

# Remembering the Cypriot Civil War 50 Years On

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Those interested in the reunification of Cyprus must appreciate how pivotal historical truth is and therefore the work of historians. Reunification can only begin with a scientific historical investigation into the events in Cyprus which began in December 1963, half a century ago this December. This essay is by no means a scientific investigation, but a few words on why such an investigation has not been done thus far and why it is long overdue. This is especially important because not one academic event has been arranged in the Republic of Cyprus or internationally to mark that dark month 50 years ago.

From December 1963 to August of the following year a Civil War raged in Cyprus, with mass killings and violence committed mostly by Greek and Turkish Cypriot paramilitaries on each other, resulting in the collapse of the three-year old consociational Republic of Cyprus. Greek Cypriots, refer to these events as the Turkish Cypriot 'revolt', while Turkish Cypriots refer to the events as a Greek Cypriot 'genocide' or 'ethnic cleansing' of Turkish Cypriots. Commentators have referred to the events as an 'intercommunal conflict', something that has been generally accepted, even by politicians of the island, thus watering down the significance and dual responsibility of both communities for the events, and the fact that the conflict was about a struggle over power in the island and over the political status of the island. The facts surrounding the events will be dealt with later, but it is pivotal to refer to what happened as a civil war and not an inter-communal conflict, as one leading civil war expert, who is of Greek heritage, does.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of 2000 I had seriously started thinking about becoming a historian and pursuing a PhD. Assured of a place in Honours (fourth-year) at Monash University I embarked upon my first trip to Cyprus since 1983 when I had been aged three. Cyprus was the island homeland I only knew from the memories of my parents and their friends. Academically, my intention was to do my 18,000 word Honours dissertation on why the Republic of Cyprus collapsed in 1963–1964 so soon after it had been created in 1960. In the end I did not pursue this project. I was driven by a series of experiences and realisations to pursue a project on the formation of the British Sovereign Base Areas within the wider contexts of British Middle East defence policy and British

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1 N. Sambanis (2000) 'Partition as a Solution to Ethnic War: An Empirical Critique of the Theoretical Literature', *World Politics*, Vol. 52, No. 4, pp. 437–483, refer to Table I; N. Sambanis, (2001) 'Do Ethnic and Non-ethnic Civil Wars Have the Same Causes?: A Theoretical and Empirical Inquiry', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 45, No. 3, pp. 259–282, 267, 279; N. Sambanis (2004) 'What is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 48, No. 6, pp. 814–858, 822.

government reluctance to decolonise Cyprus in the face of violence on the island. The entire story of this change is unimportant, with the exception of one point, and that is why and how my original idea for a project became frustrated by both the lack of accessible parliamentary and court records, and the comments of Cypriots, such as, 'why do you want to write about 1963 and 1964? It was simple, the Turks revolted'. Greek Cypriots seemed to not be interested in a scientific study on those events.

It is now 50 years on since those events and Greek Cypriots are still not ready for the facts let alone for an analysis of these by scientific historical methodology.

Meanwhile, academia has failed to properly investigate; certainly no historian has attempted to do so. Comparatively there has without doubt always been a healthy interest in the question of how UNFICYP was formed,<sup>2</sup> but this has not resulted in a comprehensive study on the long lead-up to its formation and the immediate aftermath that focuses on causes and effects and all the various factors and players involved. The handful of studies in the 1960s and 1970s were too close to the events and often by players,<sup>3</sup> largely political science studies lacking a proper historical archival basis,<sup>4</sup> or biased towards one side,<sup>5</sup> and the best is by a political geographer, whose study was only published posthumously and so we have not had the benefit of his wisdom and knowledge aside from his main study.<sup>6</sup> One-sided studies continue into the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> More recent studies have either centred on the policies of international players (Ker-Lindsay; Nicolet),<sup>8</sup>

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- 2 J.A. Stegenga (1968) *The UN Force in Cyprus*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press; A. Papadopoulos (1969) *Peace-Making and Peace-keeping by the United Nations: Cyprus a Case Study*, Nicosia [no publisher identified]; J. Ker-Lindsay (2001) 'The Origins of the UN Presence in Cyprus', in O.P. Richmond and J. Ker-Lindsay (eds), *The Work of the UN in Cyprus: Promoting Peace and Development*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 50–76.
  - 3 E. Averoff-Tossizza (1986) *Lost Opportunities: The Cyprus Question 1950–1963*, translated by T. Cullen and S. Kyriakidis, New York: Caratzas.
  - 4 S. Kyriakides (1968) *Cyprus: Constitutionalism and Crisis Government*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; L. Ierodiakonou (1971) *The Cyprus Question*, Kristianstad, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell. Z. Stavrinides (1976) *The Cyprus Conflict: National Identity and Statehood*, Wakefield, UK: Loris Stavrinides Press (Nicosia, CYREP, 1999); P.G. Polyviou (1976) *Cyprus in Search of a Constitutional: Constitutional Negotiations and Proposals 1960–1975*, Nicosia: Nicolaou & Sons.
  - 5 P. Oberling (1982) *The Road to Bellapais: The Turkish Cypriot Exodus to Northern Cyprus*, Boulder, New York: Social Science Monographs.
  - 6 R.A. Patrick (1976) *Political Geography and the Cyprus Conflict: 1963–1971*, Ontario: University of Waterloo Press, Department of Geography, Faculty of Environmental Studies, Publication Series 4.
  - 7 S.R. Sonyel (1997) *Cyprus the Destruction of a Republic: British Documents 1960–1965*, Cambridgeshire: The Eothen Press; H.S. Gibbons (1997) *The Genocide Files*, London: Charles Bravos.
  - 8 C. Nicolet (2001) *United States Policy Towards Cyprus, 1954–1974: Removing the Greek–Turkish Bone of Contention*, Mannheim: Bibliopolis; A. James (2001) *Keeping the Peace in the Cyprus Crisis of 1963–1964*, New York: Palgrave; J. Ker-Lindsay (2004) *Britain and the Cyprus Crisis, 1963–1964*, Mannheim und Möhnesce: Peleus Bibliopolis.

historical memory and history education,<sup>9</sup> more political science (Constantinou)<sup>10</sup> or, they have been biased accounts. The fullest treatment was the noteworthy effort by the journalist Makarios Droushiotis, which concentrates on exposing extremist Cypriot elites from both sides as manipulators of both the Cold War politics and ethno-nationalist politics in their desire to bring about *enosis* or partition respectively.<sup>11</sup> The majority of these studies have not been accepted by political elites in Cyprus even today because they would mean accepting responsibility as both victims and perpetrators for the start and perpetuation of the Cypriot Civil War of 1963–1964.

Although there has not been at least one comprehensive study on what transpired by a professional historian, the historical facts have not remained elusive. Former president, Glafkos Clerides, revealed in his memoirs how both sides drifted towards civil war when he published documents relating to the plans of the Akritas Organisation, of which he was a member, and of the Turkish Cypriot leadership.<sup>12</sup> The Greek Cypriots planned through both political and violent actions to overturn certain provisions of the Zurich–London Agreements – to show that the ‘partnership state’ was unworkable and unfair – while the plan of the Turkish Cypriot leadership was ‘prepare, wait, and defend’, what they believed would be a provocation from the Greek Cypriots.

My conversations with Greek Cypriot men involved corroborate this view. One interviewee, a resident of Melbourne, Australia, since the early 1970s, aged now in his mid-70s, has been most willing to speak about his role in the Akritas Organisation of the Minister of Interior, Polycarpus Georgajis, which had also included Tassos Papadopoulos and Glafkos Clerides, and which was also sanctioned by President Archbishop Makarios III. This man reveals that he was intimately drawn in at the local level of his village (and surrounding villages) in the preparations and then the carrying-out of the events of December 1963 and those which followed, subsequently being rewarded by becoming mayor of his village later in the 1960s. He claims that weapons were hidden in chests and others buried and that Georgajis himself visited the region where men who took part would gather to be, as he put it, ‘indoctrinated’ by words of hatred against their Muslim neighbours and trained to use the weapons. On one particular visit in the Autumn of 1963, the man reveals

9 Y. Papadakis (1993) ‘The Politics of Memory and of Forgetting in Cyprus’, *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, pp. 139–154; Y. Papadakis (1998) ‘Greek Cypriot Narratives of History and Collective Identity: Nationalism as a Contested Process’, *American Ethnologist*, Vol. XXV, No. 3, pp. 149–165; Y. Papadakis (2003) ‘Nation, Narrative and Commemoration: Political Ritual in Divided Cyprus’, *History and Anthropology*, Vol. XIV, No. 3, pp. 253–270; S. Philippou and A. Varnava (2009) ‘Constructions of Solution(s) to the Cyprus Problem: Exploring Formal Curricula in Greek Cypriot State Schools’, in A. Varnava and H. Faustmann (eds), *Reunifying Cyprus: The Annan Plan and Beyond*, London: I.B. Tauris, pp. 194–212.

10 For example: C.M. Constantinou (2008) ‘On the Cypriot States of Exception’, *International Political Sociology*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 145–164.

11 M. Droushiotis (2008) *The First Partition: Cyprus 1963–1964*, Nicosia: Alfadi (orig. Greek 2005).

12 Glafkos Clerides (1989) *Cyprus: My Deposition*, I, Nicosia: Alithia Publishing, pp. 202–220.

that Georgajis explained the political situation and the plan to be adopted, namely that he believed that the Turkish Cypriots were planning an attack in early 1964 and that they had to engage them earlier, before the Turkish Cypriots were ready, and thus deliver a swift knockout blow. This is what was attempted in December 1963, with the Turkish Cypriot plan to withstand the Greek Cypriot actions and hope for Turkey's intervention. The man, who has thoroughly re-evaluated his role in these and subsequent violent events, believes that he and others were systematically indoctrinated and misled by immature and power-hungry politicians, who essentially wanted to get their own way, i.e. power in Cyprus, either through *enosis* or domination over Turkish Cypriots. He continues to feel that he was used, as well as sadness and remorse at being trained to attack his Turkish Cypriot neighbours although acknowledging that they too had been similarly trained. What is perhaps most disturbing is that he reveals knowledge of many other men living in Australia who either deny involvement or wrongdoing, and who perpetuate the state myth that it was the Turkish Cypriots who revolted.

And herein lies the problem, that the Cold War between Greek and Turkish Cypriots over who is right and who is wrong about the events of December 1963 still rages. Official versions of 'historical truth' dominate political discourse and education systems. When will the politicians admit the truth, and allow the historians, and only those without nationalist prejudice, to take over? They will inevitably find that victims and perpetrators belong to the same communities which claim exclusive victimhood, and therefore both sides were to blame and were responsible for the outbreak of the Cypriot Civil War 50 years ago. For this reason an apology from both sides for the violent crimes committed is necessary.