimacy and security to the administration. At the meeting on 5 December 1955, Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan recognised the right to self-determination in principle, but stated that it could only be implemented in the future under "*certain conditions*" (Hansard, 05 December 1955 col 41). The government's basic thesis was that there should first be "*self-government*" and then a possible process of "*self-determination*".

This approach was criticised in particular by James Griffiths and John Dugdale of the Labour Party. Griffiths considers the failure to consider Makarios' three-point proposal (recognition of self-government, drafting of a constitution and negotiations on self-determination) to be a strategic

mistake (Hansard, 05 December 1955 col 43-48). Dugdale interpreted the transfer of the governorship to a soldier and the enactment of emergency laws as a suspension of the democratic process, adding, “The Regulations have done anything so far to quieten conditions in Cyprus. In fact, they are quite clearly a confession of failure to carry out the democratic principles” (Hansard, 05 December 1955 col 66).

The impact of cultural and political relations with Greece on the Greek Cypriots is undeniable. However, the dominant discourse in the British parliament has gone beyond presenting these links as an objective reality and has framed them in a way that undermines the local legitimacy of the political claims. By defining the demands as “coming from outside”, they have been portrayed as illegitimate, artificial and dangerous. This is a typical strategy of colonial discourse to suppress the subjectivisation of people.

4.2. Discursive Representation of Greece and Turkey

Greece and Turkey were the main protagonists in the parliamentary debates and emphasised that the Cyprus question was not only a question of colonial rule but also an international question. While Greece insisted on its right to determine its own future with its demand for Enosis, Turkey insisted that the status of the island should not change. Foreign Minister Macmillan emphasised his government’s role in maintaining balance on this issue.

However, Conservative MPs in the House of Commons accused Greece of fuelling the conflict through “subversive broadcasts”, while Turkey was mostly portrayed as a “loyal ally”. This is a clear indication of how British foreign policy was framed within the NATO balances of the time. Furthermore, many speakers often cited Turkey’s willingness to protect the rights of the Turkish minority on the island as an argument against Enosis. On one occasion, Richard Crossman asked under cross-examination, “Are there no Turkish broadcasting?” to which Lennox-Boyd replied, “Certainly not ones that would incite anyone to riot or violence” (Hansard, 05 May 1955 col 1992).

4.3. Delegitimisation of Enosis: Church, Communism and External Agitation

The demand for Enosis was presented by the government not only as a political demand, but also as a threat emanating from religious, ideological and external actors. In particular, the influence of Makarios was presented not only as religious but also as political leadership, which increased both popular support and the concern of British officials. Colonial Secretary Henry Hopkinson argued that the intertwining of church and politics was at odds with democratic norms and that this situation was an obstacle to terrorism in Cyprus: “I was referring to acts of terrorism in the island. [...] But I do regret that the leaders of the Church have not so far seen fit to express abhorrence at those acts” (Hansard, 05 May 1955 col 1928).

The Enosis movement was sometimes associated with communist influences, which was used to question the legitimacy of the movement and to portray it as a dangerous agitation in the context of the Cold War. Radio broadcasts from Athens were seen as a concrete example of “foreign propaganda”, and it was claimed that these broadcasts directly incited the population to revolt. Harold Macmillan explicitly described this as “*terrorist propaganda*” (Hansard, 13 July 1955 col 1910-11). This rhetoric was in line with the classic colonial strategy of portraying the demands of the population as the product of external forces.

The discourse on the illegitimacy of Enosis can be interpreted not only with regard to the internal dynamics in Cyprus, but also with regard to the domestic political context in Greece in the mid-

1950s. During this period, the government under Prime Minister Alexandros Papagos attempted to orientate its foreign policy towards the Western alliance after joining NATO in 1952, while at the same time achieving domestic stability (Clogg, 2021). While maintaining diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom was high on the list of strategic priorities during the Cold War, the internationalisation of the Cyprus issue was viewed differently by the domestic public and opposition parties (Stearns, 1993). This context facilitated the portrayal of the Enosis demand in British parliamentary discourse as an ‘external’ project that ‘clashes with geopolitical interests’, thus reinforcing the foreign policy dimension of colonial legitimisation strategies.

4.4. Tension in Britain’s Diplomatic Strategies

The main tension in British Cyprus policy was, on the one hand, the desire to maintain a military presence on the island to protect geopolitical interests and, on the other, the need to at least partially fulfil the expectations of the international community regarding self-determination. The government therefore pursued a dual strategy: it sought to reduce internal tensions through ‘limited reforms’, while at the same time emphatically declaring that it would not give up sovereignty. With this in mind, Hopkinson responded very clearly—and repeatedly—to these questions: “I made it perfectly clear, and they will realise that. As for the position of sovereignty - the position of no intention to transfer sovereignty—that was what I reaffirmed in the statement of 28th July” (Hansard, 05 May 1955 col 1930).

Strategic bases were central to Britain’s long-term interests in the region, and the reform discourse was often limited to these military interests. At the meeting on 5 December 1955, many speakers emphasised the need for Cyprus to be an alternative base for the withdrawal of British forces from Suez. In this context, the demands of the population were brushed aside in the name of ‘strategic necessity’ and in some cases even suppressed altogether. In this context, Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan again emphasised: “nevertheless, as I said at the conference and I repeat today, difficulties do arise over its application (principle of self-determination). Exceptions must be made in view of geographical, traditional, historic or strategic consideration” (Hansard, 05 December 1955 col 35).

5. Maintenance of Colonial Authority: Legislation, Language and Ideology

The year 1955 can be characterised as a period in which the British administration sought to consolidate its sovereignty over Cyprus not only through security measures, but also through legal, discursive and ideological means. At the centre of these efforts was the attempt to underpin the claim to legitimacy by referring to the violent environment, to morally and politically condemn the resistance of the population and to present their demands as a threat to state authority. These strategies are discussed in more detail in the following sub-chapters.

5.1. Seeking Legitimacy Through the Discourse of ‘Law and Order’

The rhetorical framework of the security operations directed at Cyprus in 1955 was based on the maintenance of “law and order”. The maintenance of order was first expressed in 1955 at the 5 May meeting by Lennox-Boyd, who stated: “[w]e have [...] a number of duties which it is our intention to fulfill; [...] to maintain law and order and promote economic advance” (Hansard, 05 May 1955 col 1991-2), reflecting the more local perspective of the colonial administration, but also clearly showing that it based its legitimacy vis-à-vis force on this dual concept. The frequent repetition of the term ‘law and order’ in the parliamentary minutes is not only an indication of

security, but also of the construction of a normative framework for the administration. While the opposition used the term only three times (Labour disapproved of the measures and questioned their cost, the Liberals drew a comparison with Ireland), the term was used exclusively by Conservative MPs and ministers. In this usage, the political demands of the people are presented as a destabilising threat, while the measures of the state are presented as necessary and legally binding. By the last quarter of 1955, however, the term had taken on an international character. Hugh Fraser had clearly defined the local and international dimensions of the issue. At the local level, he said:

“We must say to the people in Cyprus, as I have said to the Archbishop, that they must regard this as a question of what is to precede the ultimate objective. Democracy must be the means used in the island and it must be available to the large number of people who are on the side of law and order but who, at the moment, are terrified to speak because of the terrorists, because of the power of such Left-Wing organisations as the Communists and of the Nationalists such as Eoka” (Hansard, HC December 1955, col 122).

On an international level, he turned against the Labour Party and said:

“I disagree with those hon. Members who say that the importance of the island as a base is negligible, because I think it is extremely important to N.A.T.O. and to the Baghdad Pact. But to talk of it merely as a N.A.T.O. base to support the maintenance of law and order simply in N.A.T.O. countries is not correct, because it is also a base of great importance for the support of the Baghdad Powers and of our policy of the rule of law and order in the Middle East in general” (Hansard, 05 December 1955, col 119).

5.2 Development Rhetoric: Building Legitimacy through Prosperity

In 1955, many speeches in the House of Commons claimed that social services and investment in development had been increased. However, these technical discussions also provided a rhetorical platform for the reproduction of colonial legitimacy. Expressions such as ‘social improvements’, ‘social services’, ‘education’, and ‘infrastructure projects’ were directly linked to meeting the needs of the Cypriot population rather than being presented as measures to ensure security and order. This framework was made clear, for example, in the debate of 9 March 1955 entitled “Social Improvement Measures”, in which Colonial Secretary Henry Hopkinson, on behalf of the Government, described the measures as follows:

“Measures of social improvement under consideration or in hand include a social insurance scheme, legislation covering factories and women’s employment, and a Children’s Bill. Improvements in the health services include the completion of two new hospitals and the extension of one, the building of a new mental hospital, the formation of a district nursing service for the whole island, and a vaccination campaign against T.B. A rehabilitation centre for disabled persons is to be established and three new children’s homes opened. Improvements in education include a new teachers’ training college and extension of technical education” (Hansard, 09 March 1955 col 436).

In contrast, Stephen Swingler of the Opposition asked in an accusatory tone, “Is he aware that certain measures are being withheld as bargaining counters in the constitutional negotiations?”

The minister finally replied, “There is no question of measures being held up as bargaining counters” (Hansard, 09 March 1955 col 436).

This developmental rhetoric was used to mitigate the repressive practises of colonial rule while giving the impression that the ‘civilising mission’ would continue. Welfare is coded here as an instrument to improve people’s quality of life on the one hand and to ensure political stability and public order on the other. Although the production of services is not a prerequisite for political participation, it is presented as a condition for a cooperative order that strengthens the legitimacy of the colonial administration.

5.3. Moral Obligation and Paternalistic Discourse: The Ethical Presentation of Sovereignty

In the parliamentary debates of 1955, one of the most striking lines of discourse was the presentation of British sovereignty over Cyprus not only as a legal right or strategic necessity, but also as an inescapable duty in the context of historical and regional responsibility. The importance of Cyprus for the stability of the Middle East, the prevention of the spread of communism, the security of British air routes and as a ‘headquarters’ within NATO and the Baghdad Pact, as set out by Lennox-Boyd, the Minister for the Colonies, in his long speech at the meeting of 5 May 1955, made the presence on the island a ‘historic responsibility’, a ‘defence necessity’ and a ‘duty to promote regional harmony’ rather than a mere matter of interest. This narrative was nothing more than an attempt to justify on rational and ethical grounds the colonial presence that was frequently discussed in parliamentary debates throughout the year (see Hansard, Parliamentary Debates 1955).

One of the most striking statements made by government representatives in the 1955 parliamentary debates was that British sovereignty over Cyprus was not just a legal or strategic issue, but also a historical and regional responsibility. The importance of Cyprus for the stability of the Middle East, the prevention of the spread of communism, the security of British air routes and as a ‘headquarters’ within NATO and the Baghdad Pact, as set out by Lennox-Boyd, Minister for the Colonies, in his long speech to the Assembly on 5 May 1955, made presence on the island a ‘responsibility imposed by history’, a ‘necessity of defence’ and a ‘duty to promote regional harmony’ rather than a mere matter of interest (Hansard, 05 May 1955). This narrative is a clear example of Britain’s attempt to legitimise its colonial presence on rational and ethical grounds.

Within this framework, Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan justified sovereignty over Cyprus in his speech at the meeting of 5 December 1955 not only on the basis of geopolitical interests, but also on the basis of a moral and historical obligation. Macmillan made the following statement:

“It would be very easy to win the sympathy and even the support of unthinking people, were we to make a gesture of abdication in conformity with a vague feeling of sentiment. But I must warn the House that were we to do so the consequences would be grave and even disastrous. We should be abdicating our duty not only to ourselves, but to the Greek as well as to the Turkish people” (Hansard, 05 December 1955, col 43).

Above all, this statement emphasises that Britain’s colonial presence in Cyprus is not only linked to its own interests, but also to its duty to protect peace between the two communities on the island and the regional order. Thus, Britain as ruler redefined its coercive and oppressive

measures as a kind of 'moral obligation' and 'historical sacrifice'. Sovereignty was constructed as a heavy responsibility rather than a privilege.

A similar discursive structure could also be observed in connection with welfare policy. In many declarations from 1955, the development programmes, social investments and educational measures carried out in Cyprus were not presented as "aid" but as the fulfilment of a 'duty'. The colonial administration departed from the classical expectation of 'gratitude' and preferred to use a paternalistic language of responsibility that emphasised the welfare of the population. This was coded as a natural obligation of the ruler rather than an exchange of 'thanks' with the people, and the people were presented as a mass of population to be protected rather than a political subject. Thus, instead of 'loyalty', the 'legitimacy of protection' was emphasised, and the British position on Cyprus was reconstructed not only in the context of a power relationship, but also in the context of ethical representation.

Throughout 1955, the limited presence of the Liberal Party in the discussions on Cyprus was due not only to ideological preferences, but also to the party's weak representation in parliament and its general political ineffectiveness. While the debates during this period were dominated by the Conservative and Labour opposition, the Liberal Party's contributions often remained indirect or symbolic.

5.4. No Compromise on Sovereignty: Updating the Hopkinson Doctrine

In 1954, the statement by Henry Hopkinson, Minister for the Colonies, in the House of Commons that "some territories which cannot expect to be (fully independent)" was an indication of a hardening of the British colonial stance and a clear demarcation from the principle of self-determination. The parliamentary debates of 1955 show that this "Hopkinson Doctrine" was both continued and discursively updated in a more nuanced form. At the centre of this update was the retention of self-determination as a distant and vague goal and, instead, the promotion of the concept of self-government.

This approach was most evident in Foreign Secretary Harold Macmillan's speech at the meeting of 5 December 1955, in which Macmillan avoided a direct response to the demand for self-determination and instead stated that Britain was prepared to establish a form of 'liberal self-government' on the island. The following remarks explain the discursive framework of this intention:

"Since we all agree about one thing—self-government—let us get on with self-government. The British are anxious, the whole British Government are sincerely anxious, to bring about self-government in the island. We are not happy, of course, about direct government; it does not suit our present policies; it is out of tune with the dominant theme today and we should like to see genuine self-government of a liberal kind exercising the maximum possible authority" (Hansard, 05 December 1955, col 38).

With these words, Macmillan replaces the ideal of self-determination with the discourse of self-government and positions it as a transitional strategy for the continuation of colonial authority. All proposals for constitutional reform set out the framework and limits of local participation, with state control at the centre. This implies the creation of controllable autonomy and the non-recognition of the political will of the population.

In the same session, Alan Lennox-Boyd took a similar view, stating that reforms are only possible with the participation of “reasonable sectors”. This approach reinforced the view that self-determination was not a right but a privilege that could be granted on condition of the colony’s security and loyalty. Hopkinson’s 1954 catalogue of principles was thus taken up again in 1955 in a more nuanced discourse, and the rigid position on the transfer of sovereignty was retained.

6. Positions of Political Parties through Parliamentary Discourse

In 1955, the Cyprus question became not only a foreign policy issue in British domestic politics but also an area in which the ideological differences between the various political parties became clear. In particular, the extensive general debates on 5 May and 5 December clearly demonstrated the differences in approach to the Cyprus question between the Conservative Party, the Labour Party, and the Liberal Party. This section analyses the rhetorical framework of each party based on their responses to colonial rule, reform demands, and security policy.

6.1. The Conservative Party: Hardness, Security and Sovereignty

The ruling Conservative Party approached the Cyprus question with caution, strategic necessity and absolute sovereignty. Lennox-Boyd’s speech at the meeting on 5 May 1955 formed the basis for this discourse. The importance of Cyprus for security in the Middle East, the NATO alliance, defence against Soviet expansionism and air transport was emphasised and the British presence was presented as a ‘geopolitical necessity’. In this context, the concept of self-government was supported, but the right to self-determination was defined only as a long-term and uncertain possibility, with the process made dependent on the establishment of self-government.

“The importance of Cyprus depends on the importance of the Middle East as a whole in our world-wide strategy. I do not think that this can be denied. The Middle East is the land bridge between Europe, Asia and Africa, the centre of the Moslem world and the keystone of our defence against Communist infiltration into Africa and an essential link in our chain of strategic and military bases. It is essential that a power vacuum should not be allowed to build up on the southern flank of Turkey. The defence of this area in war is vital in order that this flank should not be turned. It is interesting, as my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor reminded the House, to note that in 1878 the Sultan of Turkey leased Cyprus to Her Majesty’s Government. This was done to assist collective defence against Russia” (Hansard, 05 May 1955 col 1993).

As Harold Macmillan explained in his speech on 5 December 1955, the government’s position is to promote self-government while preserving sovereignty and defence rights. Macmillan summarised this approach in the following words:

“Since we all agree about one thing—self-government—let us get on with self-government. The British are anxious, the whole British Government are sincerely anxious, to bring about self-government in the island. We are not happy, of course, about direct government; it does not suit our present policies; it is out of tune with the dominant theme today and we should like to see genuine self-government of a liberal kind exercising the maximum possible authority. That is what we want.

To the Greeks we said, ‘You surely cannot be against self-government. You yourselves admit that it is the essential preliminary to exercising the right of self-determination which you claim.’ To the Turks we said, ‘Well, we recognise that you are worried about

self-government in view of the large Turkish minority, but we can look after that; we can make sure that proper safeguards are arranged. After all, this problem is not one peculiar to Cyprus. It has emerged and been dealt with in other parts of the world” (Hansard, 05 December 1955, col 38-39).

This explanation made reforms dependent on certain conditions and actors and defined self-government as a conditional privilege, while security-oriented policies were legitimised on moral and strategic grounds.

6.2. Labour Party: Criticism, Reform and Limited Support

The opposition Labour Party took a more conciliatory and reformist approach to the Cyprus question. Figures such as James Griffiths and John Dugdale criticised the government’s hard line and called in particular for an evaluation of Makarios’ three-stage proposal.

“(1) Recognition by the British Government of the right of the Cyprus people to self-determination constitutes the indispensable basis for the solution of the Cyprus question.

(2) After this official recognition, the Archbishop would be willing to cooperate with the British Government in framing a constitution of self-government and putting it into immediate operation.

(3) The time of the application of the principle of self-determination should constitute a subject for discussion between the British Government and the representatives of the Cyprus people, who will be elected on the basis of the constitution” (Hansard, 16 November 1955 col 41-42).

The Labour Party has supported the idea of self-determination in theory, but instead of its immediate implementation, it has proposed a transitional process of peaceful negotiations and representative constitutional reform. With this in mind, Griffiths clarified the issue on behalf of his party: “I understand that Archbishop Makarios has put forward a proposal that he would be willing to accept five years. If we can make a settlement on the basis of five years, I would accept it” (Hansard, 05 December 1955, col 50).

Party representatives argued that the security of the military bases could only be maintained with public support. Reginald Paget, for example, commented on this issue as follows: “To try to make a base where it is necessary to hold a position against a hostile population is, in my submission, an act of strategic insanity” (Hansard, 05 May 1955 col 1941) while John Dugdale argued that Cyprus was not a suitable location for a base: “Why is it not intended to make Cyprus such a big base? It is because Cyprus is not a suitable place to have as a base,” (Hansard, 05 December 1955, col 62) arguing that Cyprus was the wrong place and stated that the violence could only be overcome if the demands were understood. Referring to the government’s previous mistakes, Paget warned that “it will become more and more difficult to settle this situation the longer it continues” (Hansard, 05 December 1955, col 124) and recommended engaging in dialogue with the population.

6.3. Liberal Party: Uncertain Position, Emphasis on Human Rights and the Rule of Law

Due to the limited number of MPs in Parliament in 1955, the Liberal Party rarely participated in debates on the Cyprus problem, but did not hesitate to engage in a discourse on the principled

liberal issues of freedom of expression, human rights and the rule of law. In his speech to parliament on 5 December, party leader Clement Davies stated that the neglect of the past and the lack of clarification had led to the current crisis and expressed his opposition to the referendum policy as follows:

“When I received a visit from the Archbishop, I told him plainly that we, as Liberals, did not believe in policy by plebiscite. That is not the way to carry out democratic rule. That is the way to mob rule” (Hansard, 05 December 1955, col 90-91).

Davies argued that the government’s proposal for a new constitution was an important and noteworthy step, but that a clear timetable was needed in Cyprus so that Cypriots could determine their own future. “We will help you. We will guide you [...] the power shall be in your hands to choose your own fate,” (Hansard, 05 December 1955, col 92) reads the roadmap, which is based on both liberal democratic values and inter-national legitimacy. In response to Turkey’s legal and geopolitical objections, he also recalled that the UK retains sovereignty over Cyprus under the Treaty of Lausanne (Hansard, 05 December 1955, col 92-93).

Other Liberal MPs, such as Jo Grimond, argued that the government’s tight security measures served to stifle popular demands by exaggerating the communist threat and that delaying democratic initiatives paved the way for such radical movements (Hansard, 09 March 1955 col 437). The Liberal Party thus represented a value-orientated and reformist line that could contradict itself.

7. Conclusion: The Threshold of Transformation of Colonial Relations in 1955

The year 1955 was an important turning point for the Cyprus debates in the House of Commons and signalled change in many ways. Above all, it signalled a period of transition, recognising that the colonial relations could no longer be maintained within the traditional administrative framework, while attempting to disguise this realisation through London’s complex and elaborate foreign policy craft. Over the course of the year, debates - most notably in two comprehensive sessions on 5 May and 5 December 1955 - set the course for a new colonial discourse centred on security, sovereignty, reform and international responsibility. The most important features of this change are analysed in the following sub-chapters.

7.1. The Hardening of Discourse in the Face of Violence

The armed actions of the EOKA on 1 April 1955 led to a hardening not only of security-oriented measures in the British Parliament, but also of the discourse that legitimised these measures. Terms such as “terrorism”, “law and order” and “illegal agitation” came to the fore at the discursive level over the course of the year and laid the foundations for the criminalisation of demands in the colony. The speeches of Lord Lloyd and Lennox-Boyd in particular show that violence was presented not only as a physical threat, but also as a moral and political one.

This harsher rhetoric emphasised not only the need for law enforcement, but also a more ideological approach to violence by the government. Measures such as the imposition of a state of emergency, censorship and mass arrests² were presented in parliament as “the “state’s “right

² Such mass measures were generally justified not only on security grounds, but also as a strategy of ‘preventive hegemony’ to prevent the public from sympathising with the organisation. See Karyos (2021), Novo (2010).

to self-defence”, and this position maintained its rhetorical superiority throughout the year, despite criticism from the opposition.

In parliament, the extraordinary measures against the EOKA – mass arrests, censorship and extrajudicial detentions – were justified with the ‘maintenance of ‘order’ and ‘defence against the threat of terrorism’. However, these measures carried an ideological shadow that went beyond security and aimed to suppress the potential of the resistance to engage with the public. Some opposition spokespersons explicitly stated that these methods could backfire and increase the legitimacy of the EOKA in the eyes of the public. At this point, in a classic example of colonial discourse, the people were presented as a ‘manipulable’ mass, while the organisation was portrayed as an ‘agent of provocative external forces.’ In this context, security measures functioned not only as a physical but also as a discursive means of restriction.

The “security first” rhetoric that was used in Cyprus in 1955 was actually a familiar scenario that Britain had already staged elsewhere. In the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya (1952–1960), mass arrests, resettlement camps and the imposition of martial law were justified by portraying the population as a ‘potential threat’. In Malaya (1948–1960), a similar approach was taken against the communist insurgency; political reforms could only be considered once order was fully established. Despite the differences in ideological opponents, geography and conditions, the methods and rhetoric were strikingly similar. From this perspective, the emphasis on security in Cyprus was not an exception but a recurring administrative reflex in the crises of the late period of the British Empire.

7.2 The Intertwining of Reform and Rejection

The year 1955 is one of the periods in which the promise of reform on the one hand and the concept of sovereignty on the other are closely aligned, and the tension is now most evident from the theoretical level to the practical sphere. Although the government emphasised in almost every meeting that it was not backing away from its reform promises, it stressed that self-governance and reform proposals were only possible with the guarantee of security and the presence of loyal actors, making the reform discourse visible in theory but only to a limited extent in practise.

Even Makarios’ three-stage plan was not taken seriously by the government; the right to self-determination was postponed to an uncertain future. The opposition parties, especially the Labour Party, repeatedly pointed out this discursive contradiction, but their demands to put the reform on the agenda were rejected by the government as “outdated” and “dangerous”. 1955 was therefore a time in which the reform was functionalised not only as a political but also as an ideological instrument.

7.3 The Road from 1955 to 1956: The Disintegration of an Empire

The year 1955 marks a symbolic turning point in the process of the loss of the colonies and the disintegration of the British Empire. This year shows that colonial rule was no longer maintained by force alone, but also by discursive hegemony. In this phase, not only was the concept of sovereignty redefined by the duality of security and strategic interests, but the concept of self-government, which had been expanded by the Hopkinson Doctrine, was only applied within the boundaries set by the central power. In its renewed form, this strategy meant that the imperial discourse was subjected to reorganisation. The paternalistic approach and the language used in

this context signalled the beginning of a new phase of moral justification and neo-colonial legitimation.

The debates of 1955 not only shaped the politics of that year, but also laid the discursive foundations for the harsher repressive policies of 1956. The conditioning of reforms, the prioritisation of security and the postponement of the recognition of the people as a political subject showed that the dynamics of collapse within the empire were only delayed, not halted. The year 1955 can thus be seen as a historical threshold that represents the discursive preparatory phase of the transition from colonialism to post-colonialism.

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