

Μια Εποχή της Βίας: Το Σκοτεινό 1958

[A PERIOD OF VIOLENCE: THE DARK 1958]

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Despite its small size, Cyprus has a rich history, but many aspects of that past have yet to be researched. A study by Niyazi Kızılyürek, entitled *Μια Εποχή της Βίας: Το Σκοτεινό 1958* (in Turkish, *Şiddetin Mevsiminin Saklı Tarihi*), adeptly fills in an important bibliographical gap in the history of the island.

As mentioned by the author (p. 11), the study is part of a larger project concerning the history of ethnic and political violence on Cyprus. In an eloquent and masterful manner, Kızılyürek provides a rare account of the violent events of 1958 that took place on the island. Although those events had a major impact on bicomunal relations as well as on the recent history of the Turkish Cypriot community, an analysis of that history has been lacking. Considering that the tragic events of June 1958 resulted in the deaths of many people, events which led to a much bloodier period, this lack of research is even more notable if we take into account the fact that other periods (1964-1967 and 1974), during which time the Greek Cypriots committed numerous acts of violence against the Turkish Cypriots, have been researched to a much greater extent.

The present study is a rare work¹ that exclusively deals with those influential events through which the political elites of both communities framed the collective memory of the people. Furthermore, with great dexterity the study sheds new light on obscure periods in that history, assessing the violent events that erupted between the two communities. Kızılyürek manages to bring ‘forgotten’ or ‘neglected’ memories back to the forefront in a way that I would say make it possible for the Turkish Cypriot community to face past events by debunking myths, deconstructing narratives, and disassembling the dominant Turkish Cypriot ‘grand narrative of victimization’.

The book consists of six chapters which in a masterful way take the reader through a ‘day-to-day’ account of those violent events, while at the same time providing hard facts about the role of the ‘TMT’ (Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı), whose goal was to promote

1 A much shorter account of the events of June in Turkish is presented in Ahmet An, *Kıbrıs'ta Fırtınalı Yıllar (1942-1962)*, Galeri Kültür Yayınları, Lefkoşa, 2005 [1996], pp. 100-126.

Turkish nationalism and thus partition (taksim), and the 'TMT knot' is revealed in a way that discloses its actual agenda.

The narrative starts with the first Turkish Cypriot clashes with the colonial administration on the 27 and 28 January 1958 and the setting of the blood feuds that would develop in the following months. The events that occurred in January, similar to the anti-Greek riots that happened in September 1955 in Istanbul, were set in motion through the publication of fabricated news, this time suggesting that 'the British had accepted Partition' (p. 21). The author brings to light the various discourses which sought to legitimize the violent uprising of the period, including those of both right-wing supporters and leftists alike, as with the case of Hikmet Madid Mapola, a prominent author of the time who saw the events as an act of 'anti-imperialism' (p. 23). In a sophisticated manner, Kızılyürek debunks the Turkish account of 'freedom fighters' by demonstrating its manipulative and well-planned strategies, as well as the instrumental role played by the TMT in undermining any attempts to find a solution. The author also brings Great Britain into the narrative, as in the end it was Britain which accepted the partition of the island and hence sparked enthusiasm among the Turkish Cypriots in an attempt to undermine the negotiations regarding the Foot Plan. However, the author's account brings yet another perspective to the Turkish/Turkish Cypriot story: the British were actually not in favour of the partition of Cyprus as that would have a negative impact on its own interests. Such a stance initially led the British to distance themselves from discussions regarding the partition of the island even though they were quite firm in that regard, which led to shaky relations with Turkey. The British response even caused Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes to openly threaten Selwyn Lloyd, the British Foreign Secretary, by saying that in the case of a Turkish Cypriot insurrection, the Turkish Armed Forces would 'not be far' (p. 25), implying that the Turkish armed forces were prepared to intervene. Furthermore, it was made clear that if the plan were implemented, the Turkish Cypriots would not assist the British (p. 30). The discourses employed by the Turkish Cypriot elite, notably Rauf Denktaş, presented British policy as a vindictive response brought about by the British defeat at Gallipoli in 1915 (pp. 31-33) and stirred anti-British sentiment among the people, a discourse reminiscent of the discourse used by Menderes prior to the events of 6-7 September.

The second chapter of the book takes up the TMT's persecution of Turkish Cypriot leftists, which it seemed were competing with EOKA regarding which of the two was the most anti-communist. But due to the fact that there was not a strong and independent Turkish Cypriot leftist movement, the TMT turned against Turkish Cypriots workers, who, due to a lack of an alternative way to organize, found refuge with Greek Cypriot syndicates and trade unions. Although enosis for Turkish Cypriot leftists was also out of the question, that did not prevent the TMT from taking violent action against them. For a non-Turkish audience, the author's short but extremely useful account of the Turkish Cypriot leftist movement, which is a little known issue, adds much to the study. The discussions between Turkish and Greek Cypriots, especially those related to the KΤİBK (Organization of Turkish

Cypriot Workers' Union) and PEO (Workers' Federation of Cyprus), the relations between Turkish and Greek Cypriot leftists, and the political differences among them (p. 42-43) are presented by the author in a way that also provides background information about those topics and exemplifies, at least in part, why they were targeted by the TMT. Following 1 May 1958, the TMT announced that all Turkish Cypriot members of the PEO who took part in celebrations with the Greek Cypriots should abandon the trade union, as the TMT was painstakingly trying to prove that it was impossible for the 'two communities to live together' (p. 44). Notably, armed attacks against Turkish Cypriot leftists took place right after Dr. Fazıl Küçük and Rauf Denктаş travelled to Ankara on 22 May 1958. Kızılyürek extensively explores the Turkish Cypriot press and news about the killings of leftists, including armed attacks that were carried out as a means of thwarting perceived threats to Turkish plans for partition. Dr. Fazıl Küçük, realizing that all the blame would fall on the TMT, stated that the TMT was not a 'cadre of murderers' but an 'organization that protects the human rights and freedoms [of the Turkish Cypriots and Turks]' (p. 50). Other leading figures, such as Denктаş and Tremeşeli, prepared similar statements in an attempt to escape the spotlight, and they also blamed Greek Cypriots. However, Kızılyürek's account once again employs strong evidence to convincingly prove that that was not the case, revealing that the TMT was behind those killings and attacks. The state of terror created by the TMT drove some Turkish Cypriots to make signed declarations stating that they were not communists (p. 56-60) and that they were leaving the trade unions to 'align with the Turkish Cypriot leadership' (p. 55).²

The next chapter focuses on June, the month in which political and ethnic violence reached its peak. If we consider the fact that during this period Britain was preparing a new plan for Cyprus, the violent incidents that occurred cannot be seen as mere coincidence but rather as carefully planned action on behalf of the Turkish Cypriot elite supported by Turkey, action which sought to prove that the only viable solution, and the only way of 'safeguarding' the lives of the Turkish Cypriots, as claimed by the Turkish Cypriot leadership, was 'partition and only partition'. Rauf Denктаş and Dr. Fazıl Küçük had already made a joint statement the previous month expressing those views. Insisting on the impossibility of the co-existence of the two communities, whose lives were becoming more troubled since the British were unable to impose their decisions and administer the island, the Turkish Cypriot elite transformed the issue into something 'exclusively Turkish' by stating that Cyprus 'does not constitute a colonial issue anymore' (p. 71). The policy of partition was expected to lead to a more 'offensive' stance, as on numerous parts of the island people were gathering and the aim was to encourage demonstrations in favour of the partition of the island. At the same time, the British colonial administration was starting to find out about the demonstrations. Governor Foot correctly surmised that if Dr. Fazıl Küçük, who was in Ankara at the time and planned to return to Cyprus that same day, did not return, it was

2 A list of declarations can be found at: www.ahdr.com.

likely that demonstrations would take place. Dr. Fazıl Küçük postponed his return to the island and the demonstrations indeed took place.

On the night of 7 June 1958, there was an explosion at the Turkish Information Office in Nicosia. From that day onwards, violence escalated and became a daily fact. While Denkaş and the newspaper *Bozkurt* ('Grey Wolf') held EOKA responsible for the bombings, Kızılyürek shows through a close and objective analysis, as well as confessions from Turkish Cypriots (pp. 95-103), that the bombings were a provocative action instigated by the TMT with the support of Turkey, all with the aim of stirring up people's emotions and encouraging them to support partition. Yet again the bombings resembled, in both planning and rationale, the events of 6-7 September in Istanbul.

Following the attack, Turkish Cypriots responded almost immediately by turning against their counterparts on the island and attacking their homes and places of work. A few days later, the first mass killing took place on the island, which is the focus of chapter 4. The event was set into motion when 35 Greek Cypriots from the village of Kontemenos (Kılıçaslan) in the region of Kyrenia (Girne) were informed that there were plans for an attack against Greek Cypriots in the nearby village of Skylloura (Yılmazköy). The Greek Cypriots got in two trucks and travelled to Skylloura to help their compatriots. The British, however, stopped them and took them to another village, Gerolakkos (Alayköy), and then to Nicosia. In the meantime, the British authorities decided to punish the 'troublemaking' Greek Cypriots by using the technique of 'bussing', a type of mass punishment first employed by the British in Palestine during the 1940s. The 'troublemakers' were transferred by bus or truck to places far from where the incidents were taking place and then forced to walk home on foot (p. 112), leaving them exposed to attacks, as happened in the June events.

Kızılyürek's well-balanced and documented account of these events sheds valuable light on both the victims' and perpetrators' roles in the events. By gathering testimonies from both Greek and Turkish Cypriots (pp. 114-135), the author clarifies much about what transpired in this much debated story; firstly, the failure of the British to foresee what could happen to the 35 Greek Cypriots, and secondly, the nationalist fervour and fanaticism of the Turkish Cypriots, stirred up by the bombing that had occurred a few days earlier which led to the murder of eight and the injury of another five Greek Cypriots. Also notable is the report prepared by the British colonial administration which states among other things that 'the 35 unarmed Greek Cypriots were ambushed by the Turkish Cypriots, which were hiding and attacked when [the mysterious] motorcyclists appeared', while it also concluded that it was 'a premeditated action' (p. 146).

After these bouts of extreme violence, the Turkish and Turkish Cypriot side proceeded with the de facto institutional separation of the municipalities with the aim of moving forward with the implementation of the partition plan. In chapter 5, the author provides a comprehensive account of the developments that led up to and followed the separation of the municipalities, as well as the instrumental role of violence in the events that transpired.

In particular, the author shows how violence was critical in the unfolding of events,

as revealed through an extended interview with Salih Mahmut Kayasal, one of the first counsellors of the municipality of Limassol in 1990 (pp. 182-184). As Kızılyürek rightly argues, the de facto separation of the municipalities helped bring into being the Turkish/Turkish Cypriot plan, while in light of the proposal of a new plan and in need of their support, the British turned a blind eye to this illegal action (p. 184).

The final chapter of the study turns its focus to the counter measures used by EOKA and provides background information about the deaths resulting from the actions of EOKA and TMT. With close calculations, the author concludes that between 1 April 1955 and 17 August 1956, the EOKA refrained from targeting Turkish Cypriot civilians and only after mid-1957 did Georgios Grivas order attacks on Turkish Cypriots who were in the militia. Kızılyürek stresses the fact that although EOKA had been ordered to attack Turkish Cypriot militia members, attacks against civilians were not encouraged, and, furthermore, the Greek Cypriot community was told to refrain from making counter attacks (p. 191). Grivas wrongly surmised that there was a Turkish-British plot against EOKA, and therefore concluded that a counter-attack would expose the organization and could prove fatal (pp. 192-193). This state of affairs was about to change, however, in July of the same year, when Grivas dropped all restrictions in regard to attacks against Turkish Cypriots and soon a bloody attack was carried out on a bus filled with Turkish Cypriots. As the saying goes, violence breeds more violence. By August of the same year, Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots had become entrenched in a vicious cycle of killing, leaving many people dead and injured. Although, as this study makes clear, we do not know exactly how many people were killed, the newspaper *Eleftheria* states that 59 people were killed on each side (p. 204), while the colonial administration (p. 205) provides a slightly different number. If we take into account the four phases of violent incidents that took place, the number of dead and injured is quite high and this demonstrates the extent of violence and the complete domination of blind aggressive nationalism that existed on the island. This state of violence on Cyprus ceased only at the end of 1959 when discussions about independence began, but again this was only temporary.

There are just a few rather minor issues in the book, such as some missing footnotes regarding the interviews on pages 119 and 160, and in other parts, the reader might have trouble locating the references the text refers to; some footnotes are lacking, as on page 21 where the footnote for the newspaper *Bozkurt* is missing. These small oversights do not detract from the core arguments, however, and the study adds to the body of work on the Cyprus issue. For scholars who study nationalism and ethnic and political violence, this work demonstrates that Cyprus provides more history than it can consume.

This is a well-documented, balanced study that is marked by in-depth analysis which sheds additional light on one of the darkest and most violent periods of the history of Cyprus, and it also notably debunks numerous myths and false impressions about the troubled past of the island, making it a book that I highly recommend.

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