

THE CYPRIOT COLONIAL CIVIL SERVANT: PRACTICAL AGENCY THROUGH UNCERTAIN IDENTITIES

Alexis Rappas*

Abstract

The colonial government of Cyprus was composed by an overwhelming majority of “indigenous” civil servants, headed by a handful of British administrators. Challenging the widely accepted representation of the Cypriot colonial civil servant as a mere performer of the British policy in Cyprus, this paper proposes a microanalysis of two cases taken from 1928: alternatively the recruitment of a higher, and the dismissal of a subaltern, Cypriot civil servant. Contrasting these two cases, the paper suggests that the split identity of the Cypriot civil servant, both a “Cypriot” and a “colonial official”, constituted a political stake both for the British authorities and the local press. It further suggests that the lower his position, the more the Cypriot colonial servant could actively participate in the elaboration of an identity which would safeguard certain of his rights, sometimes forcing his employer, the colonial government, to respect them.

Introduction: Collaboration, Brokers and Native Colonial Civil Servants

In the frame of Colonial Studies, the issue of “collaboration” between coloniser and colonial subjects has been approached with much circumspection, particularly because this concept referred primarily to the ideology developed by colonial administrators themselves according to which colonial rule rested upon the paternalistic cooperation between the colonial ruler and the indigenous subject.¹ Nonetheless, in an article dated 1972, Ronald Robinson re-legitimised a study of “collaboration” which allegedly would provide an understanding as to how Europeans were able to uphold their colonial empires in spite of the weakness of their financial and human resources.² Since then, some historians have taken up the adventurous task of studying patterns of “collaboration” between colonisers and colonial subjects and have offered as many interpretations as there are definitions for this term.³ Despite this diversity however, their common feature is to focus their analyses on the relation between the colonial state and the local broker, the latter being generally depicted as an influential and rising indigenous member of the colonial society, exchanging his informal services against a strengthening of his

social status by the colonial authorities. Beyond the obvious risk of reifying both terms of this relation – the local broker and “colonial authorities” – almost none of these analyses deal with the most obvious of “collaborators”, that is, the native colonial civil servant.⁴ This is mainly due to the fact that this figure is generally considered as an integral part of the colonial state, a simple peg in the colonial bureaucratic machinery.

Without having to resort to the magic trump card of the “broker”, one needs only to observe that colonial administrations, which constituted the seat of formulation and implementation of official colonial policy, relied on a personnel which in most cases was composed of subaltern “natives” (sometimes up to 90 per cent of the total manpower of the colonial bureaucracy). By identifying them with their European superiors and by denying them any other agency than that of being the underlings of an essentialised colonial will, historiography tends to reduce them to mere functions of a system. In fact, as native colonial civil servants, they were identified in a double, paradoxical way by their European superiors: as colonial civil servants they were indeed seen as the tools of the administration’s control on the colonial society; as natives, however, they were simultaneously viewed as “objects” or “subjects” of this control. Based on a study of the native colonial civil servants of a small British Colony, Cyprus, run through direct rule and a powerful bureaucracy, the aim of this paper is to suggest that, conscious of this double identity created by their belonging to the colonial administration, and by playing with one or the other of its features, native colonial civil servants could have been in a position to secure administrative, social and even political power vis-à-vis their British superiors who depended on their cooperation: they were in fact able to play with the fundamental inner contradiction of any colonial administration which was to be and to present itself as a civil service with all its attributes of impersonality but at the same time representing a political organisation which relied on a clear distinction between ruler and ruled. In other words, this double identification was an opportunity as much as a constraint for native colonial civil servants; it was precisely what allowed them to be actors within the system. Up to now the historiography of Cyprus dealing with the interwar period has by and large insisted on the political dimension of the relations between British administrators and administered Cypriots. The second aim of this analysis of the Cypriot colonial civil servant is to underline the limits of such an approach by suggesting that the divide between British administrators and administered Cypriots was first and foremost cultural in its nature; “politics”, as it were, was an epiphenomenon of a cultural estrangement during the interwar period.⁵

A convenient way to understand the various issues at stake around Cypriot colonial civil servants is by observing the debates taking place at the time of their recruitment and, alternatively, at the time, of their dismissal, that is as they entered and as they left the administration. Within the specific political context of Cyprus –

characterised by the struggle of the Cypriot-Greek elite in favour of the union of the island to Greece and their consequent confrontation with their Turkish fellow countrymen – it seems more appropriate to focus on the case of the appointment of a Cypriot to a higher post of the administration since this was the only type of recruitment likely to provoke a public debate; conversely, insofar as the aim of this paper is also to suggest that Cypriot colonial civil servants, regardless of rank, had in certain circumstances the ability to work, sometimes effectively, against the system they were a part of, it is more suitable to observe the case of the dismissal of a subaltern Cypriot civil servant, which as a rule entailed a lengthy procedure through which the sanctioned officer was given the opportunity to make his representations. The methodology adopted here is, therefore, that of the microanalysis, as such an approach is the only one likely to help us envision the scope of the Cypriot Civil Servant's agency.

Hence the argumentation is constructed around two cases. The first one concerns the appointment of Neoptolemos Paschalis to the post of Solicitor-General of the colonial government in 1927. The second one concerns the dismissal of Private Ioannis Vassiliou from the Cyprus Military Police in late 1926. The paper first suggests that the political foundations of the appointment of a Cypriot to a higher governmental post, transformed what was seemingly a political opportunity both for Paschalis himself and the Cypriot-Greek elite into a normative constraint: Paschalis, it is suggested, was sooner rather than later compelled to identify himself with the colonial civil service than with the aspirations of his fellow countrymen. Opposed to this is the case of Ioannis Vassiliou, whose identity as a colonial civil servant is perceived in purely bureaucratic terms, at the exclusion of any political stake. In contrast to Paschalis, his identification with the colonial state constituted an opportunity for the native civil servant. In this case, the rules of the system which aimed to serve the ruler appeared to be binding for the ruler also and constituted the native civil servant's objective ally against the system.

Recruiting Higher Cypriot Civil Servants: The Paschalis Case

Writing his memoirs in 1937, Sir Ronald Storrs had at heart to remind his readers that he was the first governor of the island to promote Cypriots to higher posts in the colonial government. His decision was motivated, as he writes, because he believed “[t]he appeal to Empire sentiment is a mockery worse than useless unless accompanied by the offer of Imperial opportunities.”⁶ Notwithstanding its Ciceronian elegance, this statement appears to be a considerable embellishment of the governor's more down-to-earth motivations. When, in January 1927, he proposed the appointment of Neoptolemos Paschalis to the newly-created post of Solicitor-General, Storrs wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies that:

“Another weighty reason why this particular appointment should be offered to a Cypriot is that the office does not appear in the Estimates and has not been approved in principle by the Legislative Council; and it would greatly strengthen the position of the Government with the Electives and with progressives throughout the country if it were known that a Cypriot had at any rate been offered the post.”⁷

The office of the Solicitor-General had been created in the wake of a plan to restructure the judicial system of the island. This plan, devised under Storrs’ predecessor, Sir Malcolm Stevenson, provided – in the frame of a broader judicial reform – for the creation of two supplementary posts in Cyprus’ Court of Appeal (High Court) destined to be filled by Cypriot puisne judges, one Cypriot Greek and one Cypriot Turk. The then Attorney-General, Charles Geharty, had asked for the appointment of a Solicitor-General to help him implement the reform. Geharty and the Colonial Secretary, Reginald Popham Lobb, originally wanted to entrust the new post to a Briton. Storrs’ own intervention can be traced in his insistence to appoint a Cypriot to the new position and his choice was to elect Neoptolemos Paschalis.⁸

The political motive behind Storrs’ decision can be traced to the afore-quoted lines in the passage on the Estimates. “Estimates” were annually discussed in the partly-elected Legislative Council, and usually gave rise to bitter confrontations between the elected Cypriot-Greek members on the one hand and the governor-appointed British official members on the other. The annual budget, or “Estimates”, was indeed one of the very few possible fields of intervention of the Legislative Council and it certainly was the only possibility for Cypriot-Greek elected members to occasionally enlist the support of the elected Cypriot Turks who usually would otherwise join the official members to block the Cypriot-Greek resolutions, particularly when these hinted at the question of “Enosis”, or Union of Cyprus to Greece. On 29 November 1926, one day before Storrs’ arrival on Cyprus and barely two months before his proposal to appoint Paschalis as Solicitor-General, the Cypriot-Greek members had rejected the Estimates for 1927 because it still contained a provision for the infamous “Turkish Tribute”.⁹

Hence, Storrs’ move was meant to short-circuit the Cypriot-Greek elected members’ preferred strategy: as the new Estimates would provide for the creation of a post of Solicitor-General to be entrusted to a Cypriot, the Cypriot-Greek members would no longer be in a position to reject them. The skill of the manoeuvre was closely connected to the Governor’s capacity, in presenting and defending his decision both locally and to the Colonial Office, to reveal Paschalis’ identity, underlining one or other feature according to the specific interlocutor he would have to persuade.

In writing to the Secretary of State, Storrs stressed the fact that Neoptolemos

Paschalis was an “exceedingly clever Advocate and an able Lawyer and ha[d] probably the best practice in the island”.¹⁰ Whereas this was written in anticipation of the Colonial Office’s possible objections with regard to Paschalis’ competence or lack thereof, it should be noted that this was the first instance when “being an exceedingly clever Advocate” was positively connoted by a British colonial official in Cyprus; the statement could for instance be contrasted to Storrs’ own usual perception of lawyers as a “numerically insignificant class of parasites who made a living out of [the peasant producer]”.¹¹ Another feature that the Governor voluntarily omitted to remind his addressee in London, was that Paschalis had, for years, been a leading figure of Cypriot-Greek irredentism, himself a member of the elected Legislative Council (1916-1921) and one of the leaders of the election-boycotting movement and non-cooperation policy in the early 1920s.¹² This was merely hinted at in the Governor’s mention of Paschalis as being “prominent” in the aforementioned despatch, thereby implying that he was socially influential. There is little doubt that appointing Paschalis, who was also a collaborator of the Cypriot-Greek, Nicosia-based and highly influential bi-weekly newspaper *Eleftheria*, was further meant to neutralise this former “politician’s” activities.

In London the proposition was met with a certain recalcitrance. Arthur Dawe, then principal at the Colonial Office, expressed his concerns with regard to what he perceived as a “new policy”¹³ which would put into question the principle according to which “higher posts in the administration ha[d] hitherto been confined to Englishmen”. He noted that once he was appointed, nothing could legally prevent Paschalis from claiming promotion to the post of Attorney General (the highest in the Legal Department) when its current holder, an Englishman, was eventually transferred; as a matter of fact, in the temporary absences of the Attorney General on leave, the “Cypriot Solicitor-General” would de facto be acting for him and as such would be an ex-officio member of the Executive Council, the highest administrative institution of the Colony. “We should thus have a Cypriot, so to speak, in the ‘Cyprus Cabinet’”. Finally, though Dawe had “no doubt that many of the educated Cypriots [were] quite able, (...) the question [was] whether they ha[d] the attributes of character which are required for the successful working of Government institutions on the Anglo-Saxon model.”¹⁴ Dawe did not specify what he meant by “attributes of character”. Far from being synonymous of “competence”, these remained abstract and their rhetorical function was designed to stress Paschalis’ “otherness”. Indeed at the Colonial Office the whole problem was centred on Paschalis’ “Cypriotedness”. The Governor’s move, it was implicitly feared, might compromise the unwritten, tacit, but nonetheless fundamental rule, referred to by Partha Chatterjee as the “rule of colonial difference”,¹⁵ according to which, within a colonial administration, there should always have been a clear-cut distinction between the British rulers and the local subalterns.

Unfortunately there are no sources that we know of which might help us to understand the dilemmas posed to Paschalis himself by the proposition. When the official proposition was put before him on Wednesday, 9 March 1927, he was reported to have expressed his gratitude to the Governor and the need for some reflection time. Five days later, on Monday 14 March, he is reported to have officially accepted the post by saying to the governor that he “considered it his duty not to refuse his services to the island and that he accepted the post”.¹⁶

What exactly went through the mind of Paschalis during those five days is open to conjecture. What is certain, however, is that the news of his appointment triggered a series of enthusiastic articles in a significant part of the Cypriot-Greek press. The editors of the journal *Eleftheria* stressed their pride “as Cypriots” for a decision taken on the part of the “foreign government” which was tantamount to the first step “in the administration of the Island along ‘Greek lines’”. Somewhat denoting from Storrs’ presumed aspirations, the editors specifically wrote:

“Providing lively evidence that the Island has men capable of administering the place, the new Solicitor-General offers a most highly [recognised] contribution to the struggle for the liberation of this country, which shall not be achieved by means of violence and arms, but through steady evolutionist tactics, by which we shall conquer, one after the other, all of the bastions of the foreign yoke. Under the gown of the Solicitor-General, a truly Greek heart shall be beating, and under the wig of the Legal Adviser the straight and profound mind of Mr. Paschalis will find the way to combine the true interests of the Crown with his deepest love for his Fatherland, for the honour and benefit of both.”¹⁷

In contrast to the Colonial Office’s concerns, the above lines in the mind of the author perceived Paschalis’ “Cypriotedness” as an opportunity, and not a handicap. The message conveyed was addressed to both British officials and to the Cypriot readership. On the one hand, this appointment was taken as an illustration, and thereby an implicit acknowledgement on behalf of the colonial government, of the redundancy of the presence of British officials on the Island: Cypriots were able to administer the country, and would do so in the “true interests of the Crown”. On the other hand, and this was addressed to the Cypriot-Greek readership, Paschalis’ appointment should have inspired a new strategy for the “liberation of the country”: this constituted the first public statement in favour of self-government as an intermediary milestone to be reached before “Enosis”. As a matter of fact, very soon after he assumed his functions, Paschalis found himself at the centre of a wide Cypriot-Greek public debate on the expediency of self-government as a national strategy.

On 24 April 1928, the Cypriot-Greek elected members of the Legislative Council presented a resolution asking for the widening of constitutional liberties for the

Cypriots. Paschalis, who at the time was “acting Attorney General” in the temporary absence of the English post-holder and, as such, an ex-officio official member of the Legislative Council, voted against the resolution. This event spread confusion among the learned Cypriot Greeks. The editors of the newspaper *Neon Ethnos* “condemn[ed] unreservedly” the Solicitor-General’s action, and reinstated that if higher posts in the administration were to be obtained and considered as part and parcel of the wider Cypriot-Greek national struggle, the “functionarisation of a person” should not, however, “necessarily imply [that person’s] renunciation [of] the people’s ideal[s]”.¹⁸ Conversely, *Eleftheria* opened its columns to articles written by prominent political figures to share their impressions on the event. Interestingly, H. Michaelides, a Cypriot-Greek member of the Legislative Council and one of the authors of the rejected resolution, stressed that Paschalis did not vote “as Neoptolemos Paschalis, but as an employee of the government having the formal obligation (...) to vote according to the government’s views”.¹⁹ Acknowledging this, the influential politician, Ioannis Kyriakides wrote that Cypriots should continue to encourage the promotion of Cypriots to the highest government posts which constituted “the beginning of self-determination”.²⁰

Self-government, self-determination or immediate Union? Paschalis’ split identity – at once that of a Cypriot and of a colonial official – spawned two conflicting views on the meaning and the purported orientation of the “national struggle” against the “colonial yoke”. Paschalis himself, now under the restraint of colonial regulation No. 57 which forbid any officer to “publish in any manner anything which may be reasonably regarded as of a political or administrative nature”,²¹ could take no part in this debate, rooted on conflicting perceptions of his own identity. As the issue of his identity was captured by the public space, and thus constructed as a political problem, his inability to intervene was tantamount to a deprivation of his own subjectivity.

During the same year, while this debate fuelled the passions of the political elite, somewhere in Limassol, far away from the spotlight, a Cypriot ex-policeman was finishing his letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies protesting against his dismissal from the police force. In this letter, he proceeded to claim his rights, which he articulated on a claim of a specific identity.

Dismissing Subaltern Cypriot Civil Servants: The Vassiliou Case

During an official inspection of the rural police stations by the Local Commandant of the Cyprus Military Police, Private Zaptieh No. 3576 Ioannis Vassiliou was found “untidily dressed and dirty” and had “failed to enter his Diary for five days, viz from 5th November, 1926, to 10th November, 1926.” To Vassiliou’s misfortune, this occurred while the Local Commandant was accompanied by Herbert Laynard

Dowbiggin, Inspector General of the Ceylon Police then on special duty on the island. Consequently Lieutenant-Colonel Albert Ernest Gallagher, Chief Commandant of the Cyprus Police, no doubt feeling humiliated in front of his distinguished guest, requested the immediate dismissal of the said Private on the grounds of “gross neglect of duty and dirtiness while stationed at Kolossi on the inspection of the Inspector General, Ceylon Police, in November, 1926.”²² Governor Sir Ronald Storrs approved.

According to colonial regulation No. 51, Vassiliou, who received an annual salary of less than £100 could be “dismissed by the Governor, provided that in every such case where the officer [had] not been convicted on a criminal charge the grounds of intended dismissal [were] definitely stated in writing, and communicated to the officer in order that he may have full opportunity of exculpating himself, and that the matter was investigated by the Governor with the aid of the head of department.”²³ The Vassiliou file does not contain the details of this first part of the dismissal procedure, but it seems to have taken the longer part of two years and to have confirmed Gallagher’s decision and the Governor’s authorisation. At the end of it in any case, Vassiliou, using his right guaranteed by colonial regulation No. 212 stating that “every individual has, however, the right to address the Secretary of State, if he thinks it is proper”,²⁴ decided to appeal against his final sanction.

In a memorandum dated 26 March 1928 and aptly signed “Ioannis Vassiliou, Ex-Policeman No. 3576”, the aggrieved officer made the following representations:

“I was serving at the above station, as I mentioned, quite alone, and I had to look after a large volume of business, trying always to present myself worthy of the confidence given to me, and taking not into consideration anything else than my duty, I had to sleep [sic]²⁵ for five whole days and nights, looking after a lot of robberies, and other troubles which happened.

And just for the reason stated, I was found to be unshaven and my patrolling not passed in the proper book. My explanations and right justifications were not at all taken into consideration, and this was enough for my honesty, good conduct, long services, to be overlooked. Dismissed of my duty after a period of 12 years honest services, was the punishment I sustained [sic].

I was and I am, a loyal man, and I understand that I had to sustain a punishment, but I am of the humble opinion, that Your Excellency will agree to that the punishment I sustained was hard.

Being a father of a family, I have to protect my children and wife, while I am dismissed of my duties, and out of business whatever. My applications to the Governor of Cyprus, and the Chief Inspector of the Cyprus Military Police, were not taken into consideration.”

By pleading guilty to the charges, Vassiliou imputed them to the hefty workload to which he was entirely committed. The gravity centre of the memorandum was centred on the two middle paragraphs of the quoted passage. These were multi-layered and in them, Vassiliou underlined four things: one, his seniority; two, his dedication to his work; three, his loyalty and four, the rights to which such attributes entitled him as a civil servant and which, in fact, had been disregarded. Finally the last paragraph appealed to the sentimental feelings of the reader. All in all, the memorandum was balanced, straightforward and clear and aimed at crafting the image of a sound civil servant.

As such, it made a very positive impression at the Colonial Office. Arthur Dawe in particular noted that the Local Commandant who was inspecting Vassiliou's station – a highly-respected Cypriot Greek by the name of Michael Kareklas²⁶ – “informed Mr. Dowbiggin [the Ceylon Inspector of Police] that Private Vassiliou was a very good man” and that “Mr. Dowbiggin also [said] that the man was not to blame. He submitted that it was the system which required consideration”. But what is even more interesting, is that Dawe appeared to be receptive to Vassiliou's own arguments, particularly those concerning his seniority. Insisting on the fact that “the right of an aggrieved officer to petition the Secretary of State is one of considerable importance and that it should be treated with respect” he wrote that “it might appear (...) that the man had been dealt with too severely in being dismissed after twelve years”. Vassiliou, the 3/7 cp. per diem Limassol policeman, thus created a bridge between himself and the Downing Street powerful bureaucrat by using language which conveyed an ethos, the importance of seniority in the civil service, to which the bureaucrat in question appeared to be sensitive.

Consequently, the Secretary of State's despatch to the Governor, drafted by Dawe and his collaborators, asked for more details concerning the facts reproached to the dismissed officer and a full memorandum by the Chief Commandant of Police. In the memorandum in question, Lieutenant-Colonel Albert Ernest Gallagher wrote that even if the petitioner was of “good character, he belonged to the old school, without any chance of promotion and consequently of the time serving type, which is fast disappearing from the Police by elimination”.²⁷ The way he worded his memorandum, the Chief Commandant of Police seemed to imply, therefore, that his decision merely quickened a process of natural extinction of a certain class of policemen. This argumentation was found to be unconvincing at the Colonial Office, to say the least. Principal Bottomley noted that “[t]he penalty seem[ed] to be out of all proportion to the offence”. He added that the absence of “some sort of machinery for a trial or enquiry before a man is dismissed” and the “summary nature of this man's dismissal seemed to [him] to be all wrong”.²⁸ Much stronger though were principal Fiddian's observations. In reaction to one of his colleagues' suggestions that it might be necessary to endorse the Chief Commandant of

Police's decision in order to protect Gallagher's authority and preserve the discipline of the Cyprus Police corps,²⁹ he wrote that this

"[was] an argument that [he had] met before, and it always made [him] sick. Whenever any more than usually scandalous act of injustice was committed in a Colony, we used to be told that we should undermine the authority and prestige of the Colonial Government if we got it put right. It is difficult to stigmatise this doctrine without using language too indecently strong for a minute. It is much more important to maintain the authority of the Government and the confidence which Colonial Civil Servants ought to feel in the justice of the British administrator than it is to maintain Colonel Gallagher's authority and uphold discipline."³⁰

Fiddian's remark was more ambiguous than it seemed. In order to contest his colleague's outward defence of the racial hierarchy within the administrative apparatus, he appealed to what might be termed a "public servant ethos", whereby the colonial civil servant's confidence – and it should be noted that no ethnicity was ascribed to the colonial civil servant – had become the keystone of the Government's authority. Yet, this confidence was directed to the "British administrator's justice" and not to the impersonal rules of the public service. In that sense, Fiddian implicitly acknowledged the very racial hierarchy he appeared to be criticising, but he suggested that this hierarchy should be built on a feeling of the "justice" in, rather than "prestige and authority" of, the British administrator. This illustrated a deviation and adaptation of the public servant ethos to the context of a colonial bureaucracy: indeed the logic of the racial hierarchy was entirely reversed here; whereas in his colleague's rationale it functioned as a principle for the preservation of the British superior's prestige, in Fiddian's remark this same racial hierarchy functioned as a guarantee for the indigenous civil servant's rights.

The Assistant Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sir John E. Shuckburgh, wrote to the acting governor, R. E. Nicholson, that "we cannot help feeling that this man was dealt with too severely in being punished with dismissal, after 12 year's service, for what would seem, so far as our papers show, to have been a single and isolated offence". Admitting that, two years after the incident, it was too late to reinstate the man in his original post, he asked however that something be done for him, i.e., "find him some small job, such as messenger or porter in some Government department". He concluded by stating that "it does seem undeniable that there should be some definite procedure for the trial at any rate of offences which may involve serious punishment".³¹ In short, Shuckburgh not only transformed his advisers' concerns into an official decision, but also suggested the implementation of measures which would further protect the indigenous civil servants, in the future, against what was perceived as their arbitrary treatment by the colonial government.

The case was officially closed with Nicholson's answer on 20 December 1928 stating that Vassiliou "turned down an offer of employment as a Temporary Guard [in the Customs Department] on the grounds that the post is only temporary; and this in spite of the fact that he was told he would be employed permanently later on if found suitable".³² The reasons commanding Vassiliou's alleged decision are open to conjecture. Could the man have rejected what appeared to him to be a rather humiliating act of charity when, feeling sincerely aggrieved, he expected full rehabilitation?

Paschalis and Vassiliou: Conflicting Conceptions of Identity of the Actors

The cases of Paschalis and Vassiliou, the former's recruitment and the latter's dismissal, although radically different, intersect over and around at least three common and closely intertwined issues: identity, subjectivity and agency.

The first issue which stems from the analysis of both cases is that of the existence of different and conflicting levels and understandings of the native colonial civil servants' identity. In the case of Paschalis, his identity was defined by three main actors or groups of actors: the Colonial Office, the Governor and the Cypriot press. In the eyes of the officials of the Colonial Office, Paschalis was viewed as a Cypriot. His Cypriotedness superseded his eventual ability as a colonial civil servant and his promotion to one of the highest posts in the government would likely change the nature of the fundamental political tacit rule of colonial difference. The Governor on the other hand played with both features of Paschalis' identity: in order to secure his appointment, he tended to blur the Cypriot origin of Paschalis by putting forward his competence and ability as a potential Solicitor-General; simultaneously he hinted at the political motive of his decision which was to promote a Cypriot to a higher post in order to tame the Cypriot-Greek members of the Legislative Council – as Karl Mannheim would put it, "turn[ing] a problem of politics into a problem of administration".³³ In the case of the press, the perception of Paschalis followed two successive stages: the press first applauded the appointment of a Greek, more than a Cypriot, to this high post; however, as soon as Paschalis began to perform his duties, it perceived a growing contradiction between his Greekness and his office as a Solicitor-General, since being Greek meant working for the national restitution, with a hint of bitter realisation of the superiority of the office to the origin. Paschalis himself was a "subject", rather than an "agent" in the whole debate: he had undergone passively more than he participated in the elaboration of this multi-faceted identity and ultimately he became unable to conciliate his opposite allegiances, and found himself trapped in his gown and under his wig.

The case of Vassiliou was totally at variance with that of Paschalis. In his

memorandum Vassiliou presented himself as a civil servant with considerable seniority, dedication to his duties and loyalty to the administration, and it was as such that he demanded the revision of the disciplinary action he had received. This rhetoric hit the bull's eye in the Colonial Office where the officials flew to the assistance of a civil servant who was entitled to some consideration. Vassiliou's Cypriotedness was not central; as a matter of fact, his very identity as Vassiliou the family man was obliterated; what mattered was that he was an aggrieved officer who used his fundamental right to petition the Secretary of State and that his plea should have been given the appropriate consideration. The Colonial Government, in the person of the Chief Commandant of Police, blatantly demonstrated their disregard for an individual who was considered a subaltern, and therefore an expendable officer, a local human resource. Vassiliou, therefore, actively participated in the elaboration of an identity perceived and acknowledged by the civil servants in London. This constructed identity created a bridge of communication with the colonial authorities in London and allowed some space for Vassiliou to become an active agent in the whole procedure. This "agency" was demonstrated up to the tragic ending of the case, when Vassiliou made the choice to refuse the accommodation proposed by the Colonial Government.

The issue of Paschalis' and Vassiliou's conflicting identities is therefore crucial to understand the functioning of the colonial administrative machinery. Here we could suggest, following Frederick Cooper and Rogers Brubaker, that "identity" is neither a fixed nor an inherent quality of the actors; identity, or rather "identities", are a set of permanently reconstructed representations of an actor or a specific group of actors by various agents. And these reconstructed – and at times overlapping – representations reveal the stakes of each of the agents involved in the elaboration of a specific actor's, or group of actors', identity.³⁴ This fluidity of the two Cypriots' "identities" however, seem to distort, to a certain extent, the rules regulating the colonial administration's mechanism.

The Rules of the System

Cyprus' colonial government is almost a textbook case for Max Weber's definition of a bureaucracy: an organisation staffed by officers recruited through the impersonal procedure of the examination sanctioning their competence; placed on incremental salary scales in the frame of a strict administrative hierarchy; assigned to precisely defined tasks and managed by a set of impersonal rules regulating their activity and determining their promotion according to merit or seniority; and subjected to disciplinary actions that might be taken against them.³⁵ "Almost" since this rational frame is closely intertwined with an irrational one by virtue of which an invisible yet very effective "colour bar" separates the native from the English civil servant.

What, however, is revealed from the analysis of the two cases is the anxious and devout observance by the British authorities, the Colonial Office in particular, of the legal implications of the chain of command. This commitment of the metropolitan officials was determined by the practical and legal aspects of our specific cases. What caused concern in the case of Paschalis was the fact that should he finally be appointed to the post of Solicitor-General, this would have set off an irreversible legal mechanism by which he would be endowed with powers which would have put him at the core of the colonial policy. In particular, there would have been no legal device to prevent him from being promoted to the highest post of his department. The press was also aware of that fact and revelled in the idea that this appointment could eventually give the Greek community what they believed to be the keystone of the government. In the case of Vassiliou, the Colonial Office was extremely anxious to certify the legality of the whole affair, and tried to understand it in legal and regulatory terms. In the absence of any rules which would allow a rational interpretation of the case, the Colonial Office even suggested to the colonial government to set up “some definite procedure for the trial at any rate of offences which may involve serious punishment”; for it was precisely the legality of the working of the colonial administration which would “maintain the confidence which the Colonial Civil Servants ought to feel in the justice of the British administrator”.

Naturally, this metropolitan anxiety over procedure exceeds the case of Vassiliou or Paschalis. It was the expression of the perennial tension and mistrust between the metropolis and the colonies – a mistrust that Jack P. Greene felt was rooted in the loss of the American colonies³⁶ – and the eagerness of the former to set up devices that would allow it to control the latter. However, this “over-conformity” with the rules, to use Robert Merton’s words, was likely to provoke dysfunctions in the colonial bureaucracy, or a “displacement of its primary goals”.³⁷ The rules were meant to regulate the functioning of a bureaucracy, the aim of which was to secure colonial domination. Yet this unwritten but fundamental task of establishing the domination of the British on the Cypriot might sometimes be at variance with the written rules of a system that allowed a Cypriot like Vassiliou to protest or which provided no limit for the ascension of a Cypriot like Paschalis to posts which were thus far tacitly reserved for the Englishmen. As E. P. Thompson suggested, “the rulers are, in serious senses, whether willingly or unwillingly, the prisoners of their own rhetoric; they play the games of power according to rules which suit them, but they cannot break those rules or the whole game would be thrown away”.³⁸

Securing Protection as a Native Colonial Civil Servant

This paper aimed to suggest that the Cypriot colonial civil servant was in a position to secure, through the uncertainty that surrounded his dual – though constructed – identity as a “native” and as a “civil servant”, “a minimum of liberty to beat the

system” as Crozier put it.³⁹ Although Vassiliou did not exactly “beat the system”, he remained up to the end an active agent in the procedure he was subjected to. Indeed as a subaltern civil servant, Vassiliou belonged to the impersonal and bureaucratic sphere of what may be termed the “merely administrative”, where rules still matter. In fact, Vassiliou’s case highlights that “natives” may at times have been in a position to change the nature of the colonial will by the mere fact of abiding by its rules: in a paradoxical way, “resistance” to the colonial administration was here achieved through the exploitation of the latter’s rules framing “collaboration”. Paschalis on the other hand, as a higher civil servant, belonged to the sphere of “politics” where there were no other rules but those of his direct employer, the colonial government: his agency vanished in the five days it took him to reach a decision over the Governor’s proposal for his appointment as Solicitor-General; as soon as he assumed his functions, he was identified, rather than he identified himself, with the colonial government.

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Notes

1. Dimier, V. (2004) *Le gouvernement des colonies. Regards croisés franco-britanniques*. Brussels, University of Brussels Press, pp. 77-83.
2. Robinson, R. (1972) ‘Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Imperialism’ in Owen, R. and Sutcliffe, B. (eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*. London, Longman, pp. 117-142.
3. One of the latest syntheses encapsulating the various theoretical debates can be found in Newbury, C. (2003) *Patrons, Clients and Empire. Chieftaincy and Over-rule in Asia, Africa and the Pacific*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
4. Exceptions can be found in research on African colonies, or in the case of British India, itself linked to the problematic of later-colonialist “indigenization of local (former colonial) governments”. See for instance Arnold, D. (1985) ‘Bureaucratic Recruitment and Subordination in Colonial India: The Madras Constabulary’ in Guha, R. (ed.), *Subaltern Studies No. 4. Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Delhi, Oxford University Press, pp. 1-53; see also Osborn, E. L. (2003) ‘Circle of Iron: African Colonial Employees and the Interpretation of Colonial Rule in French West Africa’, *Journal of African History*, Vol. 44, pp. 29-50.

5. Politics become primordial with the internationalisation of the “Cypriot Question” after the Second World War. See Robert Holland (1998) *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus*. Oxford, Clarendon Press. See also Evanthis Hatzivassiliou (1998) *Το κυπριακό ζήτημα, 1878-1960. Η συνταγματική πτυχή*. Athens, Ελληνικά Γράμματα.
6. Storrs, Sir R. (1937) *Orientalism*. London, Ivor and Nicolson, p. 558.
7. CO 67/220/4: Cyprus. Appointment of a Cypriot Solicitor-General, 1927. Sir Ronald Storrs, confidential despatch to the secretary of state for the colonies, 25 January 1927.
8. Georghallides, G. S. (1985) *Cyprus and the Governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: The Causes of the 1931 Crisis*. Nicosia, Cyprus Research Centre, pp. 17-28.
9. The differential between the island’s revenue and expenditure that the British government proposed to pay the Ottoman Porte in exchange for the occupation of Cyprus. The Ottomans never saw a penny of that sum as “it was from the first devoted to the bondholders of the Ottoman Loan of 1855 (...) for which reason it continued after Annexation by Great Britain in 1914”, Storrs (1937), *op. cit.*, pp. 543-544. A thorough analysis of the Tribute question is provided in Georgios Georghallides’ *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus, 1918-1926. With a Survey on the Foundations of British Rule*. Nicosia, Cyprus Research Centre, pp. 375-424.
10. CO 67/220/4, *op. cit.*, Storrs, 25 January 1927, *op. cit.*
11. Storrs (1937) *op. cit.*, p. 553.
12. Georghallides G. S. (1979) *op. cit.*, pp. 230-260.
13. CO 67/220/4, *op. cit.*, Arthur Dawe, minute of 11 January 1927.
14. CO 67/220/4, *op. cit.*, Arthur Dawe, minute of 16 February 1927.
15. Chatterjee, P. (1993) *The Nation and its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, pp. 14-34.
16. *Ελευθερία*, 16 March 1927, “Ο Κορ Ν. Πασχάλης. Γενικός Δημόσιος Κατήγορος. Νέα Εμπιστευτική Θέσις”.
17. *Ελευθερία*, 16 March 1927, “Ο Γενικός Δημόσιος Κατήγορος”.
18. *Νέον Έθνος*, 30 June 1928, “Πλημμελής Συνηγορία”.
19. *Ελευθερία*, 23 June 1928, “Το ζήτημα της αποδοχής της θέσης του Γεν. Δημοσίου Κατήγορου. Η γνώμη του βουλευτού Κου Μιχαηλίδη”.
20. *Ελευθερία*, 9 June 1928, “Οι διορισμοί Κυπρίων εις ανωτέρας δημοσίας θέσεις. Η γνώμη του Κου Ιω. Κυριακίδου”.
21. Regulations for His Majesty’s Colonial Service, London, published by His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1923, regulation No. 57.
22. CO 67/224/18: Dismissal of Ioannis Vassiliou from the Military Police, 1928-1929. Memorandum by Chief Commandant, Cyprus Military Police, on statements made by No. 3576 Ex-Private Yanni Vassili, Cyprus Military Police in Reds 8-7, C. S. M.P. No. 566/1927.
23. Regulations for His Majesty’s Colonial Service, *op. cit.*, 1923, regulation No. 51.
24. Regulations for His Majesty’s Colonial Service, *op. cit.*, 1923, regulation No. 212.
25. One of the officials corrected the wording, writing “no sleep” which presumably is what Vassiliou meant.

26. In 1932, Michael Kareklas was given the MBE, Cyprus Civil List, 1932.
27. CO 67/224/18, op. cit, Gallagher Memorandum op.cit.
28. CO 67/224/18, op. cit, H. Bottomley, minute of 16 July 1928.
29. CO 67/224/18, op. cit, G. Hazlerigg, minute of 12 July 1928.
30. CO 67/224/18, op. cit, Alexander Fiddian, minute of 25 July 1928.
31. CO 67/224/18, op. cit, Sir John E. Shuckburgh, 8 August 1928, official despatch to the acting governor, Reginald E. Nicholson.
32. CO 67/224/18, op. cit, R. E. Nicholson, official despatch to Sir J. E. Shuckburgh, 20 December 1928.
33. Mannheim, K. (1966) *Ideology and Utopia. An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. London, Routledge, p. 104.
34. Cooper, F. and Brubaker, R. (2000) 'Beyond Identity', *Theory and Society*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 1-47.
35. Weber, M. (1978) *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*. California, University of California Press, Vol. 2, pp. 956-1005. Max Weber's text was first published (posthumously) in 1956.
36. Greene, J. P. (1990) *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Polities of the British Empire and the United States, 1670-1788*. Athens Ga. (USA), Norton.
37. Merton, R. K. (1936) 'The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 1, No. 6, pp. 894-904.
38. Thompson, E. P (1990) *Whigs and Hunters. The Origins of the Black Act*. London, Penguin Books, p. 263.
39. Crozier, M. and Friedberg, E. (1977) *L'acteur et le système. Les contraintes de l'action collective*. Paris, éditions du Seuil, p. 20.