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DIETZEL, Irene (2014) **The ecology of coexistence and conflict in Cyprus: exploring the religion, nature, and culture of a Mediterranean island.** Religion and Society 57. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. ISBN 978-1-61451-344-5. Pp. ix + 206; 8 figures (b/w). Hardback €99.95.

Is there a link between a balanced relationship with the environment and the peaceful co-existence of communities such as Greek and Turkish Cypriots? What happens when long-standing patterns of using natural resources are disrupted by forces such as colonialism, modernisation and land reform? Could this loss of ecological balance have been be a catalyst for what is on the face of it a nationalist, ethnic and religious conflict in Cyprus? Irene Dietzel addresses these challenging questions in an interdisciplinary and ambitious book, the result of her PhD for the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Erfurt. In doing so she ranges widely across environmental philosophy, eco-theology, history, archaeology, anthropology and folk religion.

The foundation of Dietzel's argument is a thorough discussion and literature review of the theoretical background (Part I). Her overall approach aims to use environmental philosophy and cognitive theory to come to an integrated understanding of how people and the environment co-evolve. Local culture and popular religion are derived from the 'architecture of the human mind', and develop as people think and act in specific environments (p. 37).

In Part II these theories are used to explore the 'ecology of co-existence' in Ottoman Cyprus. Greek and Turkish Cypriot (and Maronite, Armenian and Latin) communities cooperated extensively in their agricultural labour. They managed scarce resources together, they paid tithes as complete villages, rather than as families or ethnic/religious communities, and they interacted on common land and in fields held in multiple ownership (Chapter 6). Such relationships were directly supported by their local culture, which was itself adapted closely to the opportunities and constraints of the local environment, such as climatic micro-zones, marginal rainfall, and patchy arable land. These ecological strategies provided considerable resilience to environmental and social pressures, and were further enhanced by Ottoman property law and inheritance customs.

Religion plays an important role here, at both an institutional and a popular level. Both the Orthodox Church and the Vakf, the Islamic system of charitable trusts, showed extensive knowledge and understanding of the local environment. This enabled them to conserve natural resources such as water, arable land and pasture, rather than just extracting short-term economic benefits from their assets. Similarly, folk religious practices, for example saints' cults associated with holy trees or springs, can provide powerful protection for scarce natural resources, though Dietzel is careful not to assume any automatic 'ecological felicity' on the part of indigenous peoples or communities long embedded in their landscape (p. 126). Syncretic practices, where such local rituals are enacted by people of different religions, are a direct result of a shared environmental context: they have an evident function and relevance to everyone engaged with that environment, regardless of their ethnic affiliation or religion (p. 136).

The breakdown of these local cultural and environmental relations, Dietzel argues, can be the catalyst for an 'ecology of conflict', the subject of Part III of the book. Colonialism played a major role here, most clearly in the forestry delimitation of the 1880s and 1890s which excluded villagers from a wide range of longstanding practices within the forests. Across the 20th century, the key issue was the transformation of property from inherited, often dispersed smallholdings, which gave a strong sense of place to those who worked them, to a modern real-estate market dependent on large farms managed by contractors. These deprived most inhabitants of agricultural experience and the consequent sense of place. Along

with the related phenomenon of urbanisation, this was both a catalyst for the bicomunal conflict of the 1960s, leading up to the Turkish invasion of 1974, and was exacerbated by it. Refugees were of course uprooted from the land and environment that they had been part of, often for generations. As well as this, Dietzel argues, these events mark the culmination of a much longer process of disembedding people from their localities, both cultural and environmental (p. 151).

The long experience of foreign ideologies and regulations concerning how local people should use and relate to their own land also helps explain the often widespread resistance across Cyprus to more recent European conservation initiatives. In particular, British colonial forest officials and European Union conservation agencies alike have been too ready to preserve as putative 'pristine wildernesses' areas such as the Akamas which are the result of human and environmental interaction over centuries (p. 172).

This summary is the bare bones of a very broad range of conceptual material that is presented and explained in Dietzel's book. This breadth is both a strength and weakness of the book: it provides a rich multidisciplinary understanding of the relationship between society, environment and religion; but it sometimes obscures and dissipates the central argument, particularly in the long literature review sections in Part I. The key chapters are Chapter 6 ('The ecology of coexistence') and Chapter 9 ('The ecology of conflict'). These provide the book's major contribution to our understanding of Cypriot society and history, as expressed in the first part of its title. The rest is helpful background explanation of an impressively wide range of important and interesting contextual issues, such as island ecology, the changing role of the Orthodox Church, the history of environmental philosophy, folk religious belief, colonial forestry policies, eco-theology, and much more. Much of this discussion lacks explicit integration into the central argument, as is suggested by the book's rather descriptive subtitle ('Exploring the religion, nature, and culture of a Mediterranean island').

People's relationship to the land is a consistent theme throughout the book, and a key driver of coexistence and conflict: 'Clothed in the guise of modernisation, the land reform of 1946 thus literally removed the *ground* for pre-modern forms of environmental cooperation, eliminated the basis for socio-ecological relations and should therefore be included as key date in the chronology of the Cyprus conflict' (p. 156; Dietzel's italics). Paradoxically, what I missed, speaking as an archaeologist, was any engagement with the land itself: those infinitely complex interactions between ploughsoil, boreholes, goats, eucalyptus trees, erosion, water channels, and everything else that taken together constitute the *ground* of human-environment relationships. Making more use of James Gibson's work on the agency and meaning of the material environment, discussed on p. 37, might have helped understand the environment as an active player in these interactions whose highly significant impact Dietzel so carefully delineates.

Some in-depth case studies would certainly have helped. In the Akamas, for example (pp. 169–72), how precisely has that interaction of insiders, outsiders, land, air and climate since at least the Hellenistic period created that unique canvas on which European Union environmentalists paint a pristine wilderness, while locally-rooted landowners draw up plans for touristic development? No book can do everything, of course. What Dietzel has done is to map out the crucially important relationship between people and environment, and demonstrate the impact this can have on coexistence and conflict, as it so clearly has had on Cyprus.

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