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## *Memories of a 64th Generation Cypriot*

RÜSTEM KÖKEN

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For the most part, *Memories of a 64th Generation Cypriot* is a book focusing on one of the most important, critical and fascinating historical periods in the history of Cyprus. It recounts the life, personal memories and experiences of its author, Rüstem Köken. Köken, the seventh child of a farming family, was born in a Turkish Cypriot village. He finished school in Pergama (Pergamos/Beyarmudu) in Larnaca before moving to Famagusta to attend Namık Kemal Lycée [Secondary School]. Following his graduation he moved to Istanbul in 1961 to attend Istanbul Technical University where he studied electrical engineering. But in December 1963 the crisis which flared up in Cyprus between Greek and Turkish Cypriots led Köken and other Turkish Cypriots to abandon their studies and move back covertly to the island in order to participate in the clashes. After spending two years fighting in the area of Erenköy [Kokkina] he returned to Istanbul where he faced many difficulties due to the agonising effects of the war. Moreover, although brief as it may be, the author does refer to, and provide, an interesting account of the tense political situation in Istanbul and the radicalisation of the student movement and politics during the closing years of the 1960s. The author later describes how he met his wife and goes on to chronicle the conditions which he and his wife withstood when their children were born. He recounts how they raised them and details the professional decisions he had to take in order to work and provide the necessary means to support his family, such as moving to Libya on two occasions owing to the difficult economic situations he was facing in both Turkey and Cyprus.

Yet, the most significant and interesting section in the book is the Erenköy warfare, which later lent its name to a whole generation of people. Following the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960, constitutional guarantees and rights were provided to both Greek and Turkish Cypriots but it was not long afterwards that the newly established state was to be tested. Through the thirteen points set forth by President Makarios, the Greek Cypriots proposed an amendment to the constitution 'to resolve constitutional deadlocks', which would relegate the Turkish Cypriot community to minority status as a prelude to bringing about *enosis*. After failing to convince the Turkish Cypriots to accept changes to the bicomunal constitutional order, heavy clashes and killings broke out between the two communities of the island. The part of the title *64th Generation Cypriot* denotes those Turkish Cypriot scholars who were studying in Turkey

in 1964, and took the decision to abandon their studies in order to go back to Cyprus and fight in Erenköy.

This most thought-provoking part of the book reveals the mentality of the Turkish Cypriot generation that participated in the violent clashes between the two communities, along with the ideas and perceptions of these people toward the Greek Cypriots as well as the political environment of that time. Nonetheless, the author could have devoted a few more pages to elaborate on this aspect in greater detail. We read that the 'Dreams of the Greeks about [the] annexation of Cyprus to Greece were obvious, but we didn't think that they would repeat the massacres they [had] previously enacted in Morea, Crete and the Balkans, in Cyprus in this century' (p. 72). It is worthy of note that when Köken refers to 'we' in the above passage, he equates Turkish Cypriots with Turks, considering them to be one and the same. In doing so he neglects or demotes the Turkish Cypriot identity, or even a Cypriot identity. He does not contemplate that Turkish Cypriots can have an identity of their own. On another point he mentions that 'As we Turks are so tolerant and so peaceful, the Greek Cypriots hated us, and they indoctrinated their children with hatred and hostility for Turks' (p. 77).

Rüstem Köken presents an account of the history of Cyprus that does not allow any space for reconciliation and collaboration between the two communities. He depicts the people of Cyprus as two entirely different communities that did not have, and still do not have, anything in common. In this respect his personal memories of being scared as a child until he departed the Greek village because Greek Cypriot children threw rocks at him, is quite revealing. What is more, he presents a scenario of the dominant Greek Cypriot community being one that holds the role of the victimiser, whereas the subordinate Turkish Cypriot community is depicted as being the victim. Although nobody can deny that the situation described was entirely wrong, it gives the reader the impression that the Turkish Cypriots were devoid of responsibility. The island of Cyprus is a place of two conflicting nationalisms that feed upon each other.

Furthermore, Köken seems to be trying to establish and perhaps promote a link to the 'motherland' of Turkey, in that he was a staunch admirer of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The Turkish Cypriots followed the radical reforms of Atatürk, and were therefore saved from the fundamentalist fanaticism of religion (p. 69). The author's Kemalism is apparent throughout the text, especially when he discusses Islam and the backward way of life, full of superstitions – a 'Bedouin culture', as he calls it (p. 206).

The author provides a vivid depiction of a bygone Cyprus full of picturesque scenery which brings back many memories to the people of Cyprus who actually lived through the period, and which also acquaints the younger generations with the past. Although the book is very strong in this respect, it lacks historical objectivity on more than one occasion. Whilst it reproduces the official historical narrative of the island and the conflict, it offers a rather confusing description at times. For example, Rüstem Köken

speaks of the lack of weaponry on the part of the Turkish Cypriots during the war. In contrast with the weaponry of the Greek Cypriots the Turkish Cypriots had only old, slow and untrustworthy rifles (p. 98). However, a few pages later there is a picture of him with a friend during an MP watch, holding Bren Guns (p. 115) that were light machine guns and totally different from the antiquated rifles he mentions earlier. On another occasion, he alludes to the death of the wife and children of a Turkish military doctor to evidence Greek Cypriot hostility. After the killings the dead were placed in a bathtub in the house. The author obviously refers to an incident which inspired an exhibit in the Museum of Barbarism – located in the Turkish part of Nicosia where the house of the doctor used to be. It should be noted that there are also Greek Cypriot versions of the killings that took place at that time, some of them perhaps absurd such as one that recalls the doctor killing his family and then he or the Turks/Turkish Cypriots placing them in the bathtub. Another account specifies that the individuals involved were indeed killed by Greek Cypriot grenades but they were then placed in the bathtub by Turkish Cypriots in order to stir the public's reaction. From the above, it is safe to argue that the evidence is inconclusive.

As a final point, the editing of this work is abysmal. There are extensive misspellings and proof-reading errors (*intersted* for interested, *mension* for mention). To illustrate this, the English letter *i* is substituted with the Turkish letter *ı* for some reason but it is written correctly at other times (studying for studying, İstanbul for Istanbul). Reading these memoirs and becoming familiarised with the author's viewpoint, one should not be surprised at the emergence of the Cyprus issue and why it still remains impossible to solve. Needless to say there are countless similar voices in the Greek part of the island which ally with Köken's standpoint but in reverse, promoting Greek/Greek Cypriot nationalism.

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