

Truth and Reconciliation on Cyprus will be Possible, when ...

Djelal Kadir

Truth and reconciliation are powerful ideas. At the right time and under the appropriate circumstances, they can prove powerful indeed. Circumstantial appropriateness is important enough for Aristotle to have considered it on two different occasions (in the Rhetoric II and Nichomachean Ethics 1142a and ff). The most proper occasion for truth is when it can coincide with what might in fact be the case. When the facts are still in the process of being manufactured, the nature of truth remains vulnerable to those who shape the facts.

Reconciliation, like truth, becomes meaningful after the fact, and after the facts are no longer susceptible to those who are still engaged in creating facts and shaping the truth that corresponds to them. Reconciliation arrives in the aftermath of conflict and contested interests, when the agon is no longer paramount and the antagonists can no longer see greater benefit in competing for the manufacture of facts and truth. This is the moment when the protagonists find greater value in harmonising factuality, truth, and the concord between them than in shaping facts and truth to suit their own particular purposes. For this reason, and especially in the political arena, both truth and reconciliation can only be taken seriously in the aftermath of deeds already beyond the reach of political operatives, that is, beyond the stage of manipulation that created the need for the rediscovery of truth and made reconciliation necessary in the first place. This is not to say that either truth or deeds are ever immune, since what defines the polis is the perpetual adjudication of facts and truth through civil and civic discourse. This is the stage when civil society takes precedent over governmental operatives and state apparatus, since the most defining attribute of politicians is their capacity to overlook certain facts expediently, that is, as it suits their motives and self-interests – ideological, economic, or otherwise.

Truth and reconciliation, then, are never absolute. They are always negotiated, compromised, adjudicated. These adjudicatory processes can only occur after those in positions to command the nature of facts and truth have either moved on and away from the historical circumstances they have forged, or when they demonstrate a genuine commitment and honest intent to forego control of the facts and their attendant truths as they have manufactured them, a rare eventuality since those in control rarely surrender command willingly or altruistically. When time, circumstance, and history superannuate the grasp of those barnacled on the body

politic and the common weal, those who remain behind on the scene can indeed negotiate the facts, adjudicate truth, and reconcile the ledger of history. To attempt to achieve these goals even while the facts are still in the process of being constituted by those who have a vested interest in giving those facts a particular shape leaves truth vulnerable to being other than truthful and reconciliation other than conciliatory. Both truth and reconciliation in such untimely circumstances become a further opportunity for those interested in continuing to ensure for themselves the distortion of any truth and any conciliation so that they conform to their particular interests and ideological motives.

Reconciliation and truth commissions have proved apt for places such as South Africa, for example, precisely because those who shaped the facts and their truth approached obsolescence, or were marginalised from the national scene, or were obliged to relinquish control of fact-making and truth manufacturing by circumstances they could no longer determine or direct. Those who command the conditions and possibilities of facts and their truth, in other words, those who determine Realpolitik, especially in a circumscribed arena like the Island of Cyprus that approaches conditions of a laboratory control-group in a small terrain, tend to be rather nervous, not to say obsessive-compulsive in their diligent endeavours to manage circumstances and their Realpolitik. This is so because the size of their theatre of operation and the consistency of their modus operandi make them quite obvious and transparent to the scrutiny of anyone who would care to scrutinise or analyse them with any honest objectivity and historical insight. In other words, the political operatives, usually clever by half, are indeed clever enough to know that they are quite transparent in their machinations, hence, their paranoia and neurotic obsession with technicalities, legal and otherwise. Their only hope for any cover or cloak of immunity is the possibility that those who are in a position to engage in such scrutiny or analysis might share their ideological proclivities, prejudices, and vested interests.

In the case of the Island of Cyprus, the above dynamics become compounded, exacerbated, and intensified because of the small theatre for this agon and, not least, because there are multiple sets of operatives who would forge the shape of the facts, the nature of truth, and the possibilities of any reconciliation. Because the same operatives who created the facts on the ground, the truths that pertain to them, and the need for conciliation among peoples they have set into conflict continue in power. Thus, any truth and reconciliation can only become realised in ways that conform to their historical vision, ideological inclinations, and economic self-interest.

When speaking of truth and reconciliation it is imperative to be truthful. The truth of the matter is that "Cyprus" is now multiple, *de facto* partitioned into two entities, and each only refers to the other and addresses the other in quotation marks.

Another term for “quotation marks” is “scare quotes”, a term that is most appropriate to the current circumstances. Scary indeed, for at least one more generation of Cypriots seems destined to know neither truth, nor reconciliation by virtue of the fact that, let us be honest, the “Turkish Republic of North Cyprus” is daily more Turkified, just as the “Hellenic Republic of Southern Cyprus” is daily more Hellenised. The “international community”, that expedient chimaera that confers the fiction of recognition and ontological authority on one or another political entity now and then, is itself befuddled by what is what and who is who. Or it does not consider a limited phenomenon such as the island of Cyprus significant enough to bother engaging in an honest assessment of what is what and who is who. There is no indication that this might change any time soon, especially since politically engineered turgidity and obfuscated reality serve some very strong interests and reinforce some powerful atavistic prejudices on the island and in the “international community”. The reality of Cyprus outside of quotation marks or scare quotes, then, is little more than a mirage, product of the phantasmagoria of those whose neurosis have historically been most acute and their modus operandi most heinous.

Thus, under the current circumstances, “reconciliation” for the regime of the “Hellenic Republic of Southern Cyprus” translates into the whole island – north and south – reconciling itself to what the regime’s principals consider as unquestionable historical facts that they themselves have created. Given the derogations and exemptions from jurisdiction under the exemptions of the EU *acquis* that exclude northern Cyprus from the purview of full southern sovereignty, to define “reconciliation” on terms pressed by the “internationally recognised part of the island” entails a performative contradiction. The only possible avoidance of such performative contradiction is the forestalling of any negotiation, in perpetuity if possible, since negotiation would mean having to concede the possibility that there might be other truths than those the current regime in southern Cyprus considers as the only reality, no matter the actual legality or historic criminality of the genesis of those facts and their truths. There is a fear of negotiation and adjudication and this explains the obsession of the regime in southern Cyprus with jurisprudential technicalities and legal protocols. These obsessions are compensatory gestures for the regime’s own self-perceived questionable legality or morality, since the principals who created the facts on the ground continue to be the same political operatives. Reconciliation, then, is a term that has been appropriated and corrupted by at least one of the interested parties to the conflict, and, in reaction, compromised just as much by the other, as well as by third parties with long-standing historical and strategic interests in the situation. In sum, to speak of truth and reconciliation at this moment on the island of Cyprus, more accurately, “Cyprus,” runs the risk of furnishing grist for the mill of political operatives whose self-interest in deepening the animadversion and antipathy between the very communities we would wish to reconcile remains unchanged.

What might the alternative be, if not now, then, perhaps in some as yet indeterminate future? I would suggest a triple formation: co-existence, distributive justice, co-governance. These are more than lexical formations, and they strike fear at the heart of the current regimes – south and north. There is nothing wrong with striking fear, especially when it is aimed at the mind of political operatives. If those who wish to further truth and reconciliation also wish to make any difference, they would want to reach the minds of both sets of governing elites and all their fairly homogenous political parties, even through fear. As pragmatic creatures, fear, especially fear of the possibility of truth they cannot shape and the fear of history they cannot control is what they are most likely to respond to. Shame would not work; politicians, by historical precedent, are beyond shame.

Peaceful co-existence is not utopian. It makes practical sense, and it is common sense, if indeed the diverse people of the island are ever to make common cause. The people of Cyprus have demonstrated time and again, even when they are emotionally hijacked in their votes, plebiscites, and referenda by self-serving politicians, that they are clearly well ahead of the governing structures and those holding the reins of power in the government and in the private sector's economic institutions. Those interested in peaceful co-existence must find a way – through the media (to the degree that the media can be rescued from servility to the regimes and their political parties), through international pressure, through sympathetic nodes within the governing structure itself – to pressure those who rule (under the present circumstances, they can not be said to be governing). Until such time as civil society and a civic community can become strong enough to enter the public arena with alternative voices to those of governmental structures, the ruling regimes will be under no obligation to make the interest of the greater number its priority. This is because such a re-ordering of priorities threatens their special interests, whether these be ideological, prejudicial, ethno-racial, or economic, or the convergence of all of these into the deadly cocktail that is, in fact, the “national” potion.

Because Cyprus is such a fractured “nation” with a limited geography and an overtly determined condensed history, the agora, the voice of its public sphere, has to overflow the geographical limits of the island. Cyprus is already saturated as a public arena by highly regimented ideological formations, by historical memory, and by economic interests that play the complete register of emotions and sentiments at the heart of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and racial prejudices with exquisitely timed demagoguery. In human terms, the public sphere is hopelessly compromised, and this is most glaringly obvious in such international forums as the United Nations and the European Union, where such a little space as the island of Cyprus generates so much rancour and so much suspicion – some genuinely felt, some cynically cultivated by those who have a vested interest in people hating and fearing each other.

So, how does one get a larger public sphere as fulcrum, as Archimedean point when the point itself is already saturated? The only hope might be to reach for an international horizon, even at the risk of coinciding with the mantra of those who would prefer to have things remain just as they are presently, even if “international” might be taken to mean “European”. For those who are so inclined, this translates into an antithesis of “Asian” or “African”. In other words, to say “European” for them becomes a cloak of immunity for a certain racism against anyone they deem other than European, hence the obsession with “European solutions” and “European Union”.

Beyond this risky reflexive and expedient identification of international with “European”, international means multilateral; it means adherence to agreements, treaties, and protocols already historically sanctioned starting with the history of what was the Republic of Cyprus at its genesis as a prospective nation liberated from colonial rule. Adhering to such historically sensitive internationalism will mitigate the partisan and self-interested protocols, UN resolutions, and EU affiliations generated by the current regimes through political lobbying, economic extortion, and appeal to inherent ethnocentrism. If indeed truth be given its due in a discussion of truth and reconciliation, history obliges us to remember that the current government, despite the arguable facts of “international recognition”, is NOT the government of the Republic of Cyprus, but a “government of necessity”. It was made “necessary” because the legitimate government of the Republic of Cyprus was dismantled by one of the parties that displaced the legitimate government and that Republic. As such, the regime in southern Cyprus is only as legitimate as the regime in northern Cyprus, which also sees itself as “a government of necessity” made necessary by the actions of the southern area. Anyone seeking recognition on the basis of recognisable truth and credibility must be hard-nosed about historical accuracy, frightening though such realities should be to those who misshaped history to fit their purposes. If truth is to be the helpmate of reconciliation, truth’s historical accuracy must be paramount.

In the context of internationalism, it must be reiterated, “Europe” as noun and “European” as adjective, no matter what it modifies, in the particular context of Cyprus and as uttered by Greek Cypriot governmental operatives means “non-Asiatic”. As such, it is a racist lexicon deployed tactically when expedient to delegitimise anything non-Hellenic, to slur anything non-Christian, and to derogate anyone not of “European” racial stock, whatever that might be. Europe in general and the EU in particular might not understand this when they respond warmly every time someone in Cyprus speaks of a “European solution”, or they understand it very well indeed. And the Cypriots who use the term serve as convenient cover for those Europeans with racist predispositions.

It is also important to differentiate international from “global”. Globality’s homogenising impulses inevitably flow through the line of least resistance and greatest profitability. Global flows are neither discerning nor ethical, and certainly are not just. They follow political capital and capital interests. Capital interests are already well entrenched on the island, north and south, and both sides have been lobbying hard on a global scale to check the lobbying efforts of the other. If the goal of pursuing truth and reconciliation is to leverage fairness, justice, harmony, universal principles of ethics, these do not play on the stage of the global. They are, in fact, considered impediments and they are either harshly neutralised or patronisingly tolerated by globalists.

An international focus, or pursuit of an internationalist fulcrum for leveraging truth and reconciliation, when the appropriate time should come, does not mean reliance on hegemonic brokers, e.g. the USA, the UK, France, Germany, Russia, or China. This is because hegemonic players in Realpolitik are by definition self-interested and certainly not committed to the realities the people of Cyprus might value. Hegemons are interested not in reality, but what Machiavelli called “the reality effect”, which means the expedient and strategic “facts” that can be capitalised and leveraged to further their own agendas, not the goals of principled Cypriots in pursuit of truth and reconciliation. The regimes of control on the island are already fully cognisant of this. Their advocates and ambassadors are already covering this ground relentlessly with their lobbyists and travelling salesmen, though their credibility is by now frayed.

To go international in the pursuit of truth and reconciliation on the island, then, means to widen the public sphere through international organisations in civil society, not necessarily relying on governmental structures, though one cannot afford to rule them out either. The only effective instrument for bringing pressure on the saturated and already occupied public sphere on Cyprus is pressure from the outside – political pressure through the international media and NGOs, economic pressure through corporate foundations with philanthropic pretensions, multilateral pressure through human rights organizations. And politico-economic pressure through vital partners like Greece, Turkey, UK, and USA, whose attention is otherwise monopolised by government lobbies and official ambassadors and trade missions, but who, in their own self-interest, might also listen to more than they hear just from the governmental regimes on the island. Given their obduracy, one has no choice but to bypass the governmental structures on northern and southern Cyprus and go directly to the world, the world of official and civil-society. Meetings, symposia, workshops among those Cypriots interested in truth and reconciliation should take place off the island at highly visible and strategic places – the UN in New York, the Nobel Foundation in Stockholm, the EU ministries in Brussels and the Human Rights Court in Strasbourg, the Organisation of Islamic Countries headquarters

(there is something more than just comical to the fact that the Greek-Cypriot government tried to infiltrate one of their operatives in “the family picture” of the OIC two years ago!)

The idea of truth and reconciliation is most admirable. Dialogue among likeminded Cypriots from all the communities on the island who share this goal should be commended. But while dialogue is always good, even with the official regimes, if such efforts are to have any worldly consequence, the status quo must be moved beyond dialogue and into negotiation. And when governmental regimes and political operatives fail to engage in negotiation, those for whom peaceful co-existence is important must take upon themselves the responsibility of negotiating outside governmental agendas and at highly visible international venues. Those who consider truth and reconciliation important enough to be indispensable for arriving at peaceful co-existence must undertake the task of creating the circumstances in which the pursuit of truth and reconciliation will be appropriate. This might well mean creating a Cypriot government in exile as a model of what a truly national and all-inclusive government for the whole island, without quotation marks, could be. Being from a small space – an Island, – the Cypriots have perfected the gestures of conversation and the politesse of dialogue and handshakes. But what has been deftly and diligently avoided, and what is needed most, is negotiation, which means dealing with what is at stake and with actual realities on the table, not just as hypotheses and as topics of hypothetical conversation preparatory for possible future negotiations. The conversation must be moved to a point of, how much – where – when – whose – in what proportion – until when – how soon – with what guarantees? Then, the pleasant conversation can resume again, but it will have resumed after having done the necessary job. To get to that point, a point when truth and reconciliation will become possible and possibly meaningful, those truly committed to peaceful co-existence must vault over the current regimes that live in dread of actual negotiation.

The people genuinely interested in peaceful co-existence on the island of Cyprus must vault over Green Lines and Walls, whether derelict or demolished, actual or symbolic, and begin, at highly visible international sites, the negotiation process outside the governmentally framed channels and beyond the pre-packaged facts and truths the current regimes have manufactured and continue to manage. The next generation must be rescued from the neuroses and phobias of the current governing cohort, lest the poison of ethno-nationalist xenophobia and division perpetuates itself indefinitely.