# Cyprus and British Colonialism: A Bowen Family Systems Analysis of Conflict Formation

Kristian Fics
*University of Manitoba*, umficsk@myumanitoba.ca

# Cyprus and British Colonialism: A Bowen Family Systems Analysis of Conflict Formation

## Abstract

This article uses family systems theory and Bowen family systems psychotherapy concepts to understand the nature of conflict formation during British colonialism in Cyprus. In examining ingredients of the British colonial model through family systems theory, an argument is made regarding the multigenerational transmission of colonial patterns that aid in the perpetuation of the Cyprus conflict to the present day. The ingredients of the British colonial model discussed include the homeostatic maintenance of the Ottoman colonial structure, a divide and rule policy through triangulation, the use of nationalism and triangulation in the Cypriot education system, political exploitation, and apartheid laws. Explaining how it centers on relationships and circular causality, nonsummativity and homeostasis reveals the useful nature of family systems theories in understanding conflict formation. Also, Bowenian universal forces are examined in terms of the emotional system, individuality and togetherness, and anxiety. These are coupled with six Bowenian concepts in assessing functionality and symptom formation, namely: 1) differentiation of self, 2) triangles, 3) nuclear family emotional process, 4) multigenerational transmission process, 5) emotional cutoff, and 6) societal emotional process.

## Author Bio(s)

Kristian T.P. Fics is a PhD student in Marriage and Family Therapy at Nova Southeastern University training in psychotherapy at the Brief Therapy Institute, and the Family Therapy Clinic. He earned a PACS M.A. from the University of Manitoba. He is author of Healing through the Bones: Empowerment and the Process of Exhumations in the Context of Cyprus (Hamilton Books, 2017). He has volunteered with the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus.

**Cyprus and British Colonialism:**

**A Bowen Family Systems Analysis of Conflict Formation**

**Kristian T. P. Fics**

A history of colonial Cyprus is the history of a people who have endured colonization for over 2,500 years. The rich history of Cyprus and its struggle for independence can be seen from ancient to medieval to modern times. Cyprus and its people struggled for independence from Persia, Egypt (Ptolemy), Rome, Byzantium, England (Richard the Lion Heart in 1191), the Franks Lusignan period (1192-1491), the Venetian period (1491-1571), the Ottoman Empire (1571-1878), and finally Britain as its protectorate from 1878-1914. Cyprus was officially annexed by Britain in 1914 and then became a Crown colony from 1925-1960, until Cyprus gained its independence (Ker-Lindsey, 2011; Solsten & Keefe, 1993). Cyprus's independence, however, only lasted from 1960 to 1974. It was cut short by war that ensued between the Cypriots (Greek and Turkish) and their ethnoguarantors, Greece and Turkey (Byrne, 2000). It was a war that in 1983 resulted in its ultimate division as the Republic of Cyprus in the south (RoC) and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), as the north unilaterally declared its independence (Clement, 1993; Ker-Lindsey, 2011).

The shadow of Cyprus's British colonial inherited patterns must not be underestimated when it comes to the affect it had in conflict formation that persists to the present day. Therefore, I invite the reader to collaborate with the novel application of family systems thinking. To understand something as large, political, and longstanding as the ethnic conflict in Cyprus, family systems thinking may be useful, if for no other reason than to shed an alternative light on issues which at this point have become otherwise ossified in the conflict. There are insights to be gleaned about how groups behave over generations when viewed through a Bowen family systems lens. This article argues that the psychosocial colonial pattern formulated during British colonialism transmitted itself through societal emotional processes, not only to new generations (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Friedman, 1985), but also as a transgenerational transmission of trauma to both groups (Volkan, 1979, 1998, 2012).

This article applies family systems theory and Bowen family systems theory to a discussion of the nature of British colonialism implemented in Cyprus regarding two questions: What were the main ingredients of the British Colonial system within Cyprus? How was it applied to both Greek and Turkish Cypriots so as to aid understanding of patterns of conflict

formation, that persist to the present, between them? I shall explore the British colonial system's interaction *with* Greek and Turkish Cypriots, which led to patterns of psychosocial behaviors that are transmitted to multi-generations as a societal emotional process and differentiation (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Noone, 2014; Papero, 1990; Titelman, 2003, 2014). These historic patterns of interaction include the British homeostatic maintenance of the Ottoman colonial structure, a divide and rule policy through triangulation, the use of nationalism and triangulation in the Cypriot education system, political exploitation, and apartheid laws.

This article is structured in three main parts. The first part presents an account of family systems theory and Bowen family systems theory that aid in our understanding of psychosocial conflict formation. The second part offers an account of the British colonial model and its application with Cyprus. In systems model thinking the process of interaction between two parties or groups is never unidirectional, but rather a process of reciprocal behavioral exchanges based on a circular causal understanding of symptom/conflict formation. The systemic approach to understanding symptom/conflict formation differs greatly from psychodynamic approaches that argue individual dynamics instead of interactional phenomena. Transactions in the British colonial relationship with Cypriots are structured around hierarchical power relations that are unequal; in this case the colonial power is in a privileged position over the Cypriots who were in a less powerful position (Becvar & Becvar, 1999). The conclusion offers a discussion of the multigenerational transmission of psychosocial patterns that are protracting the conflict via a societal emotional process and differentiation due to the legacy of British colonialism and its *relationship* with Cypriots.

## Family Systems Theory

### Systems in the Real World

When evaluating conflict formation, it is necessary to understand that thinking through old models of A causes B (A→B), and not vice-versa (linear causality), leads to similar ends with the same results regarding conflict resolution because it involves blaming one party instead of each part understanding its influence on the outcome. Linear causality often ends in the failures of political settlements and inter-ethnic peace processes in many post-violent conflict societies (Licklider, 1995). An example of linear causality in the analysis of conflict formation in Cyprus would be that Britain (A) caused Greek and Turkish Cypriots (B) to come into conflict with one another, leaving a legacy that still divides the island. This is not the whole story. To

move past such thinking patterns of conflict formation, we must begin to understand conflict formation in a new scope of circular causality based on an interaction of *relationships,* which is paramount in understanding conflict formation and peacebuilding (Fics, 2017; Lederach, 1995, 2010).

An example of circular causality would be that Britain (group A) asks Greek Cypriots (group B) to stop its protests and (B) refuses to do so, which intensifies Britain (A) trying the same thing in different ways—causing the Greek Cypriots (B) to respond by using even more opposition. This is what is known as circular causality through equifinality in systems thinking, where all actions lead to the same end because nothing *different* is being done (Becvar & Becvar, 1999).

A view of conflict formation through a systems analysis of circular causality would in fact be that the *whole is greater than the sum of its parts*, which is the principle of non-summativity in systems theory (Becvar & Becvar, 1999; Hanson, 1995). In using family systems thinking to understand conflict formation, the smallest unit of analysis is the numerical number three. Here $1 + 1 = 3$ because 1 is considered a unit such as a person (or in this case Britain) and the other "1" is a person (or in this case the Cypriots) and the third aspect is the *relationship* between these two. Hence, we arrive at the number three. If we were to remove any one component of this system for the analysis of conflict formation, which is represented by the whole, we would not get the whole picture. It would be like trying to take one part of a bubble for analysis. The bubble would burst!  Removing any one part of the system to review it— without its reciprocal interaction based on the relationship transactions—would be meaningless when trying to understand the system and its parts, i.e., Greek and Turkish Cypriots in relation to Britain. Each part of the whole is understood as a subsystem, i.e., the Greek Cypriot group, the British group, and the Turkish Cypriots. Each group is considered a different subsystem.

It is important to understand that systems are in effect self-regulating and sustaining when we are reviewing conflict formation in a psychotherapeutic family systems scope (Bateson, Jackson, Haley, & Weakland, 1956; Becvar & Becvar, 1999; Bertalanffy, 1968; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Systems work through specific mechanisms that maintain their homeostasis, which is consistent with behaviors over time that define rules and create boundaries of the system (Becvar & Becvar, 1999). For example, a thermostat regulates a house. The thermostat is set at 78 degrees Fahrenheit, which is its homeostasis, and when the air gets too hot

by a degree, the thermostatic information notifies the air conditioner through energy transfer to turn on so it can return the system to its homeostasis of 78 degrees. The same is true if the temperature gets too cold. The heat will automatically turn on. The mechanisms to return the family system to its homeostasis hinge upon feedback information provided by people's behavior, which are understood in the form of negative or positive feedback (Becvar & Becvar, 1999). Negative feedback in family systems theory is exemplified by behaviors that maintain the system, like the thermostat triggering the air conditioner when the room is too hot so it can return to 78 degrees. On the other hand, positive feedback is new information (behavior) that challenges and changes the homeostasis of the system, such as warm air entering the room to alter the system to 79 degrees Fahrenheit. Eventually, if the new behavior (information) is consistent enough, then positive feedback will change the system to a new homeostasis that has new rules with new boundaries. In this case the be set to 79 degrees Fahrenheit (a new homeostasis) that again will be regulated by negative feedback mechanisms if the room gets too hot, to return the system to its new homeostasis of 79 degrees.

These basic principles of a homeostatic system regulation can be applied to the understanding of Britain's colonial legacy in Cyprus in a new way, through family systems theory. When examining the system and its homeostasis before Britain entered the picture, the parts of the system were made up of the Ottoman Empire, and Greek and Turkish Cypriots lived there before the 1571 Ottoman occupation. When Britain became a protectorate of Cyprus in 1878, a system was already in place that had a prior structure and homeostasis with feedback mechanisms. The systems homeostasis was between the three subsystems of Greek and Turkish Cypriots and the Ottoman Empire.

Britain now entered as a system into Cyprus, which was previously occupied by the Ottomans. This introduced new information (positive feedback), which should have altered the homeostasis of the system through what family systems scholars call *structural coupling* (Becvar & Becvar, 1999). Structural coupling is when two systems merge and new boundaries are formed, based on the values, beliefs, and worldviews transmitted through behavioral interaction. The interaction formulates rules that create system boundaries, regulating the homeostasis through positive and negative feedback mechanisms (Becvar & Becvar, 1999). However, unlike other colonial contexts under the British Empire (Ireland, Canada, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Jamaica), Britain maintained the old Ottoman colonial model and its structural rules and

boundaries to regulate Greek and Turkish Cypriots with its accompanying feedback mechanisms and homeostasis. This was catastrophic.

Instead of changing the homeostasis, which the Greek and Turkish Cypriot's anticipated through the introduction of a new system (British colonialism), negative feedback (behavior) was used to maintain the Ottoman system, and homeostasis in Cyprus during British colonial rule only intensified. Worse yet, the boundaries of the old Ottoman system and its homeostasis became even more rigid when parts of the subsystem (Greek Cypriots) wanted change. This increased Greek Cypriot positive feedback mechanisms (behavior) to alter the system's homeostasis, which further intensified British and Turkish Cypriot negative feedback mechanisms (to maintain the system). Ultimately, a circular causality of escalating behaviors emerged during British colonialism that arguably persists to the present.

## Bowen Family Systems Model

### Natural Systems in the Real World

Reviewing conflict formation in Cyprus through the Bowen family systems theoretical approach to psychotherapy, and understanding the mechanisms that regulate a system's function, is helpful toward understanding conflict formation for the purposes of conflict resolution. Murray Bowen's family systems model changed the way psychotherapy was practiced and understood. Socio-biological and evolutionary scholars (Darwin, 1859; Wilson, 1975) and neuroscientist Paul D. Maclean's works on the triune brain influenced Bowen's natural systems psychotherapeutic approach (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). The triune brain is an evolutionary model of the brain that is comprised of three major systems that developed in historical sequence neuroanatomically. The reptilian brain (R-complex) evolved first as the brain stem and large fist of the ganglia complex. It is in control of survival instincts and our fight or flight system, as well as imitation ability (commonly known as the *emotional system*). The second formation, the paleomammalian brain (limbic system) developed next, and it regulates emotions through feelings and their expressions known as the *feeling system*. Finally, the neomammalian brain (cerebral and neocortex) deals with deeper thinking processes such as reasoning, future projections, and the last to evolve: self-reflection. It is known as the *intellectual system* (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

When observing the processes of the *group*, it became clear that natural selection (in which certain characteristics of a species and larger systems are selected by the environment to

5

carry on through sexual reproduction) is not just genetic and physiological, but is behavioral as well—existing in relation to other living things (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

The fundamental family unit came to be understood as an emotional unit in which the functioning of members was interdependent. This can be observed between the subsystems of Greek and Turkish Cypriots in relation to the British. The emotional intensity of the family, which is understood as the emotional system, involves the entire family (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Papero, 1990; Titelman, 1998a, 2014). This is based on the reciprocal relationships that exist between individuals as well as groups (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Bowen developed a triad of natural systems that regulate behavior in a group as follows: 1) Emotional system; 2) Feeling system; 3) and Intellectual system (Bowen, 1978).

The emotional system is the most complex human system that exists in interdependence with the other two systems (the feeling system and the intellectual system). The feeling system and the emotional system have far more neuro-connections and pathways to one another anatomically. On a basic level, the emotional system has been understood as the area of the R-complex of the brain. Kerr and Bowen (1988) succinctly express its nature as follows:

> Defined broadly, the concept postulates the existence of a naturally occurring system in all forms of life that enables an organism to receive information (from within itself and from the environment), to integrate that information, and to respond on the basis of it. The emotional system includes mechanisms such as those involved in finding and obtaining food, reproducing, fleeing enemies, rearing young, and other aspects of social relationships. (pp. 28-29)

The emotional system is the oldest most powerful human system and organizing principle of all the systems. Kerr and Bowen (1988) note that, "Feelings appear to be an intellectual or cognitive awareness of the more superficial aspects of the emotional system" (p. 31). The emotional system is an automatic and non-volitional response system such as the fight or flight process from a real or perceived threat that is instinctual. The feeling system processes and regulates emotions through feelings and their behavioral expressions which can be considered less automatic than the emotional system. The intellectual system that developed most recently (evolutionarily) is the cerebral cortex and the neo-cortex, which shut down at the onset of intense anxiety. However, people's intellects are in service to these older systems of the emotional and

feeling system in which emotional disturbances arise (in many cases without their awareness of such a process) (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). This is arguably the case in conflict formation in Cyprus expressed in the section on the British colonial model as elaborated below. Yet, there is a mutual influence of the emotional, feeling, and intellectual systems as shown here:

*emotional reaction* → *feeling reaction* → *thoughts colored by the feelings* (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 33). Yet the opposite can also be true:

*thoughts from the intellectual system* → *feeling reaction* → *emotional reaction.*
"It is inaccurate to consider any of these systems as 'better' than the others" (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 33). All systems serve important functions for groups.

Bowen developed universal counterbalancing forces that exist in nature and in almost all species: the balancing forces of *individuality* and *togetherness* (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). The emotional system operates in accordance to tensions of this *life force*. Species tend to have a proximal operational distance to healthy functioning, as does humankind. Further, that positioning of animals plays a role in their social organizations (as do humans), and the emotional system creates an atmosphere that regulates these universal functions of species.

A final major force within nature is anxiety. Anxiety comes in two forms: 1) chronic, which is enduring and long lasting and primarily imagined; and 2) acute which is situational and can be very real (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Anxiety is not considered a force that is negative in nature. It serves many functions, such as the need to protect oneself and a group, yet it can become very destructive in extreme forms of hyperactivity, such as behavioral frenzy and hypo-activity in behavior paralysis (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Anxiety is expressed as an adaptation of evolution for an individual, family, group, or species that influences the emotional reactivity levels of a person, family, or in the case here, the group/subsystem that fears threat and responds through the emotional system toward ethnonationalism. Thus, it expresses itself in the cases of Greek Cypriot *Enosis* (Cyprus merging with Greece) and Turkish Cypriot *Taksim* (a separation of Cyprus and a merging with Turkey).

These organizing principles led to "family systems theory [that] emphasizes the *function* an individual's behavior has in the broader context of the relationship process . . ." (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, pp. 48-49), and can assist us in understanding how the relationships between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots, within their relationship with British colonialism, became strained. Bowen developed several concepts that guided his theory about how conflict formed and how

7

emotional illness and/or symptomatology developed over time. The following concepts are very useful in understanding conflict formation in the Cyprus context under British colonialism. I briefly discuss six of Bowen's concepts in assessing functionality and symptom formation within a system: 1) differentiation of self; 2) triangles; 3) nuclear family emotional process; 4) multigenerational transmission process; 5) emotional cutoff, and 6) societal emotional process (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

The differentiated person/group is not governed by automatic processes, has autonomous decision-making capabilities, is not emotionally reactive, and processes responses with an awareness of the universal aspects of individuality and togetherness coupled with understanding (conscious/unconscious) of emotions, feeling, and use of the intellectual system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Titelman, 2014). The differentiated group has the flexibility to respond appropriately to anxiety and change with changing circumstances; whereas a group with a low differentiation of self is highly reactive, has a hard time with change, and pushes toward constant togetherness in protecting the system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Differentiation of self and/or group can be multi-generationally transmitted (Noone, 2014) and so can trauma (Volkan, 1998).

To deal with anxiety, people/groups within a relationship triangulate, which means they bring in a third person/group to offset their anxiety. Bowen stated, "The triangle is the basic molecule of an emotional system. It is the smallest stable relationship unit" (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 134). These triangles can and are most likely interlocking with other groups and sub systems (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). A triangle in this context includes Britain's use of Turkish Cypriots, through divide and rule tactics to implement and enforce its apartheid system of laws, to impact the offsetting of anxiety and system stabilization/homeostasis of British power in Cyprus. In the process of triangulation, the relationship of two becomes the stable unit of three relationships and so on, known as interlocking triangles, that can withstand more and more as the anxiety level increases (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). An example of interlocking triangles in Cyprus would be the involvement of more than three parties such as Greece, Turkey, and the United Nations with Cypriots, to offset and manage the building anxiety in the system during conflict formation.

The nuclear family emotional process (Bowen's third concept) is based on a pattern of clinical dysfunction in the system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Titelman, 1998a, 1998b). The formation of symptoms in this context would be psychosocial, which is dependent upon patterns

of functioning as fused relationships or distant (Titelman, 1998b) in the emotional system via the externalization of anxieties onto specific subsystems (Greek and Turkish Cypriots). Emotional process is tied to Bowen's concept of the family projection process (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988), which is best described here as a form of emotional energy intensified by anxiety, and placed onto a component of the system. A good example is when a part of the system, in this case Britain, was invested in a facet of the subsystem (Turkish Cypriots) through triangulation and fusion against Greek Cypriots. The Greek Cypriots responded by emotional cutoff (distancing) from both the British and the Turkish Cypriots, based upon the anxiety provoking both a real and perceived threat of potential identity/cultural annihilation, as processed through their emotional system.

The emotional process and the levels of being able to differentiate which system is activating a behavioral response as emotional cutoff or triangulation, within a certain context (interaction between Greek and Turkish Cypriot's), can be multi-generationally transmitted (Ackerman, 2003; Kerr & Bowen, 1988, Friedman, 1985; Noone, 2014). Patterns of interaction can also be generationally passed on in the form of transgenerational trauma (Volkan, 1998, 2012). One can postulate that in the present context of Cyprus, new avenues of inter-ethnic interaction in the form of peacebuilding are necessary to aid in the development of relationships—chiefly because of the power of generational transmission processes stemming from inherited emotional/behavioral patterns (Fics, 2017).

Following are Bowen's major concepts of emotional cutoff and societal emotional processes. Emotional cutoff is the distancing of a family member (or in this case, a group), via emotional withdrawal or physical distance, to reduce anxiety (Ackerman, 2003; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Bowen, 1978; Titelman, 2003). This is evident in the separation of the island of Cyprus to the present day. Next, Bowen's final concept is his societal emotional process. Kerr and Bowen (1988) espouse its importance when they note, "The emotional process in society influences the emotional process in families, but it is a background influence affecting all families" (p. 334). Moreover, if there is a relevant chronic social anxiety in a social system, a decrease in societal differentiation of a group (the ability to cope with stress and anxiety with a sense of self) can and does occur, with the formation of societal dysfunctional symptoms (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). One of these symptoms is an increase in violence, which happened in the 1960s and during the 1974 war in Cyprus that led to over 2000 missing persons, Greek and Turkish Cypriot (Fics, 2017).

<center>**The British Colonial Model**</center>

Systems theory aids our understanding of multiple interrelated and interdependent parts of a conflict to better comprehend conflict formation (Byrne, 1997; Byrne & Carter, 1996; Byrne & Carter, 2002). British colonial policy, which defines its behavioral interaction *with* Greek and Turkish Cypriots, includes: homeostatic maintenance of the Ottoman colonial structure, a divide and rule policy through triangulation, the usage of nationalism and triangulation in the Cypriot education system, political exploitation, and apartheid laws. All the prior decisive elements of the British colonial model in Cyprus are now discussed through the scope of family systems theory and Bowen family systems concepts where applicable, to better understand conflict formation in the Cyprus context.

**British Homeostasis of the Ottoman Colonial Structure**

When systems go through structural coupling, meaning two systems merge to form a new system (Cypriots with the 1878 British protectorate), new rules create boundaries based on the sharing of values, beliefs, and worldviews (Becvar & Becvar, 1999)—even in a relationship that is complementary and based on a hierarchy of power. However, this did not happen in the case of Cyprus. When Britain first acquired Cyprus as a protectorate, it treated Cyprus as if it were an inconsequential possession (Varnava, 2009). Cyprus economically lacked mineral resources, but held strategic military importance as a Mediterranean location for British naval bases. These sovereign military bases were consolidated in the 1960 Zurich Agreement, in exchange for Cypriot independence (Kelling, 1990; Stergiou, 2015).

Forms of British colonial control in Cyprus can be observed by its use of the homeostatic structure of Ottoman rule.  That is, leaving the social structure of the island intact. For example, the village *Muktar* (headman), who under Turkish rule implemented Ottoman policy, were obliged to disseminate British policy (Kelling, 1990, p. 6). The continuation of the social and political structure of the Ottoman system can also be noted by the introduction by Britain of a Legislative Council, with a similar composition to the Ottoman system, that provided separate electorates for Greek and Turkish Cypriots and official members. The voting system of the Legislative Council was left in the majority for Turkish delegates, similar to what occurred under Ottoman rule (Kelling, 1990). Moreover, under the Ottomans the millet system, allowing for Jews and Christians to retain their own religion (Kelling, 1990, pp. 6-7), accounted for a communal separation of the system that was intensified by British colonial rule aimed at

<center>10</center>

exacerbating ethnic divisions (Skoutaris, 2011).

Two more examples of the homeostatic maintenance of Ottoman structural rule augmented and maintained by the British were the Turkish Tribute and the education system. When Britain became protectorate of Cyprus, it agreed to pay the Turkish Tribute that the island of Cyprus would give as a province of the Ottoman Empire in the amount of £93,000 per year (Kelling, 1990, p. 7). Due to Crimean war loans, the Tribute was never given to Turkey. It was collected by Britain and used to maintain the island's colonial expenses and profiteering— fueling ethnonationalism and intensifying the ethnic divide (Holland, 1998, pp. 7-8). The injustice and economic strain caused by the British bondholders' act of continuing (and pocketing) the Turkish Tribute increased Greek Cypriot enthusiasm for *Enosis* (joining with Greece).

Further, the lack of funds for higher educational systems (because of tribute exploitative measures) ensured that there were no universities on the island. Greek and Turkish Cypriots alike received their education abroad in Greece or Turkey (Kelling, 1990), which arguably placed Turkey and Greece in future positions as influential external ethnoguarantors (Byrne, 2000). Consequently, Britain continued with the ongoing structure of Ottoman social and political organization and, in fact, intensified the homeostasis of rules that formulated relationship boundaries on the island. The rigidity of the boundaries led to a positive feedback mechanism of Greek Cypriot nationalism and the movement toward *Enosis*, and an escalation of ethnonationalist tendencies.

**Divide, Triangulate, and Rule**

With the introduction of British colonialism as a protectorate (1878) and as a Crown colony (1925-1960), group anxiety in the newly forming system increased with expectant changes. However, due to the British entrenchment of the Ottoman's social-political organization and increased rigidity of the boundaries of the newly forming system, the Greek Cypriot subsystem became emotionally reactive due to a threat to their identity and way of life. The Greek Cypriots' increase in anxiety levels moved toward ethnonationalist tendencies via *Enosis* (Cyprus's unification with Greece) and later, the Turkish Cypriots followed via *Taksim* (separation and union with Turkey).

When anxiety reaches a threshold, the intellectual system (frontal lobe of the brain and cerebral cortex) becomes more regulated by survival instincts, and the emotional system (brain

stem and ganglia complex), with fight or flight mechanisms, offset its anxiety (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). An illustration of an increase in anxiety during British colonialism in Cyprus was linked to violence in 1931, in which Greek Cypriot riots in Nicosia and in 200 other locations broke out, and the British Government House was burnt to the ground (Kelling, 1990, p. 8); that was due to pro-*Enosis* ethnonationalist tendencies (Clogg, 1986, p. 171; Holland, 1998, pp. 1-2). A rise in juvenile crime was recorded, as well as armed outlawry, commonplace *Enosis* demonstrations, assassinations, the Nicosia power plant sabotage, and the March 31st, 1955, pro-*Enosis* simultaneous bombings across the island's cities (Kelling, 1990, pp. 126-127, 151); these offer ample evidence of an increase in group anxiety and emotional reactivity.

To offset anxiety, groups/individuals tend to triangulate to withstand a feeling of anxiety that can be acute (due to circumstance) or chronic (long term) (Bowen, 1978; Titelman, 1998b). The subsystems of the Greek Cypriot community, Turkish Cypriot community, and Britain began the processes of triangulation. Triangulation does not have to be negative and is considered normal and healthy in dealing with anxiety. However, when it is done without neutrality and for purposes of divide and rule, as in this context, it can leave devastating consequences that are still felt by Cypriots today. In other words, British colonialism, in the specific context of Cyprus, purposefully triangulated Turkish Cypriots through a divide and rule tactic in opposition to Greek Cypriots, which intensified intergroup divisions. The British triangulated Turkish Cypriots by favoring them politically, maintaining and increasing the power of Ottoman organization and religious institutions, as well as making them the imperial policing units of the island—while reducing the power and influence of all these institutions for Greek Cypriots. These actions increased ethnic divisions to sustain British rule on the island that are explained below.

The relationship between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, in which they commingled and cohabitated peacefully in various avenues of everyday life (Anastasiou, 2008a; Bryant, 2001; Calotychos, 1998; Fics, 2017; Leventis, 2002), became impossible with the British continuation and exacerbation of the Ottoman's social and political policy in Cyprus. The continuation of unequal power in the Legislative Council, the intensification of the millet system, including a modified Turkish Tribute with exploitative taxes for British gain, led to riots in the 1930s by Greek Cypriots (Kelling, 1990). Britain responded by blaming the riots on the Cyprus church and then continuing to control the Church's influence on the island (Kelling, 1990).

British colonialism also impacted religious traditional institutions. While the Ottoman Empire allowed *Ethnarch,* or the leadership of the Greek Orthodox Archbishop, the British rulers did not (Attilides, 1979; Markides, 1977). Under British colonial rule this important community leader for Greek Cypriots was not only strained, but also reduced. Archbishop Makarios III then led a conservative government movement toward *Enosis,* in reaction against British tribute and modernization attempts at reducing the power of the autocephalous Greek Cypriot church and its leader (Markides, 1997). Turkish Cypriots reacted to the *Enosis* movement by forming TMT, a Turkish Cypriot defense organization that sought *Taksim* or union with Turkey (Ker-Lindsay, 2011).

Therefore, one of the major causes of the strife between both ethnic groups was that British colonialism changed the structure and importance of religion in Cyprus for the Greek Cypriots. However, the British left Turkish Cypriot Sunni Islam and social practices alone, which is a facet of its triangulation of Turkish Cypriots against Greek Cypriots. For example, the British maintained the process of triangulation on the island involving the Turkish system of *Evcaf,* a system that regulated religious property and financing (Kelling, 1990). The entrenchment of unequal treatment between Turkish and Greek Cypriots led to the devastating consequences of increased anxiety and perceived threat of identity. The societal emotional systems led to inter-ethnic group emotional cutoff, as explained below.

The continual triangulation and boundary formation of Britain and Turkish Cypriots, fused against Greek Cypriots, was intentional (Leventis, 2002). An illuminating statistic on village cohabitation of Greek and Turkish Cypriots was observed in 1891, when there were 346 mixed villages in Cyprus; in 1931, this number had declined to 246 mixed villages, with finally one mixed village left called Pyla in 1975 (Calotychos, 1998, p. 5). This drastic change demonstrates the Bowenian concept of emotional cutoff due to matters of triangulation and increased anxiety through threat in the emotional system of the Cypriots. It has been argued that linkages of associations and inter-ethnic civic life—and the absence of inter-ethnic violence—is correlated in India (Varshney, 2001, pp. 362-363). The case in Cyprus—that bicommunal organizations can increase inter-ethnic relationships and friendship development, aiding peacebuilding—has been presented as an effect of the bicommunal Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (Fics, 2017). Unfortunately, the effects of historical distancing and cutoff can be felt in the infamous Green Line that still divides the island (Ker-Lindsay, 2011; Noone, 2014).

A final blow to inter-ethnic peace and evidence of the devastating triangulation between Britain and Turkish Cypriots with respect to their relationship with Greek Cypriots, was the use of Turkish Cypriots as a policing mechanism against the Greek Cypriots (Holland, 1998). Turkish Cypriots were appointed a highly disproportionate amount of policing duties on the island, where the majority population was Greek Cypriot. Turkish Cypriots comprised 18 percent of the island's population, yet in the 1950s held 47.4 percent of police staffing positions. In comparison, 78 percent of the island's population were Greek Cypriots, and only 30.5 percent of police officers were Greek Cypriots (Kontos et al., 2014, p. 44). Moreover, the Auxiliary Police and Mobile Reserve Unit were comprised almost entirely of Turkish Cypriots. Their duties involved guarding government buildings, escorting British soldiers, and helping to reduce the British army's role in preventing public disorder in urban areas; this was similar to Britain's use of the Protestant Unionist dominated B-Specials (1922-1969) and Ulster Defense Regiment in Northern Ireland (1969-1991) (Kontos et al., 2014, p. 45). Tragically, the face of the coercive apparatus in Cyprus became Turkish Cypriot, through Britain's intentional divide and rule policy, and triangulation, to offset British anxiety over its waxing and waning control over the island.

**Cypriot Education Through Nationalism and Triangulation**

While Britain continued to triangulate Turkish Cypriots through divide and rule policies, Greek Cypriots were already in place to begin their form of triangulation to offset their anxiety from the inalterable, intensifying boundaries of the rigid system in which they were a part. Greek Cypriots attempted to offset their anxiety through advocating for *Enosis*.

Britain dangled Cypriot *Enosis* in the face of Greece during World War I by offering Greece the island of Cyprus if it entered the Great War on the Allied side (Holland, 1998, p. 8). Athens did not agree to the proposition, but later entered the war anyway. It is interesting that after the Great War, in 1925, Britain decided to keep the island and made it an official Crown colony, despite great opposition from both the philhellene's perspective and the high offices in England (Holland, 1988; Kelling, 1990). While dangling the political ideology of *Enosis* to some Greek Cypriots in the wake of maintaining and intensifying Ottoman social organization of the island, as well as triangulating Turkish Cypriots against Greek Cypriots, it seems natural that *Enosis* gained a foothold in Cyprus. This was possible because of the Greek and Turkish education systems already in place in Cyprus. The British lure of *Enosis* to Greek Cypriots, if

Greece participated in WWI, increased anxiety in a system of inter-locking triangles for Greek and Turkish Cypriots. It divided ethnonationalist education systems supplied by Greece and Turkey, which is discussed next.

The education systems in Cyprus were divided, as were other forms of social organization in the Ottoman Empire like the millet system, allowing certain liberties and freedoms. During the British colonial era the books and educational materials for Greek and Turkish Cypriots came from Greece and Turkey (Kelling, 1990). The pre-existing separation from elementary to university school systems—further separated ideologically by the entrenching roots of Hellenism and progress for Greek Cypriots, in comparison to modernization of Ataturk conceptualizations of Turkish identity—exacerbated incompatibility (Bryant, 2001, 2006). Therefore, Greek and Turkish Cypriots had to negotiate, reject, or adapt to these ethnonationalist ideologies during British colonialism, furthering a strain on their relationship. Hence, the education system became a hotbed for virulent nationalism especially because taxation was going into the pockets of the colonial power instead of toward the advancement of higher education and the creation of universities in Cyprus. As stated previously, Greek and Turkish Cypriots went to Greece or Turkey to get a university education.

Connecting to a country with historical roots, as expressed in elementary school to university, could insight the potential to develop extreme ethnonationalist tendencies that are inherently violent (Anastasiou, 2008a; Volkan, 1998). Histories of Greece and Turkey have emphasized chosen traumas (Volkan, 1998, 2012) in relation to one another, such as Greek Independence Day (1821) from the Ottomans and Turkish Balkan war losses and victories. When history and destructive narratives are expressed as one-sided through chosen trauma, and are not shared, they become socialization tools (Senehi, 2011) for creating a Manichean worldview of 'we are good and they are bad' (Zembylas, 2008). In this case, inter-ethnic division and conflict escalation seem bound to happen. By 1950, a political poll showed the virulent drive toward *Enosis* at 95 percent in favour by Greek Cypriots (Clogg, 1986, p. 51), and in 1954 the demand for *Enosis* through riots was often initiated by students (Kelling, 1990, p. 141).

The British colonial strategy of divide and rule through triangulation of Turkish Cypriots against Greek Cypriots led to Greek Cypriot triangulation of Greece into a manifest destiny of *Enosis*. The triangulation aided in the offsetting of Greek Cypriots' anxiety because their Hellenistic cultural identity felt emotionally at risk through British behavior. Further, Turkish

Cypriots responded in like manner in their formation of *Taksim*, which sought separation and connection to Turkey. Their triangulation with Turkey—intensified by separate education systems—offset their anxiety, which the British wanted to encourage.

**Political Exploitation and Apartheid Laws**

As with religious and educational systems, the British colonial government exploited Greek and Turkish Cypriots in the form of enforcing curfews (Broome & Anastasiou, 2012, p. 306). Further, they began monitoring and shutting down Greek Cypriot newspapers connected to political ideology, such as AKEL (Progressive Party of Working People), and fined them for publishing articles deemed as inappropriate, thereby reducing their freedom of expression (Kelling, 1990). People in opposition to colonial rule were imprisoned by British-employed Turkish Cypriot police. Everything within British power was used to quell the Greek Cypriot movement toward *Enosis* (Broome & Anastasiou, 2012; Kontos et al., 2014).

Greek Cypriots offset their anxiety in the system through triangulation. They contacted the United Nations (UN) in 1949 through a planned plebiscite with the right to self-determination (to be supervised by the UN). The British reacted by legislative amendments against sedition as follows:

> The judiciary was empowered to take action against persons merely on the suspicion that they were likely to commit an offense; the authorities could refuse the re-publication of suppressed newspapers . . . ; and they could deport [persons] for 'unlawful association.' (Stefanides, 1999, pp. 17-18)

The political exploitation by the British—and the apartheid type laws, such as setting curfews and the aforementioned legislative amendments—set in motion further triangulations of other parties, called interlocking triangles (Kerr and Bowen, 1988), to manage the increase of anxiety in the system. To the present day, the subsystems of Greek and Turkish Cypriots express multigenerational anxiety and introduce interlocking political triangles. The Cypriots continue to protect and distance themselves from real and perceived threats to rights and identity. For instance, Greek Cypriots reached out to Greece and the United Nations for support of *Enosis*; the British called upon the Americans in hopes of stopping Greece's support of the plebiscite and the United Nations; and Turkish Cypriots united their opposing political parties in response to the

plebiscite into the Federation of Turkish Associations (FTA)—calling upon Turkey for backing (Stefanides, 1999, pp. 9, 11).

The rigidity of social boundaries may have been set between the subsystems of Greek Cypriot society and Turkish Cypriot society as a consequence of British colonial apartheid laws and political exploitation. They specifically made use of interlocking triangles, mentioned above, to manage the anxiety of threats to existence and identity for the groups on the island. The effects of these draconian laws created distance between Greek and Turkish Cypriots and their political parties within their subsystems (Anastasiou, 2008a). The outcome was the 1960 Zurich Agreement that created Cypriot independence; this eventually failed and led to the 1974 war, which divided the island to the present day.

## Conclusion

Cyprus peace negotiations continue to fail (Haziou, 2018). Consequently, conflict analysts and peacebuilders would benefit by understanding the historical legacy of Britain's colonial ingredients through systems theory. Tactics are elucidated, such as maintaining the homeostasis of the Ottoman social structure, given the divide and rule strategy through triangulation. Such illumination may forge a just and sustainable peace on the island of Cyprus.

Further, Bowen's family systems theory empowers conflict analysts to comprehend conflict formation through patterns of behavior and interaction between the subsystems in relationship to one another—revealing patterns of emotional cutoff and triangulations that exist in the present that have become multi-generationally transmitted (Ackerman, 2003; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Titelman, 1998b). Several studies offer evidence of transgenerational transmission of trauma that continue ethnic divisions by way of the educational system in Cyprus (Onen, Mehves, Jetha-DagSeven, Karashan, & Latif, 2010; Zembylas, 2007), as well as through grieving processes (Fics, 2017; Zembylas, 2011), and unconscious externalizations of a traumata to new generations (Fromm, 2012; Volkan, 1998).

Regarding triangulation findings, British foreign policy with Greece and Greece's foreign policy with Cyprus, entrenched *Enosis* and nationalism discourse for both Greek Cypriot's and Turkish Cypriot's in their educational materials. It was also revealed that in using Turkish Cypriots as a policing force, an act of triangulation, only further intensified real and perceived divisions of the ethnic groups.

Recognizing the system that emerged under British colonialism in Cyprus could assist in increasing what Bowen calls the differentiation of self (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Titelman, 2014), in the form of a differentiation of self for Greek and Turkish Cypriot societies. The differentiational increase could lead to people's awareness of the group emotional system process and reduce emotional reactivity via anxiety by *understanding* the systemic legacy that is tied to British colonialism. Family systems and Bowen's psychotherapeutic concepts can be applied to the understanding of conflict formation in a novel way. Understanding can lead to differentiation of how a conflict like Cyprus is self-perpetuating, in the present patterns and behaviors of the past, and how it can be revealed through Bowenian concepts like emotional cutoff, triangulation, family/societal emotional process, and anxiety. It is an approach that is holistic and systemic, not based on a linear model of causality that A caused B and A is at fault. Instead the emphasis is on the *relationship* dynamics of a system, in which A caused B that caused A that caused B—a circular causality understanding of conflict formation in Cyprus, that this author hopes other readers will explore themselves, develop, and expand.

With this new insight, conflict actors are empowered to understand previously unconscious aspects of their behavior, as well as systemic drivers of the conflict in which they act. Transformed self-awareness then opens the possibility for a transformed, and ultimately resolved, conflict.

## References

Ackerman, F. (2003). Israeli-Palestinian relations: A Bowen theory perspective. In P. Titelman (Ed.), *Emotional cutoff: Bowen family systems perspectives* (pp. 443-477). New York, NY: Haworth Press.

Anastasiou, H. (2008a). *The broken olive branch: nationalism, ethnic conflict, and the quest for peace in Cyprus. Volume I, the impasse of ethnonationalism*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Anastasiou, H. (2008b). *The broken olive branch: nationalism, ethnic conflict, and the quest for peace in Cyprus. Volume II, the nationalism versus Europeanization.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Attilides, M. (1979). *Cyprus nationalism and international politics.* New York, NY: St. Martins Press.

Bateson, G., Jackson, D. D., Haley, J., & Weakland, J. (1956). Toward a theory of schizophrenia. *Behavioral Science, 1*(4), 251-254.

Becvar, S. D. & Becvar, J. R. (1999). *Systems theory and family therapy.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Bertalanffy, K. L. (1968). *General system theory: Foundations, development, applications.* New York, NY: George Braziller, Inc.

Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. Lanham, MD: Jason Erinson, Inc.

Broome, J. B. & Anastasiou, H. (2012). Communication across the divide in the Cyprus conflict. In A. J. Marsella, D. Landis, & R. D. Albert (Eds.), *Handbook of ethnic conflict*: *International perspectives* (pp. 293-327). New York, NY: Springer Publishing.

Bryant, R. (2001). An aesthetics of self: Moral remaking and Cypriot education. *Comparative Studies in Society and History, 4*3(3), 583-614.

Bryant, R. (2006). On the condition of postcoloniality in Cyprus. In Y. Papadakis, N. Peristianis, & G. Weltz (Eds.), *Divided Cyprus: Modernity, history, and an island in conflict* (pp. 47-66). Indiana, IN: Indiana University Press.

Byrne, S. (1997). *Growing up in a divided society: The influence of conflict on Belfast schoolchildren*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses.

Byrne, S. (2000). Power politics as usual in Cyprus and Northern Ireland: Divided islands and the roles of external ethnoguarantors. *Nations and Ethnic Politics, 6*(1), 1-23.

Byrne, S. & Carter, N. (1996). Social cubism: Six social forces of ethnoterritorial politics in Northern Ireland and Quebec. *Peace and Conflict Studies, 3*(2), 52-72.

Byrne, S. & Carter, N. (2002). Social cubism: six social forces of ethnoterritorial politics in Northern Ireland and Quebec. *ILSA Journal of International & Comparative Law*, *8,* 741-769.

Calotychos, V. (1985). Interdisciplinary perspectives: Difference at the heat of Cypriot identity and its study. In V. Calotychos (Ed.), *Cyprus and its people: Nation, identity, and experience in an unimaginable community 1955*-1997 (pp. 1-35). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Carter, N. & Byrne, S. (2000). The dynamics of social cubism: A view from Northern Ireland and Québec. In S. Byrne & C. Irvin (Eds.) & P. Dixon, B. Polkinghorn, & J. Senehi (Assoc. Eds.), *Reconcilable differences: Turning points in ethnopolitical conflict* (pp. 41–62). West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.

Clement, H. D. (Ed.). (1993). *The political social and economic development of Northern Cyprus*. Tallahassee, FL: Eothen Press.

Clogg, R. (1986). *A short history of modern Greece.* London, England: Cambridge University Press.

Darwin, C. (1859). *On the origins of species: By means of natural selection*. London, England: John Murray.

Fics, K. T. P. (2017). *Healing through the bones: Empowerment and the process of exhumations in the context of Cyprus*. Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books.

Friedman, E. H. (1985). *Generation to generation*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Fromm, M. G. (Ed.). (2012). *Lost in transmission: Studies of trauma across generations*. London, England: Karnac.

Hanson, B.G. (1995). *General systems theory: Beginning with wholes*. Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis.

Haziou, E. (2018, March 5). No new peace talks as things stand, says new foreign minister. *Cyprus Mail Online*. Retrieved from http://cyprus-mail.com/2018/03/01/no new-peace-talks-things-stand-says-new-foreign-minister/

Holland, R. (1998). *Britain and the revolt in Cyprus, 1954-1959*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

Kelling, H. G. (1990). *Countdown to rebellion: British policy in Cyprus, 1939-1955*. New York, NY: Greenwood Press.

Ker-Lindsey, J. (2011). *The Cyprus problem: What everyone needs to know*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Kerr, M. E. & Bowen, M. (1988). *Family evaluation: An approach based on Bowen theory*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company.

Lederach, J. P. (1995). *Preparing for peace: Conflict transformations across cultures*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Lederach, J. P. (2010). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington, D.C: United States Institute of Peace Press.

Leventis, Y. (2002). *Cyprus: The struggle for self-determination in the 1940s*, *prelude to deeper crisis.* Berlin, Germany: Peter Lang.

Licklider, R. (1995). The consequences of negotiated settlements in civil wars, 1945-1993. *American Political Science Review, 89*(3), 681-690.

Markides, K. C. (1977). *The rise and fall of the Cyprus republic*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Noone, R. (2014). Differentiation of self as a multigenerational process. In Titelman, P. (Ed.), *Differentiation of self: Bowen families systems perspectives* (pp. 83-99). London, England: Routledge.

Onen, M. B., Jetha-DagSeven, S., Karashan, H., Latif, D. (2010). *Rewriting history textbooks: History education, a tool for polarization or reconciliation*. Nicosia, Cyprus: Tipograf Arts.

Papero, D. (1990) *Bowen family systems theory.* Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Senehi, J. (2009). The role of constructive, transcultural storytelling in ethnopolitical conflict. In J. Carter, G. Irani, & V. D. Volkan (Eds.), *Regional and ethnic conflicts: Perspectives from the front lines* (pp. 227-237). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Senehi, J. (2011). Building peace: Storytelling to transform conflicts constructively. In D. J. D. Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste, & J. Senehi (Eds.), *Handbook of conflict analysis and resolution* (pp. 201-215). London, England: Routledge.

Solsten, E. & Keefe, E. (1993). Historical setting. In E. Solsten (Ed.) *Cyprus a country study* (pp. 1-47). Washington, DC: Federal Research Division Library of Congress.

Stefanides, I. (1999). *Isle of discord: Nationalism, imperialism, and the making of the Cyprus problem.* New York, NY: New York University Press.

Stergiou, A. (2015). The exceptional case of the British military bases on Cyprus. *Middle Eastern Studies, 51*(2), 285-300.

Titelman, P. (1998a). Overview of the Bowen theoretical-therapeutic system. In P. Titelman (Ed.), *Clinical applications of Bowen family systems theory* (pp. 7-48). New York, NY: Haworth Press.

Titelman, P. (1998b). Family systems assessment based on Bowen theory. In P. Titelman (Ed.), *Clinical applications of Bowen family systems theory* (pp. 51-69). New York, NY: Haworth Press.

Titelman, P. (2003). Emotional cutoff in Bowen family systems theory: An overview. In P. Titelman (Ed.), *Emotional cutoff: Bowen family systems perspectives* (pp. 9-65). New York, NY: Haworth Press.

Titelman, P. (2014). The concept of differentiation of self in Bowen theory. In P. Titelman (Ed), *Differentiation of self: Bowen families systems perspectives* (pp. 1-48)*. London, England: Routledge.

Varnava, A. (2009). *British imperialism in Cyprus 1878-1915: The inconsequential possession*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.

Varshney, A. (2001). Ethnic conflict and civil society: India and beyond. *World Politics, 53*(3): 362-398.

Volkan, V. (1979). *War and adaptation: A psychoanalytic history of two ethnic groups in conflict*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

Volkan, V. (1998). *Blood lines: From ethnic pride to ethnic terrorism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Volkan, V. (2004). *Large groups and their leaders in times of crisis and terror*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.

Volkan, V. (2012). The intertwining of internal and external wars. In J. M. Fromm (Ed.), *Lost in transmission: Studies of trauma across generations* (pp. 75-79). London, England: Karnac.

Wilson, E. O. (1975). *Sociobiology: The new synthesis*. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.

Zembylas, M. (2007). The politics of trauma, empathy, reconciliation and peace education. *Journal of Peace Education, 4*(2): 207-224.

Zembylas, M. (2008). *The politics of trauma in education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillon.

Zembylas, M. (2011). Personal narratives of loss and the exhumation of missing persons in the aftermath of war: In search of public and school pedagogies of mourning. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 24*(7): 767-784.