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For a Bicomunal Movement of Rapprochement and Autonomy

(or because Rapprochement is at heart an erotic one,
which in these times means revolutionary desire)

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THE HISTORY OF CYPRUS is inextricably linked to its geographical position as the crossroads of three continents and corresponding cultures. Politically and militarily, this meant that the island was an essential “gendarmerie station” or “transit centre” for the empires or rulers who occasionally imposed their power in the region. This almost continuous conquest — dependence of the island on foreign powers — has left a deep tradition of subservience to foreigners and an inability, so far, for Cypriots to perceive themselves as masters of their land, as autonomous individuals in an autonomous society. On the other hand, the constant intersection of cultures and influences has created the infrastructure of a future where Cyprus could function as a cultural centre — a bridge between the cultures that surround it. This is the historical dilemma before us at this moment: A Cyprus united with a sense of auton-

omy and its historical potential or a Cyprus divided — an extension of foreign dependencies.

The present de facto partition is the result of the two communal national liberation movements (Enosis and Taksim) which express the logic of subordination in its most extreme form. In these movements, the freedom of the island, of the Cypriots, was seen as impossible in itself — a logic that pushed people to look for “co-ethnic” great protectors in the states of Greece and Turkey.

The roots of rapprochement, on the contrary, lie in the street, in the independence movement up to 74, in the popular events of 74–77 and in the neighbourhood — the tradition of cultural pluralism that characterised the island until the middle of this century. In these contexts, the rapprochers may present the traditional symbiosis of Greeks and Turks as proof of the feasibility of their politics, but at its heart their demand has all the subversiveness of the new against the old world. For rapprochement is a demand in a postmodern society that has already had 30 years of independence, however brief, on its back and which is by definition the information centre of the Middle East. And this is a new game. The old symbiosis, the old class unity of the great strikes of 1948, or the uprisings of the last century, has been defeated precisely because it did not develop its own autonomous discourse and action, because it allowed Misiaoulis kai Kavazoglou to be murdered, because it revived the massacres that ran through our history from 58 to 74.

The old symbiosis could not resist the nationalism and the cultural polarisation and homogenisation promoted in the states that the Zurich “dictated agreement” almost inevitably gave birth to.

The past must be seen in its proper dimensions, not to be repeated, but to be overcome.

Nationalism as an ideology of homogenisation, of projecting threatening “Others” and of identifying the population with the state, was the main lever of separation. The internalised ideology of power was introduced through the educational systems from Greece and Turkey and reinforced the Cypriots’ sense of insecu-

rity about themselves by identifying them as a barbaric incomplete part of the national whole — Greek or Turkish. It also framed the internal conflicts within the mythological conflict of Hellenism and Turkism.

We have been, therefore, the field of release of the nationalist imaginaries of the “national centres”. That is why it is important to understand that rising cypro-centric nationalism leads nowhere. Yes it will support a single independent state, but nationalism is a reaction of insecurity, a reflection of a fear of the other. It will create a new majority of votes or cultural groups that will again oppress some minorities. And as much as Cypriots are historically justified in being outraged with those social groups whose cultural identity is extremely Greek or Turkish, it is nevertheless the plurality of heterogeneous minorities that paves the way to cultural pluralism, tolerance, and rapprochement — not the creation of a new national majority. Rapprochement presupposes the existence of “Others” as a temptation for the closed ethnic group. Only in this way can society be dynamic and Cypriots can reappropriate their heterogeneous cultural influences.

This practice of rapprochement is also inextricably linked to the notion of autonomy and respect — at least — for anything different. Autonomy is the awareness of the possibility of self-governance and self-management. Beyond its organisational implications, it is also a psychological concept. The autonomous individual or society makes choices and takes responsibility for his/her actions. The avoidance of responsibility in Cyprus (i.e. shifting the “root of evil” abroad, to plots and conspiracies) may be the result of centuries of colonialism, but the insistence 30 years after independence on begging and subservience to the big guys (to solve our problem), now looks like a refusal to grow up — to take responsibility. Cypriots do not speak to Cypriots — they speak through third parties. Whatever intolerance there may be here or there, the fact that on this little island there are two states (one of which is pseudo) whose inhabitants have to use intermediaries to communicate (even in

an electronic age) should be a matter of concern as a universal shame. And yet the priority in the debates is not about this ridiculous oddity or about the separation of this place — the penning of two polarised communities behind hostile troops — but about how many miles more or less each side will get in a final solution. No one thinks that the separation, the lack of communication between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots impoverishes both culturally, that it still keeps us as a society at the level of fiefdoms and chifliks.

We talk to ourselves, not to others. Our self-satisfaction with this narcissistic dialogue of like-mindedness is typical of our misery. We are interested in understanding and being understood by Americans and Russians, not by people who live five miles to the north or south. And yet the key to our autonomy and freedom lies in this very dialogue between the different — perhaps even the opposite. At some point the Greek Cypriot community will have to pass through Aloa and the Turkish Cypriot community through Kioneli. In the face of our common crimes, perhaps we will recognise our historical responsibilities.

The dialogue between Denktash and Vassiliou or other leaders, parties, etc. is a dialogue of salesmen. Rapprochement, whose roots are the slogans “Cyprus belongs to its people” and “Turkish Cypriots are our brothers” of 74–75 can only express its historical dynamic as a movement from below, from the grassroots. Because at the bottom, the rapprochement presupposes a curiosity, a passion for the other. It is the antithesis of nationalism — Greeks and Turks rediscovering each other, not as barbarians who slaughtered us in 22, 63, 67, 74, but as immigrants — returning neighbours. As autonomous entities of a common historical culture, which created the Greek-speaking rebetiko: “Where are you going, my Memmeti, where are you going?” and the lyrics of Hikmet in the 40s:

“And then, doctor / every dawn / every dawn, doctor / at dawn, / my heart / in Greece is always shot”.

Greece, Turkey and Cyprus were for 30 centuries a common cultural and administrative area, from the ancient Greek civilization to

the Ottoman Empire. The failure of the social revolution, of Rigas’ dream of a multi-ethnic federation, and the creation of two hostile states-ideologies cannot erase centuries of cultural formation.

The Turk is the East in the unconscious of the Greek, just as the Greek is the West in the unconscious of the Turk. A divided space is a divided self.

Cyprus is perhaps the last place of symbiosis with hope for a rapprochement of the divided historical being. This is why it has been the centre of developments for years. Perhaps the reality is ultimately the other way round than we imagine. Turkey and Greece cannot solve our problems. But we can, perhaps, open the bridge to solving theirs.

Those who support rapprochement and do not understand that at its heart this issue is overturning segregation as a social, political, psychological phenomenon, are deluding themselves. Rapprochement is also an expression of a deeper process of historical bridging of the human being itself, elimination of alienation, recognition of the other as an erotic being, and not as an enemy. Cypriots are offered at this moment the possibility to open a new way of overcoming nationalism and divisions. Something that might also put us on the international map as an autonomous society. Otherwise, we will be dragged in a few years by the ‘big boys’ to an international conference, like the Cambodians are now, for another ‘dictated’ agreement.

Will we discover within ourselves the erotic desire that abolishes borders or will we get involved in matchmaking again? Or let’s put it this way: Will we prefer autonomy-freedom with its responsibilities and creative chaos or have we settled for the next century as servants of multinationals?

Jengis and Alexia have already placed a signature on the historical dilemma. Have you?

by L.D.A.