

# The Intercommunal Relations between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in the Mixed Village of Argaki

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## Abstract

*This article continues the story from where Peter Loizos' celebrated study left off. It looks at how Turkish Cypriots experienced life in the mixed village of Argaki/Akçay from 1955 to 1974 and explores their relationships with their Greek Cypriot neighbours during the periods of tension and crisis in Cyprus. It also produces an ethnographic description with some narrative about intercommunal relations in the village of Argaki.*

**Keywords:** Argaki, intercommunal, tension, narrative, demographic, crisis, Turkish Cypriots, Greek Cypriots, neighbour, relations

## Introduction

### *An Overview of the Political Conflicts in Cyprus*

Before examining the main theme which looks at aspects of how Turkish Cypriots lived in the village of Argaki/Akçay, where the Greek Cypriots were the demographically dominant group during the conflicts in Cyprus, this paper briefly reviews the political conflicts in Cyprus, from 1878 to 1955, and from 1956 to 1974.

The chapter draws on Sant Cassia's (2005) account of a brief history of inter-ethnic relations in Cyprus to clarify the periods of conflicts mentioned above. Cyprus, which is the third largest island in the Mediterranean region, consisted mainly of a Greek-speaking Christian Orthodox population until it was seized from the Venetians by the Ottoman Turks in 1571. In 1878, Cyprus was transferred to Britain, and from that year onwards, Greek Cypriots began campaigning for a political union with Greece (*enosis*). In the 1950s, an armed struggle was mounted against Britain by EOKA, a Greek Cypriot nationalist secret organisation. EOKA's<sup>1</sup> aim was to achieve *enosis*

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1 When the article discusses in general terms the period 1955–1974 the Greek Cypriot armed group is referred to as EOKA but when talking about the period between 1955–1960 the Greek Cypriot armed group is identified as EOKA A. In the 1960s the Greek Cypriot armed group is referred to as the Greek Cypriot militia or Greek Cypriot paramilitaries but from 1967 until 1974 the Greek Cypriot armed group reorganised itself and became known as EOKA B.

but Turkish Cypriots did not accept being reduced to a minority status in a potentially Greek state and insisted that they should also be given the right to form a union with Turkey (*taksim*). To counteract the Greek Cypriot nationalists who were in favour of *enosis*, Turkish Cypriot nationalists constructed a Turkish Cypriot underground organisation in 1955, named Volkan (later called TMT – the Turkish Resistance Organisation). In the book *Cyprus Reviewed*, Michael Attalides gives us an idea of how the Greek Cypriot nationalists' movement affected the recent history of Turkish Cypriots on the island. Attalides argues that 'the Greek nationalists' movement played an important role in the recent history of Turkish Cypriots in Cyprus and their transformation from a religious minority to strategic ethnic group' (1977, p. viii).

Most relevant to this paper on interethnic relations in Argaki is the 1956 to 1974 period, following Sant Cassia's account. When intercommunal fighting started in the summer of 1958, both EOKA and TMT attacked not only the members of opposing ethnic groups but also members of their own groups. EOKA killed left-wing Greeks for being traitors and TMT killed left-wing Turks for being in contact with left-wing Greeks, who were not in favour of *enosis* with a conservative Greece. This fighting continued until 1960, when a compromise was reached between the two communities. Regardless, Greek Cypriots were dissatisfied with the 1960 constitution as it gave the Turkish Cypriots more power than they expected. For this reason, the relations between the two communities worsened and attacks followed in 1963 by Greek Cypriot militants against Turkish Cypriot villages, which continued for a number of months. Then, early in 1964, Turkish Cypriots were driven from their villages resulting in 25,000 Turkish Cypriots becoming refugees. Violent conflicts resumed in 1967 when Greek Cypriot nationalists and the military dictatorship of Greece began a campaign against President Makarios because they believed that their effort to achieve *enosis* had been betrayed by the state. The same year, Turkey threatened to invade Cyprus because Greek Cypriot paramilitaries were continuing attacks on Turkish Cypriots. The USA, however, diffused the situation.

In the early 1970s there were two dominant views among Greek Cypriots: those who supported immediate *enosis* and those who were in favour of it in theory but not in practice. Those who were in favour of immediate *enosis* staged a coup against the Republic of Cyprus on 15 July 1974, and established a puppet regime under the leadership of Nicos Sampson, an anti-Turk nationalist and an ex-EOKA gunman. Cyprus had been captured by the Greek military junta. On 20 July 1974, Turkey defined its role as a Constitutional Guarantor Power and allegedly intervened in the Cyprus conflict on the island to restore the previous constitutional order as well as to protect Turkish Cypriots.

The village of Argaki has been studied extensively by the late Peter Loizos – a British anthropologist of Greek Cypriot origin. Loizos admits that due to difficulties he had little contact with the Turkish Cypriots. He explains this in his various writings. In *The Greek Gift* (2004, appendix 2, p. 304), Loizos writes of the political situation between 1968–1970 as being 'delicate', and he intimates that he thought it would not have been helpful to Argaki Turkish Cypriots if he

had 'shown too much interest' in them – hinting of trouble from EOKA B militants. In his later works, he attempts to show a 'bittersweet' picture of pre-1955 Greek–Turkish relations in Argaki, but he says little about the years from 1955 to 1974. There are indications of tensions and incidents, but few details. In *The Heart Grown Bitter*, Loizos gives a short account of Greek–Turkish relations in Argaki, and he clearly explains why he had little contact with the Turkish Cypriots. He says:

I decided not to draw attention either to my research or to the Argaki Turks. If the EOKA hawks thought I was especially interested in what the Turkish minority in Argaki was thinking, they might intimidate either them or me, and block my future work. So while I always kept my eyes and ears open for anything which concerned the Argaki Turks, I never intensively interviewed them, which explains why I am unable to present their views in any detail' (Loizos, 1981, p. 42).

Peter Loizos carried out his study with the Greek Cypriot community in the village of Argaki. He tried to get an idea of what their living conditions were like at certain periods, but as he was unable to study the Turkish Cypriot community to the same extent, the part of the story concerning Argaki Turkish Cypriots remained incomplete. My task, therefore, as a Turkish Cypriot, who grew up in Argaki during this period, is to add to the record, to correct the inevitable weakness of Peter Loizos' work, and to extend the ethnography of both Argaki village as well as the wider issue of intercommunal relations in Cyprus during the periods of tension and crisis.

## Methodology

The participants in this research are all Turkish Cypriot villagers from Argaki. In all, I conducted nine qualitative in-depth interviews (five men and four women) in 2007, which took place in the houses of each informant. In order to analyse the events more objectively I interviewed a small section of villagers with roughly equal numbers of left-wing and more nationalist perspectives. The informants were chosen from different generations and included ages varying between young and old who experienced other periods of time in the village of Argaki. They were all aged between 49–89 years. Four of them were aged between 73–89 years and five of them between 49–67 years. Five of them were retired from various jobs such as builder, teacher and farmer, but the remainder were still working as builders and seasonal labourers. All except two of them were originally from Argaki.

Although my study is limited to nine interviews, and I am aware that ideally it should have included more, the fact is that there were few Argaki Turks in the village – about 65 in total – and the members of each family were located in the same area. I, therefore, chose one or two members from each family who had experience of life with their Greek neighbours during the periods of my research. In these circumstances I did not consider it vital to conduct further interviews because I believed that more or less the same data would be retrieved from the other Argaki Turks who still

lived there. I have confidence that the quality of those interviews undertaken is what matters most. All interviews took place in 2007 – not in the 1960s or 1970s. We should also bear in mind that in the past, because of conflicts, constraints and threats, the Argaki people were not able to explore their feelings as candidly as in 2007. After the border crossings were opened in 2003, Turkish Cypriots had more freedom to talk, tell their stories from the past without inhibition, and feel secure in doing so. I did my utmost to minimise the limitations of my study as outlined above.

### **Conflict and Outcomes**

Intercommunal conflicts do not happen in a pre-determined pattern with certain outcomes. A number of social, historical, political, economic, cultural and other factors seem to be crucial determinants. Moreover, the outcomes vary a great deal and depend on the personalities of the individuals involved in the conflict as well as on structural and demographic factors. Sevgül Uludağ (2006) argues in her book *Oysters with the Missing Pearls: The Untold Stories* that Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots lived together in peace and solidarity in the mixed villages of Stroncilo, Lapatoz and Trachonas. In the case of the mixed village of Trachonas, where 18 Turkish Cypriot and 18 Greek Cypriot families used to live together before 1974, it is stated that Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot villagers helped and protected each other. A Turkish Cypriot man, Ahmet Altan Deniz, who was interviewed by Sevgül Uludağ, explores his memories in this village and says:

‘in those times in Trachonas, there was no “Turkishness” or “Greekness”. People were people, neighbours were neighbours ... If I helped someone, I was just helping a neighbour or my neighbour was helping me ... It was not helping a Greek Cypriot or a Turkish Cypriot’ (p. 215).

Ahmet had two Greek Cypriot friends, Gogo and Despo. He says that

‘when the conflict began in 1963, Gogo and Despo came to me and said they had decided to stay with me. I said “of course my house is your house”. Just then someone from Ortaköy (Ortaköy) came. They wanted to kill my Greek friends but I didn’t let them. I helped them go to the Greek part’ (p. 217).

Likewise, in the village of Argaki, where Greek Cypriots were the demographically and economically dominant group, it is stated in the narratives that Turkish Cypriots were ‘spared’, and even protected by their Greek Cypriot co-villagers during the periods of tension and crisis in Cyprus. This was largely due to the following important social factors:

**a. *the importance of political ideology:***

The strong Left was positive towards Turkish Cypriots and most of the time they tried their best to support them during the conflicts in Cyprus.

**b. *the fact that the Turkish Cypriots were marginalised, poor and very few in number:***

As there were few Turkish Cypriots and they were completely unarmed, they had a non-

threatening political profile in the village. They did not have any connection with TMT or any other nationalistic movement and they never made any threats against EOKA or supporters of Makarios in the village.

**c *the significance of family ties and kinship:***

Peter Loizos mentioned in his work *The Heart Grown Bitter* (1981, pp. 70–71) that some EOKA members and supporters of Makarios in Argaki – the most important component of which consisted of members of the communist party, AKEL – had kinship ties as well as very good relationships in that village. They helped and supported each other during conflicts in Cyprus. For instance, during the coup, Argaki EOKA B members did not allow EOKA B members from other villages to arrest relatives who were supporters of Makarios. Hence, the good relationship and family bonds between Argaki EOKA B members and leftists enabled them to help and support the Turkish Cypriots and keep them safe from any attack or violence by EOKA B.

### **Connecting Theories of Ethnic Relations to the Case of Argaki**

The crucial sociological perspective which can be broadly applied to the case of Argaki is conflict theory which highlights the importance of divisions, unequal distribution of power and struggle or, tensions between dominant and disadvantaged groups, examining how relationships of control are established and continued for a long time. In this case, it is important to consult the pioneers: Donald Horowitz, Michael Mann, Herbert Blumer, Émile Durkheim, Ari Sitas and Peter Loizos to understand the conflict in Cyprus, beyond the obvious connection.

Horowitz (1985) outlines the complex processes of production and reproduction of ethnic conflict in society. He argues that much of the tension between ethnic groups emerges from group comparison. He points out that people evaluate their abilities/worth relative to other people, and as group identity is often central to individual identity, their self-esteem is strongly influenced by a comparison of ethnic group to others. He claims that in ethnically divided societies, power is also an end in itself, for two reasons: it confirms group worth, and it ensures group survival. Horowitz divides ethnic groups and regions into those that are backward and those that are advanced. Advanced groups have benefited from education and non-agricultural employment and backward groups are less well-educated, less wealthy and are stereotyped as 'indolent, ignorant and not disposed to achievement' (p. 227).

In Cyprus, Greek Cypriots were deemed the advanced and wealthy group who mostly benefited from education, whereas Turkish Cypriots were the backward group who were less wealthy and less educated. In the village of Argaki the situation was similar to that of Cyprus as a whole; the Argaki Turks being poor and less educated. Most of them were employed in agriculture or on building sites and their living conditions were tough, whereas Argaki Greeks were the advanced group who were better-educated and wealthier.

When it comes to the specific application of a Cypriot village, Argaki, – although certainly affected by the broader climate of the Cyprus conflict (1963–1974) – was dissimilar to other villages at that time and managed to avoid the ‘ethnic cleansing’ of the kind we see in other places: in Cyprus then, and now in other parts of the world. In *The Dark Side of Democracy*, Michael Mann defines ‘ethnic cleansing’ as the attempt to create mono-ethnic populations for a given political unit. This is not necessarily murderous, and may more often involve assimilation. Mann sees ethnic cleansing and democracy as having an elective relationship with each other in two respects: first, most democracies develop on the basis of relatively mono-ethnic populations, and second, democracy carries the possibility that the majority might use power over minorities (2005, p. 126).

Mann claims that

‘murderous cleansing occurs where two ethnic groups make a claim to the same territory; where one ethnic group feels threatened but also capable of eliminating the other; and where sovereignty breaks down amongst an unstable geopolitical environment that usually leads to the war’ (p. 126).

In the case of Cyprus, Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots made a claim to the same territory. EOKA militants claimed that Cyprus belongs to the Greeks, and they wanted political union with Greece. On the other hand, Turkish Cypriots were the group who felt threatened and established TMT, an underground Turkish Cypriot organisation, to protect themselves against EOKA militants. They did not accept being reduced to minority status in a potentially Greek state and insisted that they should be given the right to form a union with Turkey (*taksim*).

The ethnic conflict in Cyprus did not escalate into total murderous cleansing. It was partial and this was fulfilled by EOKA B militants supported by the military regime in Greece in 1974. The murderous cleansing by EOKA B was against both Turkish Cypriots as well as Greek Cypriot Communists. In the Argaki case, the Turkish Cypriots were not exposed to any ethnic cleansing or mass killing because of the social factors mentioned earlier.

In addition to these factors, ‘local humanism’ and an ‘ethic of reconciliation’ as Ari Sitas (2008) termed it, seem to have played an important role in saving Argaki Turks from murderous cleansing. Sitas discusses these two concepts considering the Cyprus case. He argues that the Cyprus conflict in some villages did not result in murderous cleansing because of self-restraint and this speaks of local humanism. For instance, in the mixed village of Argaki ethnic cleansing did not occur after the coup and invasion despite the existence of core constituencies and militants who were ready to push the society beyond an already dangerous situation.

Sitas claims that local humanism was the most important factor which prevented ethnic cleansing during the periods of conflict in Cyprus. He gives occasions of humanistic relationships between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots such as the guards who left the prison camp’s door open; the soldiers who stole food and water to give to imprisoned women and children; the soldiers who shot high rather than low; co-villagers who came in the thick of the night to warn of an attack.

According to Sitas, if local humanism can be properly understood and its cultural formation can be explained, it can provide a 'third space'. To him such humanism is a reflection of the common way of life shared by people in towns and villages before the troubles began. Sitas argues that this kind of humanism is directly related to Cypriotism and the struggle primarily of the working class and peasantry seeking a better life for all.

Loizos, in his argument about the norm of village solidarity, gives examples of the village of Argaki/Kalo, revealing that in one form it is the dogma that Argaki/Kalo village is the best village in Cyprus; in another it is that Argakites/Kalotes do not allow themselves to be divided by the fanaticism of party politics; in another it is that violence of any kind within the village should be prevented; or it is that a man would be insane to quarrel with his relatives over politics; in another form, it is the deliberate definition of areas of activity as 'non-political'; and in another it is the statement that certain areas must not be coloured by party politics. Loizos points out that in Argaki/Kalo, the norm of solidarity emerged and persisted because most of the villagers saw their futures linked to that village as a whole and they set cautious limits regarding the use of national politics within it (2004, p. 291).

Émile Durkheim, who is associated with functionalism, was concerned primarily with how societies could maintain their integrity and cohesion in the modern era, when things such as shared religious and ethnic background could no longer be assumed. Durkheim also argued that social acts had an independent existence greater and more objective than the actions of the individuals that composed society and could only be explained by other social facts rather than, say, by society's adaptation to a particular climate.<sup>2</sup> In the case of Argaki, Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots managed to maintain their integrity and unity although this was not fulfilled in all mixed villages of Cyprus during periods of unease and adversity on the island. The crucial factors which led the Argaki Turks and Greeks to social unity were the existence of local humanism and solidarity in the village. As an illustration, there was a strong solidarity between Turkish and Greek individuals. They cultivated their lands in collaboration with one another. They helped each other whenever one of them was in need of help. They made bread and cookies at Easter and Bayram festivals, sharing the same village oven.

Another sociological perspective which helps us to understand the ethnic relations between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in the village of Argaki is symbolic interactionism, which plays an important role in microsociology and social psychology. Herbert Blumer, who coined the term 'symbolic interactionism' outlined this perspective, arguing that people act towards things based on the meanings they give to them, and these meanings stem from social interaction and are modified through interpretation. Blumer (1962) claimed that human interaction is mediated by

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2 See 'É. Durkheim on Institutional Analysis. Founder of Structural Functionalism'. Available at [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emile\\_Durkheim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emile_Durkheim)], accessed on 3 November 2012.

the use of symbols and signification, by interpretation, or by finding out the meaning of one another's actions.<sup>3</sup>

Symbolic interactionism helps us to explain the social relations and involvement between Argaki Turks and Greeks. In the village of Argaki, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots always kept face to face contact in their daily lives. Not only the ageing Argaki Greeks and Turks, but also the younger generation had stayed in touch in the village through good and bad times. For example, they were together in the citrus fields picking the oranges, on construction sites building houses, and sitting on balconies making lace during the summer time. While interacting with each other, Argaki Turks and Greeks became involved in an exchange of languages, traditions and customs. They were also together in the cafes playing cards and discussing the social issues concerning their daily lives. In turn, interaction and a two-way active engagement with Greek Cypriots allowed Turkish Cypriots to be protected from violence during the periods of tension and crisis on the island. As an instance, their Greek neighbours helped them to travel to their work in safety, provided them with food, and informed them of possible dangers during anxious periods.

### **Analysis and Findings**

The interviews I conducted with Argaki Turks have revealed the following findings:<sup>4</sup>

#### ***Security and Insecurity of Argaki Turkish Cypriots***

As there were only a few Turks among the Greek Cypriots in the village of Argaki, the fear of being killed by EOKA members was predominant among them. Before 1974 they all felt insecure at certain times.

In 1957, when the Turkish Cypriot doctor, Erol from Morphou, was murdered by EOKA members, the Argaki Turks were also afraid of being killed by EOKA because their village was very close to Morphou and they thought that the same thing might happen to them. Another incident which made Argaki Turks feel insecure occurred in 1958, when one of the EOKA members set fire to the mosque, which was immediately extinguished by Argaki Greek leftists. Mukhtar, Behlül Hüseyin, remembers the incident and recounts it as follows:

'it was a Sunday night in summer and the daughter of Peter Loizos' uncle was getting married. All the villagers, Greek and Turks, were at the wedding party and the village was quiet. One EOKA member, who was drunk, took advantage of the situation and set fire to the mosque.'

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3 H. Blumer (1962) 'Society as Symbolic Interaction', in A. Rose (ed.), *Human Behaviour and Social Process: An Interactionist Approach*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. See also [[www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbolic-interactionism](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbolic-interactionism)], accessed 3 November 2012.

4 The interviews conducted for this research have been translated from Turkish into English by the author.



This unpleasant event made the Argaki Turks afraid of being killed by EOKA. Nevertheless, the effort by the majority of Greek villagers to extinguish the fire, reassured them to some extent.

The security of Argaki Turks was entirely in the hands of their fellow Greek villagers since Argaki was completely surrounded by Greek villages. As they lived far from other Turkish villages the only people who could help them maintain their lives in a peaceful atmosphere were the Argaki Greek Cypriots. Most of those interviewed claimed that their safety against external dangers was mostly safeguarded by the leftist Argaki Greeks during the periods of conflict in Cyprus. Akif İsmail Hodja related that

‘in 1974 the Greek soldiers from Greece came to Argaki and stayed for a few days. During their stay they said to the Greek villagers that they wanted to kill the Argaki Turks, but the leaders of the village such as Thomas, Phani Varellas and the other villagers did not let them kill the Argaki Turks.’

Akif Hodja continued his story:

‘Argaki Greek Cypriots warned the Greek soldiers that if they touched any Turk in the village, they would fight against them. Because they had good relationships with Turks and they did not want them to be killed.’

Ayşe Hüseyin, another female Argaki Turk, expressed how thankful she was towards her Greek villagers when she said,

‘during the conflicts Argaki Greek Cypriots used to visit our houses and warn us constantly about the danger outside our houses, and tell us not to let our children go out until the EOKA members from different places leave the village. They did not want us to be killed by EOKA members.’

Argaki Greeks were so determined to ensure the security of their Turkish counterparts that when the Turkish lorries came in 1964 to take the Turkish villagers, the Greeks would not let the Turkish authorities take them away. They promised that they would shelter the Argaki Turks and supply them with food. The offer by the Greeks was accepted because of the good relationship which existed between them. It was a strong enough reason for the Turks to stay in the village. Argaki Greek Cypriots did not let their Turkish Cypriot villagers down and they kept their promise until they themselves had to leave the village. They never permitted an EOKA member or a Greek soldier to touch any Turkish villager and those Turkish villagers who contributed to this study declared their gratitude towards Greek villagers and avowed never to forget the effort they made to protect them and supply them with food during the violence. Ali Hodja, one of the older Argaki Turkish Cypriots, remembers this:

‘we had always good relations with our Greek villagers. They supplied us food during the conflicts. For instance, one of the Argaki villagers, Bafidis, used to bake bread for Argaki villagers and give the bread to Argaki Turks.’

### *Friendship and Support between Argaki Turks and Greeks*

The Argaki Turkish Cypriots interviewed each declared that they had good relationships with their Greek Cypriot counterparts and almost all of them had close friendships with their Greek neighbours. They used to share some activities together and helped one another whenever they needed anything. A case in point was one villager, Müsteyde, who used to make lace with her close Greek friend, Maroulla when they came home from work. They would labour in the fields during the daytime and crochet lace together in the evenings after they had finished their dinner. Sometimes, they continued their lace-making until midnight. Müsteyde remembers those evenings and reminisces:

‘My best friend in the village was Evribivi’s [Bebi’s] daughter Maroulla. I used to share everything with her, my problems, happiness and my secret things. We used to go to work together, and when we came home from work in the evening, we used to crochet lace all night long. While working we used to talk about our future life.’

Akif İsmail (Hodja)’s friend, Andrea Polyviou, helped him to meet a girl from Argaki and get married. Akif Hodja also used to have a partnership with his Greek neighbour, Yiorgos Chango. Together they grew watermelons, melons, and different kinds of vegetables. He explained his partnership in his own words saying,

‘Yiorgos and I were very good friends. We used to help each other whenever we were in need. We never tried to cheat each other. Our partnership was the result of our good friendship. During our partnership, as we respected each other, there was not any problem between us. We used to grow mainly watermelons, melons and vegetables. We shared everything equally among us without trying to cheat each other.’

Another Argaki Turkish woman, Ayşe Kemal, used to bake bread, and cheese pastries (*pilavuna, gullun*) in a big outdoor oven (*furno*) with her Greek neighbour, Andromachi during the Easter and Bayram holidays. Salih, one of the young Argaki Turks, used to eat and drink with his Greek friend Sotiri in the evenings.

The friendship between Ayşe Hüseyin and Agathe Guchobi was closely bound and very sincere. It was moving to hear from Ayşe Hüseyin that her Greek neighbour, Agathe, helped her to carry her injured son in her arms and run to the neighbouring village, Zodhia – one mile away – to take him to hospital in Nicosia. When Ayşe Hüseyin remembered this moment, she burst into tears sobbing,

‘I will never forget that moment and Agathe’s help, all my life.’

Some Argaki Turks did not have close personal Greek friends in the village, but simply had Greek acquaintances from their workplaces. They claimed that relationships with their Greek colleagues were very good and furthermore they explained that they never had any arguments or fights with them. Their friendships were based on mutual respect and a feeling of kinship with one another.

There was also mutual solidarity between Turks and Greeks in Argaki. As sample cases, Akif İsmail (Hodja)'s neighbour, Sofoulla Chango, used to let them keep their meat and other foods in her refrigerator during the summer as her Turkish neighbours did not have one. During the conflicts of the 1960s, Phani Varellas used to take Argaki Turkish workers to their workplaces in his bus, making sure the roads were safe beforehand. Ali Hodja used to help Thomas, the manager of the co-operative society, with clerical work when he came home from work in the evenings.

In 1959, the clerk of the village cooperative society, Bibi, assisted Akif Hodja with a loan for some money from the cooperative bank to pay off his father-in-law's debt. If Bibi had not helped him at the time, his father-in-law would have had to sell his land to pay his debt. Akif Hodja was grateful for Bibi's help.

During the war in 1974, Argaki Greeks and Turks continued to support and help each other. In particular, the Greek Cypriots assisted the Turks in meeting their daily needs during the clashes. By way of illustration, Bafidi's wife, an Argaki Greek, used to bake bread in her large outdoor oven (*fournó*) and she would give the bread first to the Argaki Turks, even though she knew that she would encounter some complaints and threats from the neighbouring villagers. She used to take the risk and support her Turkish villagers and never left them without bread during the war.

In 1972, when there was a conflict between EOKA B members and supporters of Makarios, it was difficult and dangerous for Turks to provide for their own needs because EOKA B had set up road blocks. During this period, Argaki Greeks opened their grocery shops to the Turks so they could obtain supplies. The Greeks did the same again in 1974, opening the doors to their stores so that Turkish neighbours would not suffer from hunger. One of the grocers was Pantelis; he never refused to open his shop door to Turks.

### *Travel outside the Village and its Hazards*

From 1963 to 1964 it was dangerous for Argaki Turks to travel outside the village or to go to work because Greek Cypriot militia set up barricades on the roads and would search the vehicles. If they found Turks in any of the vehicles, they would arrest them and sometimes kill them.

In 1963, Ali Hodja's wife, Fezile, was taken to hospital in Nicosia after burning herself whilst baking bread in the outdoor oven. As she had recently given birth, she needed to nurse her baby, so an Argaki Greek Cypriot, Phani Varellas, used to help by regularly driving the infant with its grandmother in his bus to take the baby safely to Fezile. Because of the road blocks set up by the Greek Cypriot militia it would have been dangerous for Fezile's mother to make her way to the hospital alone. On their way to hospital one day, they were stopped by a Greek Cypriot soldier. That particular soldier wanted to kill Fezile's mother but Phani Varellas prevented it. He explained the situation, and finally, managed to persuade the soldier not to kill her.

In 1963, when fighting broke out, Argaki Turks had difficulties getting to work. One Argaki Turk, Ali Hodja, had a problem reaching Dhekelia where he worked because the roads were barricaded by Greek Cypriot militia, and any Turk who was captured might have been killed.

Argaki Turkish Cypriot workers were lucky to some extent because Phani Varellas, who transported them in his bus, would make sure there were no roadblocks set up on the route before starting out. Ayşe Kemal's husband, however, was not as blessed as the Argaki Turks. In 1964, while he and eighteen other Turkish workers were travelling from Engkomi (Tuzla) to work, they were stopped by Greek Cypriot soldiers and killed. If Ayşe and her husband had lived in Argaki at that time, he possibly would not have been killed.

During the same year, Argaki Turkish youngsters had to forego their studies in Nicosia because it was difficult for them to travel to and from their village due to the roadblocks. Argaki families were also afraid of sending their children to work outside the village such as Erol Abdurrahman's father who worried so much about the dangers of his son leaving the safety of the village that he found Erol a job in the village to be near Greek villagers where he thought he was more protected.

In 1964, one Argaki Turk, Derviş, was fortunate to be spared his life. Derviş was arrested by members of the Greek Cypriot militia whilst outside the village but luckily he was not executed immediately. As soon as Argaki Greeks learned of his arrest, their own EOKA members searched for him and rescued him.

### *Growing up in the Village*

I grew up in Argaki and am a descendant of the original Argaki Turks. My mother, Bahire, also hails from Argaki but my father, Akif Hodja, originated from Limnitis. I have not only heard about intercommunal relations but I have also experienced them at first hand with my Argaki Greek friends for four years – and this knowledge has, in the main, prompted me to undertake this study. In this research, I have purposefully not explored my personal experiences much because it is my aim to give an objective account of intercommunal relations between the Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots in the mixed village of Argaki. Nonetheless, I do remember good times as well as others when life was not so rosy. To give an example, in 1974 there were a few occasions when, as I walked through the village to the '*kafeneio*' with my brothers, Greek Cypriot youths would call us names and throw stones at us, but we soon changed our route to the café and avoided them.

The Argaki Turks that I interviewed for this study all originated from Argaki with the exception of Akif İsmail (Hodja) and Ali Hodja, although their wives were from the village. The younger participants were all born in Argaki and grew up with their Greek neighbours and friends in the village. They experienced similar things at different times. As children they played all sorts of games in their quarters, and when they grew up they worked together in the citrus orchards as fruit pickers. It was not only in the citrus orchards where they worked together but also in other workplaces such as on building sites and in carpentry shops in the village.

One of those interviewed, Erol Abdurrahman, declared that he used to work with Greek friends for a Greek master builder and did not encounter problems at work. Clarifying his case he said:

'While I was working with my Greek friends for a Greek master builder, I was not confronted with any problems. The Greek master used to treat us equally and never made me feel isolated or segregated among the Greek workers.'

Another participant who shared the same experience was Erol's wife, Zeliha. She was employed with Greek friends as a workhand picking citrus fruit, carrots and beetroot. Zeliha said that the work was difficult at times, particularly labouring in the fields in the wintertime when her hands would almost freeze while weeding the carrot fields. Zeliha also told me that the living conditions of her family were not as satisfactory as their Greek neighbours; namely, they did not have electricity in their house. They used to press their clothes with an iron heated over a coal fire. She remembered growing up without a TV set at home and the family used to go to their Greek neighbours to watch movies on their television.

Ayşe Kemal's family had inferior living conditions in comparison to other Argaki Turkish families. As mentioned earlier, Ayşe had lost her husband during the fighting in 1963 when he was murdered by Greek Cypriot soldiers on his way to work. As a consequence she had to move from Tuzla, her husband's village, back to her own village of Argaki where she worked hard to bring up her five children. Life was indeed tough for her in Argaki without a husband. However, it was perhaps not as difficult as she expected because her Greek neighbours supported her by finding jobs for her children. They also helped her family to integrate into village life. At first, it was not easy for her children to adapt to the village because they did not understand the Greek language. Her eldest son, Salih, had a problem with one of the Greek boys because he did not speak Greek, but then he learned the language and he made many Greek friends.

The Argaki Turks were not as fortunate as their Greek co-villagers in terms of education. Sometimes they did not have a teacher in their school for weeks. There were occasions when they were taught by a temporary 'teacher', who was an educated person but not a qualified teacher. This, together with the fact that they did not have access to full-time education due to violent periods throughout the island, affected their future studies in a negative way. Additionally, because there were so few Turks in the village, Turkish teachers did not want to travel to Argaki, and were afraid of being killed by Greek Cypriot militia on their way there.

It can be concluded that, in the village of Argaki, Turks grew up alongside their Greek friends and neighbours peacefully without any serious incidents. Argaki Turks were not exposed to any attack, isolation or segregation and they never feared being killed by the Greeks in their village. Having said that, I record below some occasions when frightening things were said and done by individuals in the village, and the lives of Argaki Turkish Cypriots were often adversely affected by the wider conflicts on the island.

### *Living with the Greeks*

Although Argaki Turks did not have any crucial problems with the Greeks of their mixed village, a few unpleasant incidents happened, which did not involve any direct attack or violence. Mukhtar

Behlül described one event in 1958 when Argaki EOKA members did not speak to the Argaki Turks in the village for a week. He said,

‘the Turkish Cypriots never learnt the real reason why this was so because it remained secret among the EOKA members’. He added, ‘in the same year, one of the village’s EOKA members set fire to the empty mosque in the village but the supporters of Makarios extinguished the fire immediately and helped the Turks to repair it.’

Another disagreeable incident happened in between 1958 and 1960, when one of the Argaki Greek Cypriots, Petros Paly, tried to incite his friends to kill Argaki Turks and throw them into a well. As soon as other Argaki Greeks heard of it, they immediately told Paly to keep quiet and not talk of killing Argaki Turks again.

One of the older Argaki Turkish participants interviewed, Akif İsmail (Hodja), stated that his father-in-law had a problem with one of the Argaki Greek owners of a water pump. This incident happened in 1963, when his father-in-law came back to Argaki from Limniti. He had planted an acre of black-eyed beans in summer but he was not given access to water to irrigate his plants. As a result, his black-eyed beans dried out and died. The Greek village leaders did their utmost to convince the Greek Cypriot owner of the pump that he should allow the Turkish farmer to use the water, but they were unsuccessful.

In 1972, the EOKA B member Kikas was murdered. Assuming that their leader had been killed by Turks, the Argaki EOKA B members used to swear at Turks in the village whenever they saw them. One of the participants in this study said that her mother used to do her shopping at a store belonging to an EOKA B member but he was so unpleasant to her that she became frightened and stopped going.

Having unearthed the above incidents, it must be said that there were many good stories which verified the strong solidarity and relationship between the Turks and the Greeks in Argaki. One such example is Mukhtar Behlül Hüseyin, who advocated that in 1963, some EOKA members wanted to come to Argaki to kill Turks, but the Argaki Greeks did not allow them to enter the village. Each Argaki Turkish informant interviewed during this study attested that during the conflicts in the 1950s, the 1960s and in 1974, their Greek neighbours helped them to obtain food and made them feel safe in the village. Even the Argaki EOKA members sometimes visited the Turks and attempted to alleviate their fears during those periods of conflict.

The Argaki Turks were fortunate to have supportive, friendly Greeks in the village. According to Argaki Turkish participants, the Greeks always tried their best to ensure the security of Argaki Turks in times of conflict, and they proved this by protecting them from external dangers at certain times. An illustration of this was in 1974 when soldiers from Greece wanted to kill the Argaki Turks, but Argaki Greeks did not permit it. Young Argaki Turkish informants stated that they had a peaceful life with their Greek friends when the village was still mixed. To quote a young Argaki Turk, Salih, he said,

'I had a good relationship with my Greek friend, Sotiri. We used to play backgammon in the coffee-shop and go out for a drink.'

The younger Argaki Turks declared that they had never been exposed to any isolation, degrading treatment or segregation by the Greek landlords or Greek masters while they worked in the fields or at their workplaces. They were always treated equally. They emphasised that there had not been problems between Turkish and Greek workers.

As mentioned earlier in the paper, Argaki was not the only village where Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots lived in peace and solidarity during times of conflict in Cyprus. There were also other mixed villages such as Stroncilo, Lapatoz, and Trachonas, where two communities shared the same experiences. Sevgül Uludağ corroborates this in her book *Oysters with the Missing Pearls: The Untold Stories*, where she writes about how Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots lived together peacefully in those mixed villages throughout violent periods on the island.

It can be ascertained from the quotes of the Argaki Turkish people who participated in this study that they led a peaceful life with the Greek villagers in spite of fearing for their safety on occasions. On the whole they seemed content to have helpful and non-racist Greeks living in their village. Argaki Turks greatly appreciated the Greek villagers' support and loyalty. However, in 1974, the situation overturned and the Argaki Turks were unable to help the Greeks remain in the village or protect them from external dangers as their Greek villagers had done in the past for them. Following the displacement of Argaki Greeks, the Turks displayed their loyalty towards the Greeks by taking care of sixty elderly Greek villagers who stayed behind in Argaki to tend their animals. They not only took care of those Greek villagers but they also saved two youths and one elderly Greek villager from being arrested by Turkish soldiers.

Ayşe Kemal reported that her father saved an elderly Greek woman called Kadisi, from being arrested by Turkish soldiers. She explained that

'Because Kadisi was so scared, she used to stay in our house after the Greeks had been displaced. One day, a Turkish soldier asked my father if he had any Greeks staying in his house and he admitted that Kadisi was with us. He then regretted telling the soldier about Kadisi because the Turkish soldier wanted to arrest her. Thankfully, my father persuaded the soldier not to arrest Kadisi by explaining how the Greek villagers used to protect us from Greek soldiers and from EOKA members.'

Akif İsmail (Hodja), recounted that he saved two young Greek Cypriots, Phidia and Stephanie, from being arrested by Turkish soldiers. He went on to say that

'while Phidia and Stephanie were trying to cross the border to go to Astromeriti, they were caught by Turkish soldiers. I was with the Turkish soldiers to help them communicate with Greek civilians when those young Greeks from Argaki were captured. I immediately stopped and explained to the Turkish lieutenant that those young Greeks were from my village and they had never let the Greek soldiers and EOKA members harm any Turks in

Argaki. After I had described the good relationships that Argaki Turks and Greeks had fostered, the Turkish soldiers allowed the young Argaki Greeks to cross the border to Astromeriti.'

### *Living without Greeks*

Living without Greeks was not so easy for Argaki Turks in the beginning. Most of the Argaki Turkish people interviewed claimed that they were mostly disappointed with the Turkish Cypriots who moved in from other places. Although they no longer lived in fear of attack by Greek soldiers or Greek Cypriot militia, and lived in better houses which their Greek neighbours had asked them to move into until they returned, they were not as comfortable as they expected to be.

The Argaki Turkish women interviewed were especially unhappy with all the Turkish Cypriot refugees in the village. One of the women, Ayşe Kemal, complained that

'the refugees were always jealous of us because we lived in Greek houses and also had Greek properties.'

Another Argaki woman, Müsteyde Behlül, was really disappointed with the new Turkish Cypriot residents. Feeling profound sadness she sighed,

'my family's house was broken into many times by the new refugees and they had stolen my valuable jewellery; a Cyprus five pound note (pendo lira), which my mother had given to me, and all the lace I had made with my close Greek friend, Maroulla.'

She was very upset as she re-examined her feelings for the new Turkish Cypriot villagers. She was particularly distressed about the lace items stolen by the refugees, because she had lost not only her lace but also the only mementos she treasured of her close Greek friend, Maroulla.

Most of the Turkish women from Argaki who were interviewed, said that after the Greeks had left the village it was impossible for them to go to their own fields by themselves because they did not feel as safe as when the Greeks were living there before. They also stated that it was not as easy as it used to be in the past to leave their doors open during the summer time. Müsteyde says,

'before 1974 we [Argaki Turkish women] used to go to our fields without [being] accompanied by our men, but after 1974, as there were soldiers all around the village, this was not possible.'

Another Argaki Turkish woman, Zahiye, agreed saying

'we were going to our fields alone as females without feeling fear inside before 1974, but now we are afraid of going to our fields alone as a woman.'

An elderly Argaki Turkish woman, Ayşe Kemal protested that after 1974, when the refugees came to Argaki, she thought life would be better, but the refugees disappointed them. She did not want to believe that Turkish Cypriot refugees could be so angry and jealous of them. She



emphasised that when the refugees first came to the village, they treated them as if they were their enemies. She argued that she found it difficult to understand the attitudes of refugees towards them.

### Conclusion

This study has raised questions with implications to debate, i.e:

- ❖ To what degree is the particular nature of the Argaki 'story' a result of the geographical and demographic isolation of the Argaki Turkish Cypriots?
- ❖ To what degree did the Argaki Turks' feelings of fear concern Greek Cypriots – who were the majority in the village – and was it directly related to the demographic structure in the village or to exterior perils?

To consider the first point we can comment that intercommunal conflicts do not all adhere to a similar predetermined pattern. The outcomes depend on individual personalities, and on structural and demographic factors. The strong left-wing group in Argaki was positive towards Turkish Cypriots and always supported them during periods of conflict in Cyprus. In addition, some EOKA members who were friends or relatives of this group also made them feel secure because Argaki Turks maintained non-threatening political profiles in the village since they did not have any connections with TMT or any other nationalist movements, they were completely unarmed and they had never made any threats against EOKA or supporters of Makarios in the village. As Loizos stated in his book *Iron in the Soul* (2008, p. 18), EOKA people said there were no traitors in the village and this included the Turks. Turkish Cypriots in other mixed villages were not as fortunate as Argaki Turks. As often happened in 1964 in villages with populations of mostly Greek nationalists, the Turkish Cypriots might have found no Greek supporters and perhaps been driven out or would have decided to leave.

In the case of Lefka, where the Turkish Cypriots were the demographically dominant group, it was the Turkish Cypriots who expelled the Greek Cypriots in 1958. It is, therefore, not all about Greeks, or Turks, as cultural groups, but about nationalists and demographics in both groups.

To reflect on the second point, the Turkish Cypriots – a minority in national terms – were also the minority group in many mixed communities. In such situations it was prudent for them to avoid fighting and to try to live peacefully with the majority Greek Cypriot population. This was valid for Argaki Turks, too, but their feelings of fear did not arise because of any Greek Cypriot neighbours' negative attitudes or treatment towards them. Apart from a few unpleasant incidents caused by Argaki EOKA members, it was the enemies from outside Argaki, such as the non-Argaki EOKA members and Greek soldiers who raised their fears of being killed. Their Greek Cypriot neighbours had never made them feel isolated or frightened. They had tried to reassure them and make their lives more comfortable during periods of tension and crisis in Cyprus.

We can argue that at the grass roots level, the patterns of traditional coexistence of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have never been totally interrupted. Even at the most critical of times there has been surprising evidence of this as supported by the relations between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots in the village of Argaki. It is impressive to observe that these two communities in the mixed village managed to pursue their good relations without causing serious harm to one another during tense periods of crisis on the island.

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Peter Loizos with Eral Akarturk in Peter's garden in London © Eral Akarturk