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# Branding Orthodoxy: Religious Diplomacy and the Makarios Legacy in Sub-Saharan Africa

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## Original Article

# Branding Orthodoxy: Religious diplomacy and the Makarios legacy in Sub-Saharan Africa

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**ABSTRACT** This article investigates religious diplomacy and its branding potential and power ramifications, focusing on Cypriot missionary work in Sub-Saharan Africa. It analyses the diplomacy of Archbishop Makarios III, the first President of the Republic of Cyprus, who branded Orthodoxy as an anti-colonial alternative to the African 'colonial religions'. Makarios used religious diplomacy instrumentally for domestic and international legitimacy as well as for enhancing Cypriot statehood during periods of internal and external contestation. The article also examines the current work of the Greek Orthodox (Cypriot) Mission in Kenya, the continuities and shifts with regard to the initial aims of Makarios's religious diplomacy. It looks at the extent to which the Mission has been internationalized and potential to function as a 'reverse mission' also representing Kenyan-Africans in Cyprus. The article is based on archival research, press coverage, interviews and participatory observation.

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Oh, it's extraordinary the number of babies and streets that have been named after me in Africa! In Tanzania I did nothing but meet little black Makarioses, and the same in Zanzibar, though Zanzibar is Muslim... Naturally they understood nothing about what it means to belong to the Greek Orthodox Church. You meet

some fellow on the street and ask him, 'What religion do you belong to?' and he answers, 'To Makarios's religion!'

Archbishop Makarios III, First President of the Republic of Cyprus, Interview to Oriana Fallaci (1974)

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## INTRODUCTION

How far can religious and public diplomacy combine to project a country's image abroad? How can small and less powerful states and non-state actors exploit niches and distinctive cultural assets to exercise soft power in postcolonial Africa? And what might be the intended and unintended consequences of such practices, the material and symbolic effects of religious diplomacy?

In responding to these questions, we use the case of Cyprus as an example, its historical involvement with missionary work in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly with regard to its mission in Kenya. We consider the Cypriot case especially interesting in the way a small European state tried to brand its religion in a region where religious missionary work had been tainted due to its association with western imperial expansion. Notwithstanding the notion that missionary activity also offered critical space and sought to 'convert' aspects of colonialism (Robert, 2008), White European missions have been commonly perceived as a precursor to colonial rule (Stanley, 1990; De Kock, 1996) – the notion that first came the priest to seed ideas and values and soften 'the terrain', then the soldier to defeat the undisciplined native and finally the governor to provide 'proper' rule. To that extent, although Cypriot missionary work has displayed the *symbolic violence* of White religious missions to Africa – the acceptance of hierarchical relationships and co-optation of Africans to foreign truth regimes – it also managed to enact *symbolic resistance*, tying the Cypriot Orthodox mission to the African anti-colonial struggle.

As suggested by Opondo (2010, p. 110), one of the major problems of colonial and neo-colonial diplomatic practice has been the obsessive desire to exclude or convert native subjects, that is, not content, as in inter-European diplomacy, with conversing and developing meaningful and mutually beneficial relations with them. This will-to-convert derived from the non-recognition of the colonized as a bearer of (true) religion, civilization, humanity and political disposition,

thus the need to convert them in both matters of faith and governance. In that sense, colonial diplomacy could be said to be *doubly religious*: on the one hand, promoting conversion into Christianity and, on the other, promoting conversion into western modernity. Both cases featured as gospels of truth, which rendered the colonial subject as lacking in knowledge, epistemology and autonomous means of redemption. The habitual and symbolic forms of domination (Bourdieu, 1991) that this kind of practice institutes in (post)colonial societies have been comprehensively and persuasively analysed by postcolonial theorists (Mamdani, 1996; Mbembé, 2001).

The Cypriot involvement in Sub-Saharan Africa bears similarities but also distinctive differences to this colonial diplomatic practice. On the one hand, it is a White European mission, instituting symbolic domination, seeking to convert and bringing another version of Christianity and White messianism to unredeemed Africans. On the other hand, it is historically and symbolically a *postcolonial* mission. It is sent from a country, which was itself colonized and initiated from a political leader with impeccable anti-colonial credentials: Archbishop Makarios III. Consequently, although Cypriot religious diplomacy reinforced established racial-colonial inequalities vis-à-vis Africans, it offered, at the same time, emancipatory rationales and symbolic capital for overcoming them. This underscores the need to approach religious diplomacy not through binaries of 'good' or 'bad', but with an appreciation of the 'definitional complexities' and diverse goals which are present in different contexts (Seib, 2013, p. 4).

To be specific, Cypriot religious diplomacy capitalized on a cultural niche, promoted by the island's major religious-political celebrity. The first Cypriot President happened to be the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of the island, who also led the anti-colonial struggle. As we suggest below, Makarios fully exploited this historical legacy, including his links to Africa (i.e. initially his exile to the Seychelles by the British in



1956–7) and his subsequent active involvement with the Non-Aligned Movement. This helped him to successfully brand Orthodoxy as a *post-colonial religion par excellence*, building on the links of Orthodoxy with the African independent churches that separated themselves from the established Catholic and Protestant denominations linked to colonial rule. Notwithstanding the habitual micro-imperialist subtexts and problematic statements – such as the ‘black Makarioses’ or ‘Makarios’s religion’ in the epigram above – Makarios managed to become something of an honorary African. He played a leading role in spreading Orthodoxy in Africa by conducting mass baptisms – conversions and reconversions – of Africans through high-profile visits. He also laid the foundations of an Orthodox theological seminary in Nairobi that has provided training into Orthodoxy and currently serves the whole of Africa. These efforts culminated in the canonization of African Orthodoxy into the Greek tradition, which officially started by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, though it was Makarios’s political-celebrity status, which gave it glamour and visibility, and a distinctive Cypriot twist.

Nowadays, Cypriot missionary involvement in Sub-Saharan Africa continues and involves significant developmental and humanitarian work, but it is something of a *perplexing inheritance* for the Cypriot state. The current Orthodox Archbishop of Kenya is a Cypriot, and his name is also Makarios – a symbolic continuation. But the days of an Archbishop-President are long gone: as are the days of proud and vocal participation in the Non-Aligned Movement and association with Third World demands and aspirations. That the Cypriot state has clearly shifted diplomatic priorities is evident by the ‘suspending of operations’, in effect the closing down, of its resident diplomatic mission in Nairobi in 2013 (with respect to Sub-Saharan Africa, Cyprus currently has only one resident diplomatic mission, namely in South Africa). To that extent, we examine the changing goals and shifting uses of religious diplomacy, including the extent to which the current Cypriot Archbishop

in Kenya is not only an agent for Cypriot diplomacy with access to the Kenyan political elite, the faithful and the civil society but also a conduit for the occasional representation of Kenyan and African interests in Cyprus, although within the restrictive limits of the religious and humanitarian transcript that he operates in. In conclusion, we reflect on how far the aims of the Cypriot mission are shifting, pursuing objectives not originally intended or imagined.

## RELIGIOUS DIPLOMACY, BRANDING AND THE CYPRUS CASE

The notion of religious or faith-based diplomacy has come to signify a wide range of activities. It has often been suggested to operate ‘beyond power politics’, publicly utilizing religious discourses and ethical considerations which ‘trump realpolitik’ or expose ‘the missing dimension of statecraft’ (Johnston and Sampson, 1995; Johnston, 2003). It has also been presented in terms of the ideological or faith-based formulation of foreign policy, international action or negotiation strategy (Butterfield, 1953; Iqbal, 1975) as well as the international and transnational relations of religious actors (Haynes, 2001). Examples at the state level include the diplomacies of the Holy See or the Islamic Republic of Iran or the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, or at the inter-governmental level the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the transnational relations of organizations, like the Muslim Brotherhood and Hezbollah, and the institutionalization of permanent intra-faith collaboration, such as the World Council of Churches.

Another aspect of religious diplomacy entails hybrid state and non-state religious activity, which covers inter-faith dialogue forums and mediating work, such the Alliance of Civilizations under the auspices of the United Nations or the Community of Sant’ Egidio that works under the auspices of the Holy See (Bartoli, 1999; Lachmann, 2011). It can also entail faith-based mediation in people-to-people encounters across putatively opposing religious beliefs (Wellman, 2004). Even the notion of strategic religious



diplomacy in support of direct military objectives, notably in the case of US army's peace engagements in Iraq, has been developed (Griffin, 2009). Note, finally, that the public diplomacy of religious actors can be used both against and in support of government policy, as has been the case of Buddhist monks in Myanmar who sustained and publicized the Saffron revolution against the regime but also publicly demonstrated in support of the same regime's crackdown of minority Rohingya Muslims (Winston, 2013).

In the case of Cyprus, when referring to religious diplomacy, we are interested in both *the religiously informed discourses and activities of Cypriot State diplomacy and the diplomacy of the Cypriot Greek Orthodox church*, which at times have been inseparable, especially during the Presidency of Archbishop Makarios (1960–1977). The political influence of the Church in Cyprus remains important but it is no longer the powerhouse it used to be during the reign of Makarios.

With regard to religious diplomacy, parallel to this process of representing and negotiating issues of concern to religious actors or faith-based concerns of state actors, the development of communication techniques and religious branding has intensified. Religion as an enterprise is not something new, especially with regard to the organized religions that aspire to spread the faith and retain the faithful. What is new, however, is the increasing interaction between religion and global marketing strategies, such as the consumption of religious culture through entertainment, televangelism, new age designer spirituality and so on (Einstein, 2007; Kuzma *et al*, 2009). Interestingly, this concerns not the mere promotion of the faith, whether with good or bad intentions, but *the parallel promotion and selling of other products, places and nations*, by association with a specific religious brand (Temporal, 2011; Uysal, 2013).

The public dimension of religious diplomacy entails such organized attempts to influence public audiences within and across the community of faith and/or the national community from which that faith is seen to derive (Seib, 2013; Pentin, 2013). It might seek to spread the faith, or impart religious values, or simply enhance the logo of the faith (Baczyńska and Heneghan, 2014). At the

same time, it enhances the status of the faith, or the agent successfully representing that faith, within the faith community or nation (Fineman, 2013; Garkand, 2013). Furthermore, incorporating the logic of reciprocal, two-way communication and influence between actor and audience (Melissen, 2005; Deos and Pigman, 2010), public (religious) diplomacy can include the intersubjective activities and constitutive exchanges between faith organizations and communities of faith.

The Cypriot case with branding Orthodoxy in Sub-Saharan Africa illustrates while also problematizing various aspects of the normative making and remaking of the diplomatic world (Constantinou, 2006; Bjola and Kornprobst, 2013; Cornago, 2013). To begin with, *(Cypriot) religious diplomacy has been contested internationally as well as nationally*. Faith-based diplomacy goes against the current of modern diplomacy, given how the mixing of politics and religion has been viewed negatively in post-Westphalian secular societies. Yet, the interplay of religion and politics has been enormous, despite the secular thesis separating them (Bohn, 2002; Kirby, 2003). During the Cold War, Marxism and 'atheist communism' have been proscribed as the most insidious enemy of the 'free' and 'godly' West. In the 1960s and 70s, however, a body of works emerged introducing a 'liberation theology', a movement which provided new hermeneutics of the message of the Christ while embracing key aspects of Marxism. Even though international, this movement has been especially active in Latin America. Makarios's religious involvement, outlined below, assembled the critical spirit of liberation theology championing the oppressed and teaching that the Church should work actively to combat social, political and economic oppression.

With regard to official diplomatic agencies, at least in the West, it has been suggested that the Westphalian legacy has brought about a significant loss of religious literacy and competency in the understanding of faith-based discourse and its diverse uses, something that is nowadays suggested as being in need of reconsideration (Loskota and Flory, 2013). To be sure, the religious subtexts of policy and discourse have often remained or not



difficult to expose in the foreign policies of many so-called secular states, like the US (Huliaras, 2008). Moreover, even ideologically opposed states, like China, have tapped into the various faiths in their realm for public diplomatic purposes (Zhang, 2013). Nonetheless, the high-profile mixing that Makarios attempted as President of Cyprus in Africa was perceived at best as exotic, at worse as alienating and dangerous by the standards of a 'modern' European state. Thus, Makarios has been criticized both domestically and abroad for this merging of religion and politics and derided as the 'Red Priest' (Tatum, 2002, p. 49). However, 'liabilities' can turn into 'assets' (Avraham, 2014) and in a small country where cultural assets are generally limited and one has to struggle to 'sell the state' (cf. Park, 2009), 'riskier' opportunities like using religion to gain international visibility and enhance influence appeared to be entirely rational.

Cypriot religious diplomacy has been *semi-officially or indirectly pursued by the state*. The Republic of Cyprus is not a theocratic state; it is formally a bicomunal Republic, a consociational democracy, which at independence in 1960 constitutionally divided power along ethno-religious lines between the (Christian Orthodox) Greek Cypriots (78%) and the (Muslim) Turkish Cypriots (18%). The reason it developed an ability to pursue a religious diplomacy has had to do with the importance of the Cypriot Church as a political institution in the colonial and postcolonial periods and that the first President of the Republic of Cyprus was elected to be the Archbishop of Cyprus, Makarios III. Another important factor concerned the fact that the de jure government of the Republic was taken over exclusively by the Greek-Cypriot community, following the eruption of intercommunal violence in 1963–4. In sum, historical circumstances and the personal involvement of the first President of the Republic made it possible for faith-based diplomacy to enter through the back door, and used *selectively* and *expediently* in international relations with targeted states, whilst Cypriot diplomacy remained officially secular.

At the same time, Cypriot religious diplomacy utilized successful *place branding*, linking it to the

national image, whilst capitalizing on media coverage and tourist campaigns conducted by professional firms (Anholt, 2009; Pigman and Deos, 2008). Cypriot Orthodox missions to Africa have been supported by the notion of the island as a spiritual abode, with biblical references to the apostolic missions of St Paul and Barnabas and with a historic autocephalous church recognized by imperial (Byzantine) degree. Further historical weight was provided through links to the Crusades, when Cyprus became a Christian kingdom that hosted the Christian withdrawal from the Holy Land, and not only as a military bastion of Christianity but also as a spiritual abode, given how many Christian ascetics from all over Europe came to the island during that period to be as-close-as-possible to the Holy Land. Cyprus has been branded both as an *island of love* (in reference to the worship of Aphrodite) and an *island of saints* (in reference to the many eponymous apostles and Christian holy persons that lived, passed or died in the island). This has allowed Cyprus to underscore its long monastic tradition, medieval churches and ancient icons, and thus to make legitimate pretensions of being a kind of *spiritual metropolis* vis-à-vis other places that were new to Christianity or with less grandiose heritage.

Finally, the Cyprus case illustrates how in certain contexts public diplomacy can even work better when pursued by small states. One way of understanding small states is to approach them negatively as those states that are not 'great powers', following on the developments of the 19th and 20th centuries, the proliferation of new states and the decolonization of empires (Neumann and Gstöhl, 2004, p. 4). Other definitions, however, suggest that small statehood is linked to the lack of conventional power and insecurity/fragility issues. Nonetheless, these definitions often miss how small states may be 'great powers' in issue areas linked to their geographical position, specific valuable resource, economic flexibility and diplomatic competence (Thorhallsson and Wivel, 2006, p. 658). Moreover, the notion of the state should be seen not only in relation to the power it broadly possesses or claims to possess but to the power it periodically exercises (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2005, p. 4). In this regard, small states can exercise

considerable power *relationally* by finding and exploiting their niches (Thorhallsson, 2012, p. 160).

As put by Cooper and Shaw (2009, p. 10), due to limited human and often material resources, small states need to develop 'public diplomacies that engage a wider set of non-state resources and networks'. What they 'lack in structural clout they can make up through creative agency' and the smaller size foreign ministry bureaucracy certainly allows for more flexibility in terms of diplomatic pursuits. Moreover, a small state's projection of values and ideology into a foreign land cannot be viewed as a real threat. 'Soft power' can never be combined with 'hard power' and transformed into 'smart power'. Thus, the public diplomacies of smaller states may in the end have more persuasive reach as their *soft power is untainted by hard power*.

Of course, as suggested above, the symbolic domination of power in diplomatic practice remains. As shown by scholars (Adler-Nissen, 2008; Pouliot, 2010; Neumann, 2012; Kuus, 2013), while investigating the diplomatic habitat and daily political activities within which forms of power are produced and operationalized, attention must be paid to the micro-practices surrounding classifications, hierarchies, expertise, routines and rituals. In this particular case, religious diplomacy allows Cypriot state and non-state actors to 'punch above their weight' in terms of outreach and influence and to that extent smallness should not serve as an alibi for the absence of symbolic violence with regard to other subaltern actors. On the contrary, the smallness of the actor and incapacity in exercising hard power might sublimate symbolic violence and make it look 'innocent' or more difficult to detect. Yet, as shown below, matters with Cypriot religious diplomacy are more complex for it has also managed to institute symbolic resistance through its anti-colonial branding of Orthodoxy in the African continent.

## MAKARIOS AS A DIPLOMATIC CELEBRITY

Cypriot religious diplomacy and branding fully utilized what subsequently became known as celebrity diplomacy (Cooper, 2008; Tsaliki *et al*,

2011) and the biggest asset Cyprus had at the time of independence of a celebrity diplomat. Makarios III was the archbishop and primate of the autocephalous Church of Cyprus from 1950 until his death in 1977. During the 1950s, he became the political leader of the anti-colonial struggle of the Greek-Cypriot movement EOKA (National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters) that fought against British colonial rule. Consequently, because of his dual role, Makarios became the Ethnarch: the *de facto* leader of the Greek ethnos in Cyprus.

At the international front, Makarios participated in the first Afro-Asian Conference, which took place in Bandung, Indonesia, in April 1955. In Bandung, the foundations for a Non-Aligned Movement were laid out and Makarios launched his profile as an anti-colonial leader (Anagnostopoulou, 2013, p. 258). The Bandung move was highly symbolic and imaginative. The Conference was an entirely Afro-Asiatic meeting, with no other European and no other Christian bishop – the religion of the colonizers (Vanezis, 1971, pp. 90–91). This association with the Third World continued. Years later as an independent state, Cyprus chose to join the Afro-Asiatic Group of states at the United Nations and is still a member of the Asiatic group, even though for all other terms and purposes it defines itself as a European state (Constantinou, 2004, pp. 109–111).

Following independence, Makarios became the first and longest-serving president of the Republic of Cyprus (1960–1977) while also being Archbishop. This meant that Cyprus had been broadly and unofficially projected onto the world stage as a semi-religious actor. Although in some 'modern' quarters this appeared undesirable and anachronistic, among more 'traditional' actors Cyprus was successfully branded through its religious history and biblical origins. As put by Vanezis (1974, p. 41): 'It is not often realised that the Orthodox Church of Cyprus is one of the oldest Christian churches of the world, much older than the Patriarchate of Constantinople itself or the Church of Metropolitan Greece'. Makarios overplayed and thrived on that status, receiving dignitaries from Christian countries in the



Archbishop's Palace or Kykko Monastery, when expedient, rather than the Presidential Palace. As recalled by Fallaci (1974), the reception of him could be deeply religious even in secular spaces like a hotel in Athens: 'One evening he came down to the lobby, and as soon as he appeared, all dressed up like an icon, shining with gold and jewels, and gripping his pastoral scepter, the lobby became a chapel. Some bowed till their noses touched their navels, some knelt on the floor, some tried to kiss his hand or at least his vestment'.

Makarios's celebrity status cannot be singly explained by reference to either his political or religious authority (Hatzivassileiou, 2015, p. 227). It was rather a combination of both. He expressed a centuries-old tradition, which was both spiritual and political, and pre-dated state authority. His international partners would face the Greek state as a recent creation, not to speak of the Cypriot state, but not of his ecclesiastical clout, e.g. a leader whose sign was from cinnabar given as an imperial right to the Archbishop of Cyprus in the late 5th century. (Emilianides, 2011, p. 104). He was respected also because over time he came to represent a revolutionary project, irrespective or despite the smallness of his state, first with the anti-colonial struggle and then the Non-Aligned Movement (Hatzivassileiou, 2015, p. 239).

Makarios's strategy was to publicize and internationalize the Cyprus question through speeches, travelling and symbolic gestures. During the anti-colonial struggle, he travelled extensively to Greece to gather support for Enosis but also in 1953 to Egypt, Syria and Lebanon, where sizable Greek Orthodox communities existed (Vanezis, 1971, p. 90). He joined the Bandung conference in April 1955, 3 weeks after the beginning of a violent insurgency in Cyprus and for an archbishop symbolically missing the Good Friday and Easter liturgies – a holy week devoted to prayer and abstinence – while working for the political emancipation of his people (Mayes, 1960, p. 23). He sought a working knowledge of the UN as far back as 1952, sitting at the proceedings of the 7th General Assembly, and subsequently petitioned the UN, in the beginning against the advice and official foreign policy of Greece and

finally in 1954 with Greek support, to demand the exercise of the right of self-determination for Cyprus. (Mayes, 1960, p. 126).

In the post-independence era, now as Head of State and celebrated anti-colonial hero, he travelled in addition to many other countries and arranged for the filming of many of his visits, creating a series of documentaries mainly for domestic consumption. Whereas in places like India or Japan, symbolic inter-faith dialogue is visually narrated through his encounters with religious leaders and non-Christian religious sites, in other places like his visit to Finland in 1968, beyond the political meetings he capitalized on his religious position more directly, conducting a religious service in an Orthodox Church in Helsinki (Georgakis, 1968). Likewise in his visit to the USSR in 1971, he participated in the enthronement of the new Patriarch of Moscow and visited the Theological Academy of Leningrad.

In his visits to Africa, he was welcomed as a typical African leader who combined politics and religion and even held a staff like any other African chief (Interview with Julius Katholo, 1/7/2015). He visited many African countries, especially countries where Christianity was prominent, such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Nigeria, Benin, Ivory Coast, Ghana and the Seychelles. Makarios had a special relationship with Kenya. He first passed through Mombasa on his way to the Seychelles, exiled there by the British government. When he was freed from the Seychelles, in April 1957, he spent one week in Nairobi where he met Kenyan freedom fighters, and delivered strong public speeches and statements about emancipation from British colonial rule (Tillyrides, n.d). This memorable short pass of Makarios through Kenya established contacts and elevated him into an emblem of anti-colonial struggle – an *mzungu* fighting *mzungus*, a white guy fighting his own people, offering added legitimacy to the African cause. Moreover, just like many African leaders, Makarios 'naturally' used religion for political emancipation. It was also through his passing from Kenya that Makarios fully realized the institutional importance of Christian missions in African countries as well as the significance of the African



independent churches that were driving the anti-colonial movement (Archbishop of Kenya Makarios, 2015, pp. 37–38).

Progressively, the Cypriot anti-colonial struggle through Makarios's personification became known in Sub-Saharan African countries, even before the beginning of Cypriot missionary work. President Nyerere expressed his admiration for the Cypriot anti-colonial struggle precisely because of the smallness of the nation, making it a source of inspiration for bigger nations, like Tanganyika (Cyprus State Archives (CSA): FA1/343/43/3; Kranidiotis, 1963). President Jomo Kenyatta suggested that Makarios's name was deemed a synonym for freedom in Kenya (PIO Press Release, 16 January 1970), thus symbolically providing an official stamp of approval for Kenyans to adopt it. Indeed, following mass baptisms in Kenya in 1971 the majority of those baptized chose the name Makarios (Tillyrides, n.d.).

## THE CYPRIOT REBRANDING OF ORTHODOXY

Makarios identified emancipation from colonial rule as a *religious* idea and thus essentially associated the anti-colonial struggle to a *religious mission before being a political one*. In April 1957, a few days after his release by the British from the Seychelles exile, he made his way to Kenya and, in a fiery speech in the Orthodox Cathedral of St Anargyroi in Nairobi, linked *his* religion to liberation theology:

The representatives of the church are being accused because they are dealing with politics, that they are politicians. No! They are not politicians, the church is not dealing with politics, we are not political representatives; we are slaves and soldiers of the flag of freedom and the idea of freedom is not political [...] the right to freedom is universal. God created people to live all free under the sun. (*Enateniseis*, 2012, p. 173)

Makarios capitalized on the legacy of the African Orthodox Church, which originally developed independently from the Greek Orthodox Church. The African Orthodox Church emerged in Johannesburg in the late 19th

century and it was the offspring of the Pan-African movement. In 1892, a group of black Methodists who were dissatisfied with the racism encountered within the Methodist Church, broke away to form an 'Ethiopian Church'. The Ethiopian Church later split into several groups, some of which were interested in episcopacy, and formed links with the African Methodist Episcopal Church of the USA and with the (Anglican) Church of the Province of South Africa. In the 1920s, one of the clergy of the Ethiopian Church, Daniel William Alexander, made contact with the African Orthodox Church, which had recently been formed in the USA, and eventually was ordained a bishop of that church.

Some of the clergy associated with the movement conceived the idea of forming a single Black Church, and one of the main proponents of this view was an Anglican priest, George Macguire, who sought affiliation with the Orthodox Church as a black ethnic jurisdiction (Platt, 1989, p. 474). He approached the Russian Orthodox bishop in the USA, but at that time, immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the Orthodox Church in America was in a difficult position. Daniel William Alexander's role in the process of the creation of the Orthodox African church was decisive. His religious career started as a catechist at St Cuthbert's Anglican Church in Pretoria in 1902. Later, he joined Brander's Ethiopian Catholic Church in Zion, where he was a Provincial Canon, Director of the Rand and Prebendary of St Augustine's Pro-Cathedral. However, Alexander left Pretoria and the Anglican Church in 1914 and, in about 1920 as mentioned earlier, he joined the African Church of J. Khanyane Napo. He was stationed in Kimberley but soon he got tired of being summoned to Johannesburg for meeting about quarrels between the leaders and he left to form the *African Orthodox Church* in 1924. In 1931, Alexander visited Uganda at the invitation of Reuben Sseseya Mukasa (later known as Fr Reuben Spartas) and ordained Mukasa and Obadiah Basajjitalo as priests (Hayes, 1996).

In May 1935, Alexander wrote to Archbishop Isidore of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Johannesburg, asking for letters of introduction to



Fr Nikodemos Sarikas of Tanganyika and the Patriarch of Jerusalem (Githieya, 1992, p. 158). The Archbishop replied, suggesting that he visit the Patriarch of Alexandria. Within the same period, Archimandrite Nicodemus Sarikas visited Tanganyika and observed for 9 years the life and habits of the people of the Orthodox African Church in Eastern Africa and wrote several reports on their activities. On November 18, 1935, Alexander arrived in Kenya and along with others he took the initiative and founded a seminary with eight students at Gituamba. In June 1937, he ordained two of his students as priests and two as deacons and returned to South Africa (Githieya, 1992, pp. 167–168).

The African Orthodox Church in South Africa received government recognition in 1941. As a result of the contact with the Patriarchate of Alexandria, in 1946 the African Orthodox Church led by Gathuna, a student of Alexander, sought and received recognition by the Patriarchate as a *canonical Orthodox Church*. It was then that African candidates for the clergy began to receive training in Egypt and Greece. Yet after the end of the World War II and while the anti-colonial movements intensified, the Orthodox Church in some enclaves was banned and members of the church received harsh treatment, especially in Kenya. This is the reason why Archbishop Makarios's passing via Kenya in 1957 had added symbolic value for the anti-colonial movement and the persecuted Orthodox Church (Hayes, 1996). Yet, with Makarios the 'Hellenization' of the African Orthodox Church became a more high-profile religious as well as political project.

In March 1971, Makarios made a four-day visit to Kenya to lay the foundations of an Orthodox Seminary in Nairobi, whose aim was to train Orthodox priests from all over Africa. He also conducted mass baptisms – conversions and reconversions from other denominations – into Orthodox Christianity; around 6000–7000 baptisms were conducted during his visit, and continued even when Makarios left the country reaching approximately 9000 (Archbishop of Kenya Makarios, 2015, p. 42).

As pointed out, Makarios's interest in Sub-Saharan Africa was not strictly religious. It

entailed both domestic and international political agendas. Between 1964 and 1974, there was a period of political turmoil for both Greece and Cyprus that deteriorated further with the establishment of the military junta of the Greek colonels in 1967 (Woodhouse, 1985). Makarios's international visits and celebrity status were not something the Greek military government liked. The same went with the Turkish government and Turkish-Cypriot community of Cyprus for different reasons. Makarios was constantly seeking international recognition for his government and confirmation of his legitimacy following the intercommunal clashes between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in 1963–4 and the fact that the officially bi-communal Republic of Cyprus became in effect mono-communal.

Consequently, Makarios had specific domestic and international audiences in mind when engaging in religious missionary activity. In 1972, the dissatisfaction of the Greek junta and internal opposition in Cyprus against Makarios reached its peak. Three prominent Cypriot bishops – Anthimos, Yennadios and Kyprianos – convoked a Holy Synod on 2 March 1972 and demanded Makarios's resignation from the presidency of the Republic by invoking canon law. To that extent, Makarios's ethnarchism and dual role, his once powerful rhetorical weapon for his political status, became the Achilles heel of his presidential rule (Anagnostopoulou, 2013, p. 283).

In this hostile atmosphere, Makarios made the Cypriot state his greatest shield of protection, giving it the mission of the guardian of the Greek and Orthodox values in Cyprus and underlining the fact that the struggle of the Greek Cypriots was not only for the motherland, Greece, but also for the faith (Anagnostopoulou, 2013, p. 284). Makarios, confronting the three bishops, responded with an 'ecumenical front', with the convocation of a Special Synod, in July 1973, under the headship of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, which deposed the bishops. However, this 'holy war' weakened the state (Anagnostopoulou, 2013, pp. 285–286). Consequently, through his public religious diplomacy, prominently acted out in Africa, Makarios sought to enhance both his



religious and political authority internationally as well as at home.

His official visits but also his 'private' missionary activity were fully publicized via commissioned documentaries, closely directed and scripted by the Presidency Minister, Patroclus Stavrou, who also wrote most of Makarios's speeches. The religious speeches almost always had political subtexts, and the political speeches, where appropriate, religious references and subtexts. For example, at the ceremony for the deposit of the cornerstone of the Seminary in Nairobi on 22 March 1971, Makarios explained that: 'This Seminary, beyond the religious purpose which it will serve, will constitute a symbol and an expression of a permanent link of friendship and brotherhood [...] yet another cornerstone in the consolidation of the existing friendly relations between our two countries; relations that have been founded by the belief in common ideals and common struggles' (Quoted in Nearhou, 2002, p. 299). In other words, it was about the enhancement of postcolonial solidarity and continued struggle for independence and dignity through the spreading of the Orthodox faith, domestically underscoring that this was something Africans fully endorsed while some in Cyprus doubted.

In his return speech from Nairobi on 23 March 1971, given at Nicosia International Airport, Makarios played on the non-state, religious character of the mission that could still rip benefits for the Cypriot state, through the 'many friendly manifestations' by the Kenyan people (PIO Press Release, 1971). That was the kind of public diplomacy and exercise of soft power in a foreign country that no other Cypriot politician could master, cementing the Cypriot state abroad and Makarios's legitimacy at home. In an interview to Fallaci (1974), Makarios revealed how effortlessly this was done:

It was amusing because there's a Catholic mission there [referring to Kenya] that's not too well liked because of its old ties with colonialism, and to baptise even a single person those poor missionaries have to sweat like hell. Help women give birth, nurse babies, and what have you. For me instead it was quite simple. I didn't have to do

any of those awful things, and the result is that in Africa I have at my disposal the largest concentration of black Orthodox Christians!

Makarios who died in 1977 did not live to see some of the difficulties surrounding the canonization of the African Orthodox Church into the Greek Orthodox tradition. Specifically, he did not experience the deposing and unfrocking by the Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa of the historical African Bishop Gathuna in 1979 – the one who welcomed Makarios and arranged for the mass baptisms in Kenya in 1971 – over spurious charges of causing 'disunity'. These charges created a major schism in the Orthodox community in Kenya between the 'Greek' and 'independent African' supporters that ended up in court and run until the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding this later event, Makarios was right that his own symbolic missionary work was greeted with much enthusiasm by the locals, and that it was, compared to the other missions, extremely easy.

## THE WORK OF THE CYPRIOT MISSION IN KENYA

Makarios Tillyrides is the current Archbishop of Kenya. He became the natural inheritor of Archbishop Makarios's missionary project in the country and through the Seminary to the missions throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. In 1971–1972, Archbishop Makarios established the Orthodox Seminary in Kenya and in 1975 he asked Tillyrides – a doctoral student at Oxford University – to join the mission, which he eventually did in 1977 after the completion of his studies. Despite periodic absences, Tillyrides remained there as a layperson until 1992 when he became a priest and he fittingly changed his name from Andreas to Makarios (*Fileleftheros*, 17 February 2002). The Orthodox mission is officially under the Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria but effectively under the Cypriot Orthodox Church because of the legacy of Makarios. It is thus very much a Cypriot mission, with financial and human resources coming for many years primarily from Cyprus, and with



Makarios Tillyrides taking over as Archbishop from another Cypriot, Seraphim Kykkotis.

According to Makarios Tillyrides (Interview, 29/6/2015), the foremost target of the Cypriot mission is to deliver the word of the Gospel. However, the mission also conducts social, developmental and humanitarian work. Specifically, it builds and supports clinics, hospitals, orphanages and schools (from kindergarten to technical colleges). In line with other Christian missions in Africa, its role is pastoral in both the material and spiritual senses. The current Archbishop is the spiritual guide to close to one million parishioners but also a tireless manager, with two mobile phones in hand, roving the country, in charge of numerous social welfare and humanitarian projects. Although faith is not conditional for receiving assistance from the Mission, it is clear that joining Orthodoxy may give the faithful specific advantages. Many Kenyans join the Orthodox Mission and the Seminary in an attempt to find a better future through education. Some may have a religious disposition. For others, the choice of religion may simply be a means for social development and a career.

Currently, there are around 1000 people attending at the Seminary and the schools in the surrounding area such as the kindergarten, the primary school, the computer and sewing schools and the teachers' college. Moreover, the Mission cooperates with the Cypriot Branch of Doctors of the World and together they develop food programmes and support clinics (*Fileleftheros*, 25 March 2007) as well as collaborating with a number of other Cypriot Foundations operating in Africa, e.g. the A.G. Leventis Foundation, the Sophia Foundation for Children, the George and Androula Vasilliou Foundation. Along with other schools, the mission participates in athletic festivals and competitions of any kind (*Pantainos*, July/August 2006, pp. 302–306). There is a Makarios football team that participates in a local league. Additionally, the mission frequently organizes music festivals where the Orthodox youth present hymns, folk songs and theatrical performances (*Our Cyprus*, January/April 1995, p. 18).

Conducive to the success of this Cypriot mission is the liturgical translation and innovation

but also the flexibility with which the Orthodox dogma is applied to the African faithful. The work of the Seminary is versatile as it spreads the message of the gospel in more than twenty local languages and dialects. This is very important in terms of innovation and outreach as no other Christian mission did anything similar until recent times (*Pantainos*, January/February 2006, pp. 70–73). Moreover, in many instances, polygamy is allowed, especially among the Massai community. Also circumcision is allowed and celebrated among certain traditional communities. The Mission also uses African traditions such as ululation, clapping and dancing, integrating them into the austere Byzantine liturgy of Christian Greek Orthodoxy. The current Archbishop Makarios symbolically joins them in their dances, something that is frowned upon by Orthodox purists. But as he states, 'Many cannot imagine a bishop dancing... [They find] it unthinkable in our tradition. But here we do it. It does no harm to anybody' (Markides, 2007). One could read this as a symbolic, 'marketing' gesture and co-optation of local traditions for missionary expediency. However, in interviews with locals in Kenya (e.g. Damaris Parsitau, interview 3/7/2015), it is highly appreciated and links the Greek Orthodox liturgy to that of the African Independent Churches.

The Cypriot Orthodox Mission in Kenya receives excellent publicity through laborious hard work. The Archbishop is a prolific author, writing articles in both Greek and English and publicizes them in various Orthodox magazines, the Cypriot, Greek and Kenyan Presses as well as online websites describing his activities and the financial aid given and projects supported through the Mission. Many actions of Archbishop Makarios are gestures of excellent public relations and communications strategy. Since the time he was Bishop of Riruta, he initiated a 'Love Crusade' to bring the African youth into Orthodoxy. With the same goals, he organizes music festivals, educative seminars and 'unorthodox' youth gatherings at mountain peaks (*Our Cyprus*, September–December, 2004).

The Archbishop conducts his public diplomacy targeting the Orthodox youth not only of Kenya



but also in East Africa and worldwide through international conferences on religious and social topics. With the dissemination of Archbishop's work all over the Christian Orthodox world, the award of the Orthodox Patriarchate School by the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations came as a further enhancement of Makarios Tillyrides's image (*All Nations*, January–February 2008, p. 11).

The current Archbishop, Makarios Tillyrides, acts as a ceremonial unofficial ambassador of Cyprus in Kenya especially since 2013 when the Republic of Cyprus decided to 'suspend the operations' of its resident diplomatic mission. The above is evident from the fact that he is the one officially contacted and invited in meetings and events by various government agencies and official entities (Interview with Makarios Tillyrides, 29/6/2015). Even during the period when the Cypriot High Commission would be in operation the Archbishop would have had much easier and high-profile access to Kenyan politicians than the High Commissioner. One such example is the meeting with the former Vice President of Kenya, Kalonzo Musyoka, who expressed the Kenyan government's gratitude and thanks for the support and practical assistance to the people of Kenya (*Enateniseis*, May/August 2009, p. 209). Musyoka, who is a friend of Makarios Tillyrides, now serves as Honorary Consul of Cyprus in Kenya.

Probably, Archbishop Makarios's most recent success story of conducting public religious diplomacy was held in 2012, when the son of the then Prime Minister of Kenya, Raila Odinga, named Fidel Castro, was baptized into the faith before marrying. The young Fidel received the name Makarios and the ceremony attracted wide publicity, given how he was seen as a successor to his father and groomed for a political leadership position in Kenya (*Enateniseis*, September/December 2012, pp. 172–175). The young man retained both names and became known as Fidel Castro Makarios Odinga, until his sudden death in January 2015: two revolutionary names in one – enhancing both the Orthodox and the Cypriot logo.

## CONCLUSION

As shown, Cypriot religious diplomacy and missionary work in Sub-Saharan Africa started with an ambitious-visionary leader. It was a means through which Makarios sought to enhance his international legitimacy and leadership within the Non-Aligned Movement but also his political and ecclesiastical power at home. Makarios's public diplomacy in Sub-Saharan Africa also helped to successfully brand Orthodoxy as an anti-colonial, liberation faith and this has allowed the Cypriot Mission in collaboration with the Orthodox Patriarchate in Alexandria to significantly increase its congregation and influence in the region. This has taken place at the same time as the Cypriot (and Greek) diaspora in the region has been reduced, following the independence of African states, making the task of promoting Orthodoxy and Cyprus more challenging.

The Cypriot Orthodox Mission displays the subtle power of 'weak power'. When compared to the traditional and well-established European missions to Africa or the more recent and larger Evangelical missions from the United States (Huliaras, 2006), the Cypriot mission has been, in the words of a Kenyan academic, a surprisingly *silent mission* and quite successful probably because of that silence (Damaris Parsitau, interview 3/7/2015). It seems less vocal or strategically vocal on sensitive issues, or not expected to be vocal given its size, thus managing to remain neutral and friendly to all political factions in Kenya.

Our case study has also revealed two other issues that inform debates about the 'Good Country' benefit that Cyprus acquires, inter alia, through its religious-humanitarian actions (see <http://www.goodcountry.org> with Cyprus currently on 18th place). At the same time, however, the activities of the Mission complicate the national exclusivity and one-dimensional perception of the Mission. First, it appears that in the last decade or so, especially because of Archbishop Makarios Tillyrides's initiatives, the Cypriot Orthodox Mission in Kenya is progressively changing into an *international* Orthodox mission. This is in line with the major transformations of the late twentieth and twenty-first century



concerning the ‘deterritorialization’ and ‘transnationalization’ of religion, including Orthodoxy, around the globe (Roudometof, 2014). In the case of the Orthodox Mission in Kenya, this is due to two main reasons: First, there is not enough interest by the Republic of Cyprus as evidenced by the shift in its diplomatic priorities, despite the continuation of financial aid given to the Mission, although significantly reduced due to the current financial crisis in Cyprus. Second, Archbishop Makarios has begun to cooperate with organizations from all over the world and holds a large network of partners. For example, he cooperates among others with the Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. Together, they perform, for example, programmes against AIDS and they finance drilling in areas where there is no water. Finland has also sent material for the needs of the mission, clergy, nurses, laymen and teachers (*Pantainos*, January/February 2006, pp. 70–73; *Pantainos*, September/October 2005, pp. 383–386). In other words, *Orthodoxy is still branded through the Mission, but Cypriot statehood not exclusively so.*

Secondly, the current Archbishop Makarios seems to have developed roles that are quite distinct from those President Makarios envisaged when he established the Mission. One might say that there is a *reverse mission* now with more Kenyans (including more Kenyan priests and monks) currently living and operating in Cyprus, than Cypriots in Kenya. That is contrary to the 1960s and 70s. Thus, the current Archbishop often acts as a representative for these Kenyans and their interests in Cyprus, not merely representing and branding Orthodoxy and Cyprus in Kenya (Interview with Makarios Tillyrides, 29/6/2015). There are currently Kenyan priests and students who work and/or are being educated in Cyprus, some with scholarships arranged by the Cypriot Mission in Kenya, and who see Makarios as *their* bishop, and *their* ambassador (Interview with Panaraitos, 4/8/2015). No longer just the Cypriots’ ‘Man in Nairobi’, Makarios is the Kenyans’ ‘Man in Nicosia’. To be sure, the extent of his representation of their interests is limited by Cypriot-EU policies and dominant perceptions

concerning migration. But at least within the parameters of the Church and its influence on Cypriot society and politics, it allows for possibility that will be otherwise absent. Of course, this reverse support and advocacy enhances the symbolic power and relegitimizes the original Cypriot mission in the eyes of Africans experiencing its effects and benefits on the ground. It will be interesting to see how both the initial and the reverse missions develop, following Makarios’s eventual retirement from ‘the mission’.

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## NOTE

1 For the court case, see <http://kenyalaw.org/caselaw/cases/view/8433>.

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