

Rethinking National Liberation and Socialism in the 20th and 21st Century: Can the Cypriot Left Write its Own History?

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Abstract

This is an article on the history and historiography of Cypriot communism. It is inspired by two recent volumes on Cypriot communism: the first is about the 1931 October uprising, the Communist Party of Cyprus and the Third International based on the official documents of the Communist International (by Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos), and the second by a volume that deals with the history of Cypriot communism until the formal disbanding of the Communist party in 1944 (by Alecou and Sakellaropoulos). The paper aims to contextualise and discuss how Cypriot communists themselves engage with their own history: Cypriot Communists saw their mission as historical, i.e., the resolution of the national question was seen as integral to their strategy of achieving a socialist transformation of the world. It critically examines the difficulties of the Cypriot Left to write and appraise its own early history of Cypriot Communism, despite repeated attempts and having commissioned historians to write an official history. Communism in Cyprus emerged in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution during the late period of British colonial rule in Cyprus and was active in the 1931 uprising. The hegemonic nationalist historiography has vilified the Left and its role in the national liberation struggle, because the Communists in the 1920s and 1930s opposed union with Greece (Enosis): they saw this as a reactionary slogan that diverted attention from the urgent resolution of the class/social question and would play in the hands of colonisers dividing the toilers along ethnic/national lines in their 'divide-and-rule' games. This paper critically reviews historical debates over anticolonialism and liberation struggles in Cyprus. In nationalist historiography, the 'social question' is subordinated to the 'national question', if not totally obscured. The Left in the 1920s and 1930s however, perceived the 'national question' as an aspect of the social-political question in the struggle for socialism: the principle of self-determination of Cypriots was to be realised as part of regional struggle with the goal of a Balkan Socialist Federation. By the 1940s, the Cypriot Communist line changed: as the prospects of revolution receded, the anticoloni-

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al struggle would resolve the national question by uniting with Greece. What followed is well-known: Cyprus and its people are de facto divided. Whilst there is fascinating scholarship demonstrating the processes of the different versions of a highly contested ideological struggle about the goals, strategy, tactics and means in national liberation, the nationalist historiography has imposed a straitjacket that prevents such insights from properly making inroads in public history, school textbooks, and official historiography. This has generated a national(ist) ideological frame that has made historical debates which question the dominant narrative almost impossible within public history. Nonetheless, the terrain has now opened widely, as younger scholars in academia and in social media are questioning such assumptions and reifications pertaining to anti-colonial struggles for liberation. The current dissensus and polarisation has generated new spaces and has endowed new vigour in debates on the history of the Left in the country. Such debates however are not necessarily about the past; they are primarily about the present reading the past to illuminate the future.

Keywords: Cypriot communism, anticolonial struggle, nationalism, historiography, Co-intern, national liberation.

Introduction: Moscow's Archives, Contested History, and the Presence of the Past

It has been a century since the first Communists emerged, in the late period of British colonial rule in Cyprus, and there is a new interest in the history and legacy of Communism on the island. Since the 1960s, AKEL, the continuation of the Communist Party of Cyprus (CPC), has on three occasions declared its intention to publish text containing its own, *official history*. On two occasions texts were finalised and approved by the leadership. These texts were circulated within and around the party informally, but they were never published. The question of history of the Left has returned with a vigour, never as strong as it is today.

As this paper was being finalised, the leader of AKEL, Stefanos Stefanou, spoke at an event organised by AKEL honouring Adam Adamantos, mayor of Famagusta in the 1940s. Adamantos was one of the most charismatic leading figures of AKEL, who was expelled from the party some 71 years ago. During the event,² the AKEL

² Speech by AKEL Central Committee Secretary General Stefanos Stefanou at the event in honour of Adam Adamantos, 15 September 2023, Cultural Centre of Deryneia, available at <https://akel.org.cy/ek-dilosi-pros-timi-adam-adamantos/?fbclid=IwAR1ReQwtZnwGxvd8j8gvcKvx2N0sbgr8KD7BRBxQ5e-Buc17HSs7BjGS8QOo>

leader spoke respectfully of Adamantos and attempted to open new channels of communication and dialogue on history, with the aim of making knowledge of mistakes, injustices and shortcomings a compass for the future. He noted that the party must collectively evaluate the Party's policies at that time, assessing things in their historical context, within the conditions of the time. Without becoming introverted, the party must 'draw useful conclusions for our politics today.' He emphasised: 'The challenges of today go beyond the traumas of the past. That is also the mission of history. To function like a car mirror from which you look backwards to drive safely forwards. [Also we must] be fair and objective with the people who played a leading role in various events, such as Adam Adamantos, Ploutis Servas, etc.' In 1952, Adamantos, who disagreed with the new party line which supported immediate *Enosis* (union with Greece) considering that the line was foolish and dangerous, emphatically stated: 'I am not prepared to sacrifice anything, even my smallest finger, for *Enosis*.'³ He has not been fully rehabilitated by the party; however, many consider that he has been vindicated and AKEL now acknowledges this.

Today, more than 70 years later, history is a lively issue. Yet, the debate over the history of the Cypriot Left is not new. A decade ago, during a conference, the Dean of the Faculty of History and Archaeology of the University of Cyprus⁴ spoke about the notable gap in the study of the history of Cypriot Communism. He argued that the Left (i.e., AKEL) is incapable *by itself* to write *its* [own] history.⁵ At the conference, eyebrows were raised, but there was no direct or immediate response by the participants. Nonetheless, the late President Demetris Christofias, the second longest serving leader of the party,⁶ went on to admit that there is a major gap, as the study

³ Loukas Kakoullis, *Αδάμ Αδάμαντος, ο Κορυφαίος της Αριστεράς και της Κύπρου*, (Adam Admantos, The Leading Figure of the Left and Cyprus), *Χρονικό - Πολίτης*, 10 April 2010, available at <http://www.polignosi.com/pictures/20210927/1632725599-09591.pdf>

⁴ Associate Professor George Kazamias.

⁵ *Συνέδριο για την Κυπριακή Αριστερά στην Πρώτη Περίοδο της Βρετανικής Αποικιοκρατίας* (Conference on The Cypriot Left in the First Period of British Colonialism), co-organised by the Prometheus Research Institute and the Department of History and Archaeology of the University of Cyprus, April 2012. This led to the book, by Giorgos Georgis and Yiannos Katsourides, *Η Κυπριακή Αριστερά στην Πρώτη Περίοδο της Βρετανικής Αποικιοκρατίας: Γένεση, Συγκρότηση, Εξέλιξη*, (*The Cypriot Left in the First Period of British Colonialism: Emergence, Constitution, Evolution*, edited by Taxideftis, Athens 2013).

⁶ Demetris Christofias (29 August 1946 – 21 June 2019) served as the sixth President of Cyprus from 2008 to 2013. He was the fourth General Secretary of the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) from 1988 to 2009 and the ninth President of the House of Representatives from 2001 to 2008. The longest serving leader was Ezekias Papaioannou (October 8, 1908 – April 10, 1988) who, as third General Secretary of AKEL, held the position for 39 years until his death (1949-1988).

of issues concerning the Cypriot Left has not been given the attention it deserves. He emphasised that the Cypriot Left, since its emergence in the early 1920s, has played a leading role in Cypriot political events, in the anticolonial struggles for freedom, democracy and political rights, in the struggles of workers for social justice, in the struggles for progress, prosperity and cultural advancement of the people. The party has not managed to write its own history ‘perhaps due to various political expediencies, or even ideological rigidities that stood in the way of historical scientific research’.⁷ The problem however may be more complex, as will be discussed.

The professor’s challenge to AKEL was an ironic reversal of Eric Hobsbawm’s key thesis that it is *impossible* for *nationalists* to write the history of nations *scientifically*. Hobsbawm cited Ernest Renan, who had noted, a century earlier, that the development of historical studies threatens the whole project of nation-building, as getting your history wrong was part of being a nation.⁸ Here, a Greek historian, by insisting on the impossibility of the Cypriot Left to write its history, touched upon a sensitive nerve of the Cypriot Left: History is the central terrain in the struggle of ideas, an integral part of an ideological contestation about *who makes history*. On his part, Demetris Christofias, the only leader of AKEL to be elected President of the Republic, something that had been unimaginable before,⁹ admitted that there is indeed a gap and took upon himself -at least in part- the responsibility by stating: ‘I say this self-critically because I was leading the party’s Central Committee for 20 years.’¹⁰

The party under Christofias had hardly been indifferent about its history. On the contrary, soon after he assumed the leadership in 1988, the party embarked on self-criticism and renounced the party’s support for *Enosis* during the period 1964-1967, in December 1990, condemning this turn as ‘a mistake and a violation of the Party Programme and the decision of the 10th Congress, which spoke of the comple-

⁷ ‘Χριστόφιας: Συνεχής και Πολύπλευρη η Παρουσία της Αριστεράς’, *Kathimerini*, 24 April 2012, available at <https://www.kathimerini.com.cy/gr/politiki/86978/?ctype=ar>

⁸ Ernest Renan, *What is a Nation?* (*Qu’est-ce qu’une Nation?*), published in 1882, available at http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf

⁹ The young Andreas Mavroyiannis, at the time a sociology scholar embarking on his PhD dissertation in 1984, saw no possibility of AKEL ever assuming power. This is the same Mavroyiannis, the diplomat who with the support of AKEL would be runner up in the presidential election of 2023. See Andreas Mavroyiannis, A. (1984) *The Cypriot Communist Party (A.K.E.L.), Study of Comparative Sociology [Le Parti Communiste Chypriote (A.K.E.L.), Etude de Sociologie Comparative]*, doctoral thesis in sociology (political sociology), Université Paris X-Nanterre, U.E.R. des sciences sociales.

¹⁰ ‘President Calls for Scientific Study on the History of the Left in Cyprus’, 25 April 2012, *Famagusta News*, available at https://famagusta.news/news/blog-post_1893-2/

tion of independence'.¹¹ Secondly, during the 1990s, which was difficult times for the Left internationally, including AKEL, the party entrusted the writing of the official history of the party to the historian Rolandos Katsiaounis. The untimely death of Katsiaounis prevented him from completing the work and this was perceived as a great loss for the Left. Nevertheless, the works that Katsiaounis left behind remain to date the most serious effort at an *autonomous scientific* history,¹² as Hobsbawm conceived it, beyond and outside of the hegemonic ideology of nationalism.¹³ It took many years, but since then, new generations of historians, political and social scientists, have come forward to discuss the history of the Cypriot Left anew. This process has begun to bear fruit and is not limited to those working under the official tutelage of the party. It expands further and has produced scholarship generating a valuable *critical history* of the Left in Cyprus, as discussed further down.

Volume I: Cypriot Communism, the Uprising of 1931 and the Comintern

The 201-page volume by Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos is a welcome contribution and has been the subject of public debates in the press and social media.¹⁴ The volume consists of a 77-page introduction by Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos and a 110-page selection of Soviet archival documents, translated from Russian to Greek for the first time.¹⁵ The volume contains excerpts, published for the first time, from the original depositions in the Communist International (Comintern), also known as the Third International, of the Communist leaders Charalambos Vatiliotis, known as 'Vatis', and Kostas Skeleas (Christodoulides), as well as official documents commenting on the party's position during the uprising. The author of one of the Comintern

¹¹ AKEL, '88 Years KKK-AKEL' ('88 Χρόνια ΚΚΚ-ΑΚΕΛ'), 1 February 2014, available at <https://akel.org.cy/88-%CF%87%CF%81%CF%8C%CE%BD%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CE%BA%CE%BA%CE%BA-%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%B5%CE%BB/>

¹² Beyond his published works, Katsiaounis gave many lectures on the history of the Left in Cyprus and had drafted numerous internal lectures and speeches on the subject.

¹³ See Andrekos Varnava, 'An Appraisal of the Works of Rolandos Katsiaounis: Society, Labour and Anti-Colonialism in Cyprus, 1850s-1950s', in Thekla Kyritsi and Nikos Christofis (eds), *Cypriot Nationalisms in Context: History, Identity, and Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 243-57.

¹⁴ See newspaper *Phileleftheros*, 28/11/2021. Also see Nicos Trimikliniotis, Spyros Sakellaropoulos - Manolis Choumerianos - *The 1931 Uprising, the Attitude of the Communist Party of Cyprus and the Third International. through the Official Documents of the Communist International*, (Η Εξέγερση του 1931, η Στάση του Κομμουνιστικού Κόμματος Κύπρου και η Γ' Διεθνής. μέσα από τα Επίσημα Έγγραφα της Κομμουνιστικής Διεθνούς) Topos, Athens 2021 (Book Review), *Θέσεις*, vol. 159, May/June 2022.

¹⁵ For other works on Cypriot communism by Spyros Sakellaropoulos, see <http://www.spyrossakellaropoulos.com/booksDetails.php?bid=54>

documents, harshly critical of the then CPC leadership, is Ploutis Servas (Plutarchos Savvidis), under the pseudonym ‘Georgios Nisiotis’ (which means ‘Islander’), later leader of the KKK and AKEL.¹⁶ Another text is signed by ‘Panov’, Stylian Triantafylov (Stylianios Triantafyllou). Panov, a PonticGreek who, as Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos assert, was an important official of the Comintern, would later perish in the Stalinist purges.¹⁷ Between Servas and Panov, Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos believe that there was an ‘osmosis’. This is an understatement of an apparent coordination in preparing common positions, if not conspiring, in what was undoubtedly a rigged ‘trial’ against both Vatis and Skeleas. By reading their depositions in the ‘procedure’, one can immediately sense that they were something between the Kafkaesque ‘Trial’ and a ‘chronicle of a (political) death foretold’, after Gabriel García Márquez’s novella. The two Communist protagonists would never again lay foot on Cyprus, with their political and physical demise predetermined.

The volume begins with a long introduction that comments on the documents unveiled. It expands on an earlier English version about the deposition of Vatis,¹⁸ and builds on the interpretation of the 830-page volume, a kind of a *longue durée history* of ‘the Cypriot social formation’ by Sakellaropoulos.¹⁹ Chapter 1 (pp. 11-18) is an introduction to the documents, the main sources for the volume, as well as the previously available reports and testimonies. Chapter 2 (pp. 19-26) provides a brief biography of the four protagonists in the ‘trial’ of Vatis and Skeleas by Comintern in 1932, when in Moscow. Chapter 3 (pp. 27-88) provides a particularly interesting, in-depth, and wide-ranging analysis of the documents in the light of the various other available sources. There is also a critical review (p. 88), which locates the Vatis and Skeleas texts.

¹⁶ Leader of the KKK and AKEL (1935-1945). Expelled from the party in 1952. See. Spyros Sakellaropoulos and Alexis Alecou, ‘The Paradoxical Coexistence of Two Communist Parties in One: The Case of the KKK and AKEL (1941-1944)’, *Θέσεις*, vol. 147, April-June 2019.

¹⁷ Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos, based on Papadatos, Panov appears to have had such influence in Comintern that he had played a role in the selection of Zachariadis as General Secretary of the KKE. However, he disappeared afterwards in the Stalinist purges, N. Papadatos, *Άκρωξ Αλόρητο, Οι Σχέσεις ΕΣΣΔ-ΚΚΕ, 1944-1952, (Top Secret, The USSR-KKE Relations, 1944-1952)*, ΚΨΜ, Athens 2019.

¹⁸ Manolis Choumerianos, Spyros Sakellaropoulos, ‘The Communist Party of Cyprus, the Comintern and the Uprising of 1931: Thoughts on the “Apologia” of Charalambos Vatiliotis (Vatis)’, *Twentieth Century Communism*, Volume 2019 Number 16, ISSN 1758-6437.

¹⁹ See S. Sakellaropoulos (2017) *Ο Κυπριακός Κοινωνικός Σχηματισμός [1911-2004] από τη Συγκρότηση στη Διχοτόμηση*, (The Cypriot Social Formation [1911-2004] from Constitution to Partition), Topos, 2017, pp. 151-217.

In their introduction, Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos use the word ‘apologia’ (the English text uses the word ‘apologia’)²⁰ which exudes an a priori sense of having to account, to provide an ‘apology’ for their action on the part of a political procedure that renders them ‘defendants’. Yet Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos themselves fall short of linking their depositions to the texts of similar show trials. In fact, they argue that the big show trials started much later, in 1936. This contextualisation is necessary in setting the climate in Cyprus under British colonial administration, as well as the debates on Communism of that time. This work contributes to knowledge drawing on evidence that Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos have gathered and interpreted, which I will comment upon.

Chapter 4 contains a fascinating section, ‘The Documents’ (pp. 89-198). This is the core of archival material documenting Cypriot Communism in the 1920s and 1930s, and their treatment by the Comintern (until 1932). The reader will encounter the authentic revolutionary zeal by the Cypriot Communist pioneers, as well as their well-argued class analysis in interpreting political, ideological and economic events. One cannot but admire the sophistication of the class-based political analysis and the richness of their thinking in attempting to make the necessary connections as a tool and compass to understand concrete situations in context. This debunks the myths cultivated by later leaders, who alleged that the pioneers of the Cypriot Communist movement were ‘wrong’ on the national question due to the supposed ‘low ideological or political education’ of cadres at the time. Of course, there are some problematic approaches, tactical and theoretical errors, but this has nothing to do with their allegedly ‘low’ educational or ideological level, a charge levied at them by later leaderships. On the contrary, their level of argumentation regarding their ideological and political training would make later leaders envious.²¹

²⁰ In an earlier English version, the authors refer to this as ‘apologia’, Manolis Choumerianos, Spyros Sakellaropoulos, ‘The Communist Party of Cyprus, the Comintern and the Uprising of 1931: Thoughts on the “Apologia” of Charalambos Vatiliotis (Vatis)’, *Twentieth Century Communism*, Volume 2019 Number 16, ISSN 1758-6437.

²¹ Some theoretical blind spots and weaknesses in the way class analysis is used in politics and ideology applied in the specific context of colonial Cyprus can be located, in what we have later called ‘reductionism’ and elements of ‘economism’. However, this is not relevant to the debates we discuss in this article. What is crucial here is the admirable way Vatis and Skeleas, and to a lesser extent Servas, interpret the 1931 uprising by reading politics utilising class analysis as a key tool for interpreting history. In the current climate where ‘anti-reductionism’, ‘anti-economistic’ and ‘deconstructive’ readings of the ideology of the Left remain in vogue, the theoretical and empirical reconnection of class, social and economic factors would be a welcome development in analyses, but that is the theme of another essay.

As for the protagonists (Vatis, Skeleas, Servas), we get a flavour of the brutal mercilessness of the Stalinist context. This explains, at least in part, the unfair accusations hurled at each other in their depositions: it is a typical ‘prisoner’s dilemma’ predicament. Also apparent is the sinister role of Ploutis Servas, who was later ‘re-warded’ for his ‘services’ with the party leadership. He is offering no impartial or innocent commentary, nor are his unfair criticisms against the leadership of the Cypriot Communists without an ulterior motive. After all, these are the times of Stalin’s ascent to power in the USSR -by 1929 Stalin had consolidated his control of the party. The events that the documents refer to occurred in 1932. Of course, the climax of the purges occurred with the show trials of 1936-39. . However, we are already well within the Stalinist period, with purges and persecutions having already begun.²² In any case, it would be erroneous to blame every change of policy or decision on Stalin and Stalinism. With Lenin’s death there was a noticeable ‘leftist’ turn in the Comintern, and then a ‘rightist’ turn. Often practices and policy changes are characterised by harsh and rough decision-making by taking ‘artificial shortcuts to resolve political or organisational problems’, instead of patiently and exhaustively going through a dialectical-democratic method of deciding.²³ This prepared the ground for Stalinism, including the use of ‘threats, intimidation, suspensions, and expulsions, to impose blind political obedience and subservience’. ²⁴ It is thus essential to properly historicise events in the harsh times, in the context they unfolded.

²² The Fifteenth Party Congress in December 1927 defeated and expelled the Left opposition and by 1929 Trotsky was expelled from the USSR. Vladimir Volkov and Clara Weiss (2018) ‘Historic Discovery of Left Opposition Manuscripts from the Early 1930s’, World Socialist Web site 27 August 2018, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2018/08/27/left-a27.html> and Isaac Deutscher (2003) *The Prophet Unarmed. Trotsky 1921-1929*, Verso, London and Isaac Deutscher (2003) *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky, 1929-1940*, Verso, London.

²³ John Peterson termed this as ‘Zinovievism’ after Grigory Yevseyevich Zinoviev (1883 – 1936), a Soviet revolutionary and Bolshevik politician and a close associate of Vladimir Lenin. John Peterson (2019) “Zinoviev and the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern”, *In Defence of Marxism*, 20 December 2019, available at <https://www.marxist.com/zinoviev-and-the-stalinist-degeneration-of-the-comintern.htm>. During the 1920s, Zinoviev was one of the most influential figures in the Soviet leadership and the chairman of the Communist International. However, the tumultuous relationship between Stalin and Zinoviev would continue throughout the 1920s and Zinoviev would be expelled from the party three times (in 1927, 1932 and 1934). Zinoviev’s ideological disagreements and troubled relationship with Stalin led him to form a partnership with Leon Trotsky and Lev Kamenev. In 1936 he was arrested for plotting to overthrow Stalin as a chief defendant in the Trial of the Sixteen. All defendants of the trial were found guilty and subsequently sentenced to death.

²⁴ John Peterson (2019) “Zinoviev and the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern”, *In Defence of Marxism*.

Two Turkish Cypriots are referred to in this volume. Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos identified them as Communists whom Vatis met on 10 August 1931, Asim Aziz Buli and Ahmet Hulusi. Sadly, the latter became one of the informants and witnesses (amongst others, including numerous Greek Cypriots) in the trials against Communists, such as the trial of the poet Tefkros Anthias, who was a leading Communist at the time.²⁵ There were numerous informants at the time, mostly Greek Cypriots who, under pressure or bribe, testified during the trials. There are scarce sources about the exact number of Turkish Cypriot Communists, although Hulusi, at the trial of Vatis in Cyprus (before his exile to the UK), probably exaggerating, claimed to have recruited 200 Turkish Cypriots as members (p. 101). The subsequent book on the history of Cypriot communism by Alecou and Sakellaropoulos (discussed further down),²⁶ refers to some testimonies of old communists who mention two bricklayers and three-four barbers, while others refer to a dozen or so persons. They also mention the names of those who took leading roles: The communist newspaper *Neos Anthropos* (21.5. 27) reports that, at the May Day celebration, among the speakers was the shoemaker Ali Ferudji (again probably misspelled by the British), who spoke in Turkish for the Turkish Cypriots present. Also, in their appendix containing the persons the British considered to belong to the CPC, Hussein Dzahit (probably misspelled by the British) is referred to as number 169.²⁷ This is an interesting issue that requires further research. In this sense, it will be useful if this volume is translated into both Turkish and English.

There are some issues of interpretation by Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos of the volume (Chapter 3) which warrant commentary.

First, Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos aptly note that ‘national liberation’ from colonialism contains crucial class and social dimensions. However, they overstate what can be considered ‘revolutionary’ or ‘progressive elements’ within the *Enosis* campaign in Cyprus,²⁸ which was driven by conservative and reactionary forces.

²⁵ ‘Η Δίκη του Προλετάριου Ποητού Τεύκρου Ανθία’ (The Trial of the Proletarian Poet Tefkros Anthias), *Paphos* newspaper, 7 April 1933.

²⁶ A. Alecou and Sakellaropoulos, S. (2023) *ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΚΟΜΜΟΥΝΙΣΤΙΚΟΥ ΚΟΜΜΑΤΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΚΥΠΡΟΥ (1923-1944), Η χαράση του Κυπριακού Κομμουνιστικού Κόμματος* [HISTORY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CYPRUS (1923-1944), The rise of the Cypriot Communist Party]. Athens: Topos, p. 61.

²⁷ Alecou and Sakellaropoulos, S. (2023) *ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΚΟΜΜΟΥΝΙΣΤΙΚΟΥ ΚΟΜΜΑΤΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΚΥΠΡΟΥ (1923-1944)*, p. 61.

²⁸ This is from the point of view of the Left or Communists in the anticolonial liberation struggle, see Young, R. J. C. (2001) *Postcolonialism: A Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Without explicitly stating it, they uncritically assume the slogan of ‘Enosis’ as the historically ‘natural’ resolution of the national question in Cyprus. They appear sympathetic to the irredentism, more or less perceiving Cyprus *like any other of the Greek islands* united with Greece in the process after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. However, they fail to recognise how the Cretan experience served as major historical trauma, with Turkish Cypriot leaders insisting that ‘Cyprus must not become Crete’.²⁹ Moreover, they seem to underestimate the *specificities* of Cypriot society, the historical factors, and the importance of the presence of a significant Turkish Cypriot section of the population.³⁰ At some point, they seem to sympathise with those expelled from the party who wanted to compromise with the nationalists or underestimated the potential of bicomunal relations both in fighting colonialism and imperialism and in the prospect of building socialism.³¹ However, such a reading places the history of the CPC within the *hegemonic* nationalist narrative, falling into the logic of precisely what Eric Hobsbawm aptly criticises.

In essence, their analysis seems to be of a teleological character and is underpinned by various theoretical assumptions concerning the ‘evolution of history.’ This epistemological logic is encountered even in critical studies of nationalism, where the birth of nations or nationalism is traced to particular ‘causes’, as if ‘the nation’ springs out automatically from such factors. Such approaches either ignore or underemphasise that social arrangements are invariably governed by degrees of *indeterminacy*, meaning that the direction of history is not predetermined, but is constructed precisely through a plethora of practices that coalesce contextually (and often ambiguously), thus producing particular sociopolitical configurations.³² In the colonial context, the communist strategy for national liberation as part of the political struggle

²⁹ Rebecca Bryant and Mete Hatay (2015) *Turkish Perceptions of Cyprus 1948 to the Present*, PCC Report 1/2015, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/zypern/13468.pdf>

³⁰ See Panayiotou, Andreas, Moudouros, Nicos, Misiaouli, Anna (eds) (2022) *ΑΝΘΟΛΟΓΙΑ Ιστορικά Κείμενα και Αναλύσεις για την Εξέλιξη των Θέσεων για Κυπροκεντρισμό, Κυπριακή Συνείδηση, Κυπριακή Ταυτότητα και τον Κυπριωτισμό [ANTHOLOGY Historical Texts and Analyses on the Evolution of the Positions on Cyprocentrism, Cypriot Consciousness, Cypriot Identity and Cypriotism]*, New Cyprus Association. Nicosia: En Typois.

³¹ They were expelled for being ‘liquidationists’. Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos discuss this on p. 71. For the exchange between Vatis, Skeleas, Servas and Panov see pp. 98, 130, 131. For the general debates in the communist movement on ‘Liquidationism’, see V. I. Lenin, (1966) *Against Liquidationism*. Moscow: Progress Publishers SSR.

³² For instance, Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* vis-à-vis communication media, Gellner and industrialism, or *Nation-state and Violence* by Anthony Giddens and the expansion of state administration, etc. For a poignant critique on the subject see chapter 3, ‘Decentering the Nation’, by Michelangelo

for class liberation with the goal of socialist revolution, was a matter of fierce debate amongst communists from the 1920s.³³

Second, methodologically we ought to be careful when interpreting written documents as evidence *out of context*. Archival documents are *archived*, as such they are *selected, processed and stored* documents, which may well contain valuable data, but they are *by definition fragmentary parts* that tell us something about ‘reality’. In this sense, they cannot be understood outside their context, i.e., they must be interpreted *within the whole, not fragmentally*. In the instance under examination, the archive texts must be interpreted as part of the specific process at the specific moment, among other texts (possibly yet unpublished), but also of the violence of a ‘hearing’, *not* in the context of a free discussion. Although the final words of Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos rightly note that the incidents are genuine ‘children of their time’, they seem to underestimate the circumstances under which the depositions of Vatis and Skeleas were extracted and written. After the 1931 October uprising both leaders were arrested and exiled to the UK, from where they managed to escape to take refuge in the USSR –they did so apparently voluntarily. However, we must construe the very nature of the proceedings at the Comintern ‘hearing’ and the circumstances and conditions under which they wrote their ‘apologies’ and answered oral questions as to what had happened in 1931: These must be read in their context of a very difficult moment for both in the Cypriot and the world Communist movement.

Certainly, Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos underline the wider polarisation and fierce confrontations between comrades during those difficult times. However, the most accurate description is provided by Costas Grekos who refers to this process as a ‘trial’.³⁴ There is a rather bleak story in its broader context -the revolutionary hopes of Cypriot leftists were drowned by the Stalinist counter-revolution in the USSR:

‘In November 1932, Vatis and Skeleas were exiled by the British authorities to London. From there they made their way to Moscow, where they were tried by the Balkan Bureau of the –by then completely Stalinised– Communist International. Heading the inquiry was Bela Kun, the one-time comrade of György Lukács, and leader of the failed Hungarian revolution of 1919. The two were

Anastasiou (2022) *Nationalism and Hegemony: The Consolidation of the Nation in Social and Political Life*, Routledge, London.

³³ See Young, Robert J.C. 2001. *Postcolonialism: A Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.

³⁴ Costas Grekos, *Η Εξέγερση του Οκτώβρη και το ΚΚΚ*, (The October Uprising and the CCP), Nicosia, 1994, p. 28.

found guilty of having attempted to implement the Bolshevik tactic of the United Front. In “the third and final period of Capitalism” only the immediate raising of the slogan of “socialist revolution” would do. Vatis was sent to the famished areas of the Soviet Union where he died of typhus in December 1933. Skeleas was executed while WWII was raging, in 1942. Christodoulos Cristodoulides –the editor of *Rizospastis* in the early 1930s and brother of Costas Skeleas– was also called to Moscow. He was executed in the 1940s. So was Iordanis Iordanides. Bela Kun, the inquisitioner, would himself be executed in 1938 for “leading a counter-revolutionary terrorist organisation”. And here we are, nearly a century later, unearthing still our revolutionary traditions.³⁵

I interviewed Kyriacos Tsioupras, a veteran Communist journalist, who in the 1960s had been entrusted to deliver to the headquarters of AKEL in Nicosia documents and belongings of the communist leader Vatis.³⁶ He had met Vatis’s wife some 30 years after the Communist leader had perished in Siberia and had been given the bundle to transfer. The veteran noted how tragic circumstances and intolerance leading to brutality at the time resulted in the demise of the likes of Vatis and Skeleas amongst so many others in the Communist movement. He saw this as part of a historical tragedy of the defeats in the struggles of the 20th century; he wished that the Left could learn from those.

The volume by Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos contains valuable documentation on the history of Cypriot Communism that must be contextualised and read together with other sources and studies, which will be discussed further down.

Volume II: History of Cypriot Communism (1923-1944)

This volume by Alexis Alecou and Spyros Sakellaropoulos entitled, *History of the CCP (1923-1944); The Dawn of the Communist Party*³⁷ is a 232-page volume that includes nine chapters, an epilogue, an appendix of tables with a list of CPC cadres, members and sympathizers according to a colonial police entry. It covers a longer period; whilst it builds on the first volume, it aims to give a broader perspective until the time of the dissolution of the CPC into AKEL in 1944.

³⁵ Daphnos Economou (2019) ‘The First Career of the Communist Party of Cyprus’, uploaded on May 31, 2019, paper presented at the Historical Materialism Conference (Athens, May 2019), https://www.academia.edu/90682243/The_First_Career_of_the_Communist_Party_of_Cyprus

³⁶ The interviews with Kyriacos Tsioupras took place in London between April and May 2022. He was a journalist in Moscow during the 1960s for the Communist newspaper *Haravgi*.

³⁷ *Ιστορία του ΚΚΚ (1923-1944). Η χραναγή του κομμουνιστικού κόμματος*. Athens: Topos.

The volume starts with a short introduction and is followed by the first short chapter that examines the historical, social, and economic developments from the cession of Cyprus to the British (1878) to the early years of the interwar period.

The second chapter deals with the emergence of the first communist cells (1919-1923) and the main positions of the party. This is a very short chapter, only four pages long, as the sources the authors have found are very limited.

The third chapter deals with 1924-1926, the emergence of the party, the CPC's positions on the national question, and interventions on social fronts. The fourth chapter deals with the period 1926-1930, a period of party institutionalisation, and how it matured and grew as an organisation.

The fifth chapter deals with the period starting from Vatis' assumption of leadership (December 1930) to the October events in 1931. It deals with the CCP's relations with the Turkish Cypriots, and the CCP's confrontation with the *Enosis* movement, before taking a close look at the October events of 1931.

The sixth chapter deals with the aftermath of the October uprising (Oktovriana) and the Vatis-Skeleas-Servas conflict within the Third International -drawing on the previous work by Sakellaropoulos and Choumerianos, discussed above.

The seventh chapter deals with the period after October, until Servas took over the leadership, an era of political authoritarianism, when Communists were persecuted and banned by the British rulers.

Chapter Eight deals with the period that Ploutis Servas became general secretary until the eve of AKEL's creation (1935-1941). During this period the party is banned and is forced to work underground after the 1931 October events, but the fact that it seriously takes up trade union action is a huge boost to communism. The (illegal) party grows in influence and is paradoxically 'saved' from the kind of the contemporary dogmatic disputes which had plagued other communist parties in Europe at the time. This is the time that the underground party decided to establish a legal party structure that would eventually take the form of AKEL. This is also the period when there is a shift towards self-determination, self-government, and eventually *Enosis*. By World War II, the party shifts its position on the national question as its slogan now is for a united anti-fascist front.

Chapter Nine examines the creation of AKEL until its disbanding and its merging into AKEL. The conclusions are followed by biographical notes of leading members of the CPC.

This book is an attempt at a comprehensive narrative based on sources collected and synthesised, at least in Greek, with a thorough reference to the literature and other data available. The emphasis is on the dilemmas of Communists, the individuals involved, and their actions. It would be fruitful if the authors took more into account a broader review of the historiographical debates so that the Cypriot context could be integrated into a regional and global context of analysis.

The authors rightly note that the anticolonial struggle contains critical class-social dimensions. They do not revisit this issue, except for a reference to the concept of class struggle in the Vatis-Skeleas-Servas confrontation, in Moscow in 1932. Also, they do not explain how they comprehend the manifestations of the class struggle, nor do they link them, at each historical stage, to debates within the party.

The authors rightly consider unfair the criticism of the CPC in the Vatis-Skeleas (political) trial in Moscow, in 1932, while the Comintern was changing positions in that extremely volatile period. The authors avoid characterisations of the pioneers of Cypriot communism. However, apart from the documents, which in any case must always be interpreted in their specific context, the testimonies they cite are based either on individuals who were youths or students in the early period, and/or those who later became leaders of the party. Also, in substance, the basic position of Ale-cou/Sakellaropoulos does not differ substantially from the pro-enosis line of the subsequent leaders, who rejected the CPC anti-*Enosis* independence line: in the 1920s and early 1930s Cypriot communists *prioritised class over nation* as the basis for the creation of the anti-imperialist front. They saw the resolution of the national question in the colonial context as the realisation of the right to self-determination as set out by Lenin (1972) as part and parcel of a revolutionary strategy to realise socialism. The way forward was the creation of a Soviet Socialist Balkan federation. While they rightly attribute the main responsibility to the twists and turns of the Comintern, the authors remain quite negative on the CPC's stand against *Enosis*, which they consider to be wrong because, they argue, it deterred it from reaching the Greek Cypriot masses.

The authors however fail to address the cruciality of political cost for the Cypriot Left (and in turn for the Cypriot society as a whole) of the change of line in the early 1940s, when the leadership adopts the *Enosis* line: This change undermined the very basis for *class as the foundation for an anticolonial cooperation between Greek and Turkish Cypriots*. Today, in hindsight, the critique of the pioneering communists towards *Enosis* has been historically vindicated, as they correctly predicted what was

to follow. However, the solid arguments they put forward at the time, under those circumstances, demonstrate they had mastered dialectics for they correctly analysed the facts on the ground at the time. There may have been tactical errors, perhaps adopting milder rhetoric, that would have made their arguments more receptive and less objectionable by the conservatives. However, examining their position today, one can see that it made sense. The position of the CPC on the national question in Cyprus would be resolved once the Cypriot people rid themselves from British colonial yoke when workers and peasants realise the goal of a revolution to build an independent socialist state within a Balkan socialist federation. Well before the party was officially accepted by the Comintern, the CPC saw the prospects of revolution in Cyprus tied to the prospects of an international workers' revolution. It was not a position imposed from outside i.e. the Comintern or some other communist centre. The way forward, as they saw it at the time, was based on what they saw as the necessity of a Greek and Turkish workers' united front against the British colonialists. The view that the CPC was simply towing the line of the shifts and turns of the Comintern is simply untrue. Evidence shows that the Greek and British communists did regularly reach out to the Comintern, for advice, guidance, knowhow and support; many took up such views but this was never an issue of mere 'obedience'. Communication was not easy, and, in any case, they formulated their line on the basis of the realities, the contestations, the balance of forces in furthering the struggle in Cyprus in the resolution of the national and colonial question from the 1920s till the 1940s.

In any case, even later when the communists changed their line, abandoning the independence within a Balkan Socialist Federation, they were still wavering between 'self-determination', 'self-government', and Enosis, which reflected the fluidity of the geopolitical and social landscape in Cyprus and their domestic political dilemmas stemming from the realities of political forces in Cyprus. The right-wing and conservative nationalists (around the church for the Greek Cypriots and around the pro-British elite for the Turkish Cypriots) never believed that the communists had really changed their position.

The authors rightly link the developments of the 1924-1944 period with the subsequent development of AKEL. The CPC is dissolved but continues to exist 'by other means' as it takes over the leadership of AKEL: By 1947 AKEL adopts, in the party's programme, scientific socialism as its guiding theory and democratic centralism as its organisational principle. Interestingly, the process of 'Bolshevisation', which other CPs had gone through 20 years earlier, was only completed, with its own peculiari-

ties, in 1952. The ‘Stalinisation’ processes are there but they are adapted to take the rather ‘milder’ forms in the fluid Cypriot context. Not that the leadership would spare anyone who was deemed to be opposed to the line in the party; by 1952, opposition voices were expelled or silenced. Soon however, after the death of Stalin, ‘de-Stalinisation’ would again take a slower and milder form in Cyprus. In this sense, the CPC was only *formally* dissolved, to survive politically, ideologically, and organisationally, in another form.

Some Critical Remarks about the Volume

While historically this book is interesting and important for the internal Cypriot context, it would be extremely fruitful if the authors had a broader review of the historical and historiographical debates, to locate the Cypriot situation within a regional and global framework of analysis of communism in the first half of the 20th century.³⁸

Second, the authors rightly note that national liberation from colonialism contains critical class-social dimensions. They aptly consider that the Moscow interrogators subjected Vatis and Skeleas to unfair questioning and criticisms about the CPC position and role during the (political) Vatis-Skeleas trial in Moscow in 1932. The Comintern itself was twisting and turning, constantly changing positions during this volatile period, demonstrating the difficulty in correctly reading the political situation and what was to be done. The CPC was forced to make difficult decisions during such a volatile local context, thereby changing its positions and slogans. The authors avoid taking a clear position, relying instead on commentaries of others, or attempting to deduce conclusions from their sources without much commentary of their own. However, there are problematic issues of interpretation of the historical context: their conclusion remains within the logic that the early communists’ position against *Enosis* was a major obstacle for the growth of the party, which also assumes that their change to a pro-*Enosis* line was somehow ‘natural’ or ‘inevitable’. However, this position cannot stand in the face of evidence: with hindsight, we all know what happened when *Enosis* prevailed, which is precisely what the early communists of the 1920s and early 1930s had predicted. The consequences were apparent to them, and they rightly warned about the danger of how the imperialists would drive a wedge that

³⁸ See Young, Robert J.C., *Postcolonialism: A Historical Introduction: A Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); Bryan D. ‘How Can We Write Better Histories of Communism?’ *Labour / Le Travail*, vol. 83, 2019 (pp. 199–232. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26741327>. Accessed 6 Sep. 2022); Anne Garland Mahler and Paolo Capuzzo (eds.) *The Comintern and the Global South* (London: Routledge, 2023).

would divide the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriot masses along national lines.³⁹ The arguments they put forward at the time, in those circumstances, demonstrate that they were dealing correctly and dialectically with the facts of the time. There may have been tactical errors and another rhetoric would have been preferable, but their position was essentially correct. After all, even when the line was changed, the position of party remained ambivalent as it reflected the fluidity of the geopolitical and social space of the country: the shifts are between self-determination-self-government, even though there were moments of full identification with *Enosis*.

A closer scrutiny of the time is revealing. There was a collapse of the old order after World War I and the October Revolution in Russia, while the Asia Minor catastrophe (for the Greeks, but not for the victorious Turks) had demonstrated the catastrophic results of the 'Megali Idea' ('Great Idea'): *Enosis* was the Greek Cypriot aspect of the 'Megali Idea' projected, which had been fully discredited. Greek imperialistic irredentism seeking to annex territories in Asia Minor had violently collapsed, leading to violence, deaths and millions of refugees, and an exchange of populations. At the time, Cypriot Communists rightly critiqued such old irredentism. It argued that it was the same bourgeois class who exploits the workers and peasants (the pawnbrokers and loan sharks) who was promising *Enosis*, essentially attempting to divert attention away from the urgent need for radical social transformation. In the meantime, British colonial taxation was causing mass poverty and landlessness.

The communist strategy of the united anti-imperialist front seemed sound, but the question is in *what terms, with whom and for which goal* (immediate and longer-term). During the high point of what was considered to be a revolutionary era, the line of *independence within the framework of a Balkan Soviet Socialist Federation* seemed highly plausible and appealing, as it allowed both Greeks and Turks workers and radicals to cooperate. Also, this could appeal, to some extent, to the radicalised sections of nationalists who were prepared to break with the British. This is a period of cataclysmic world-changing events -revolutionary prospects also exist in post-Ottoman Turkey, where there was a strong element of Jacobinism within the ideological

³⁹ Vatiotiis, under the pseudonym Nikos Kleomenis, insisted to the end that "the slogan for union is counter-revolutionary, utopian and is a weapon in the hands of British imperialism to divide the Cypriot workers". Vatiotiis, C. «Εθνικισμός ή Κομμουνισμός» (1931) ["Nationalism or Communism?"; Η Kallis (ed.) *Ιστορία του Κομμουνιστικού Κόμματος Κύπρου*, (History of the Communist Party of Cyprus (unpublished), published in *Περιπέτειες Ιδεών*, τ. 9, *Πολίτης* 28.1.2007, <https://www.scribd.com/doc/21757896/peripeties-09>

and political project of *Kemalism*.⁴⁰ There were, however objective difficulties in attracting Turkish Cypriots. Many of them were radicalised but found it difficult to join the party; yet some did. The fact that there were not many Turkish Cypriot members is not, as the authors allege, because Turkish Cypriots were mostly ‘uneducated’ or confined to agricultural production. In fact, many were educated and, for historical reasons, part of the British administration. *Kemalism*, during the first phase of the establishment of the Turkish Republic, was fluid and open and attracted progressives, who were also friendly to the Greeks.⁴¹ Besides, in 1930 the pact of friendship between Venizelos and Kemal was signed. At the time Venizelos was opposed to Enosis, particularly if this took the form of a violent process against Britain.⁴² There is significant scholarship on the Turkish Cypriots that demonstrates how many democratic-minded and Leftist Turkish Cypriots were active and were organised politically and socially, disputing simplistic nationalistic assumptions about their alleged ‘backwardness’ or ‘deficient modernisation’.⁴³

When this revolutionary zeal and the prospect for such socialist federation in the Balkans and the USSR (Comintern was later disbanded) faded, the world out-

⁴⁰ Eren Duzgun in his book, *Capitalism, Jacobinism and International Relations: Revisiting Turkish Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) examines the path of Jacobinism in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. He argues that until the 1950s, the Ottoman/Turkish experiment with modernity was not marked by capitalism, but by a historically specific Jacobinism. The assertion of this Jacobin legacy then leads to a new interpretation of the subsequent transition to capitalism and its authoritarian consolidation in modern Turkey.

⁴¹ See Georghallides, G. S. (1985) *Cyprus and the governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: the cause of the 1931 crisis*, Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre.

⁴² See Katsis, A. (2021) *Η πολιτική της Ένωσης (1923-1974) – Από τη Λοζάνη στον Ατίλα (The politics of the Union (1923-1974) - From Lausanne to Attila)*, Limassol: Herodotos.

⁴³ See Kızılyürek N. (2002) “Modernity, Nationalism and the Perspectives of a Cypriot Union”, *CEMOTI, Cahiers d’Études sur la Méditerranée Orientale et le monde Turco-Iranien* Année 2002, Vol. 34, 211-230 <https://doi.org/10.4000/cemoti.751>; Kızılyürek, N. (2012) “Turkish-Cypriot Left: A Historical Overview”, Trimikliniotis, N., Bozkurt, U. (eds) *Beyond a Divided Cyprus. Palgrave Macmillan*, New York; Kızılyürek, N. (2009) *Οι Τουρκοκύπριοι, Η Τουρκία και το κυπριακό (Turkish-Cypriots, Turkey and the Cyprus problem)*, Athens: Papazisis; Anagnostopoulou, S. (2004) *Τουρκικός εκσυγχρονισμός: Ισλάμ και Τουρκοκύπριοι στη δαιδαλώδη διαδρομή του κεμαλισμού (Turkish modernization: Islam and Turkish Cypriots in the labyrinthine path of Kemalism)*, Athens: Vivliorama; Ktoris, S. (2013) “AKEL and the Turkish-Cypriots”, *Cyprus Review*, Vol. 25, Fall 2013, 15-38; Nicos Moudouros (2021) *State of Exception in the Mediterranean: Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot Community*, London: Palgrave MacMillan; Djavid An, A. and Christofi, N. (2021) “Η Τουρκοκυπριακή Αριστερά και τα προβλήματα συνεργασίας με την Ελληνοκυπριακή Αριστερά” (“The Turkish Cypriot Left and the problems of cooperation with the Greek Cypriot Left”), Christofi, Christofi, A. (ed.) *Μεταξύ Έθνους και Τάξης: Αριστερές και Κυπριακό 1920 – 1974 (Between Nation and Order: Leftism and the Cyprus Problem 1920-1974)*, Thessaloniki: Psifides.

look changed. However, the Communists' turn towards a more positive orientation towards *Enosis* would become a zero-sum game: Choosing to align with the Greek Cypriot nationalists over the Turkish Cypriots inevitably meant that Turkish Cypriots could not join the united front en masse and they would be pushed toward their own separatist nationalism. But the choice of *Enosis* was neither predetermined, nor natural, nor inevitable. In fact, Venizelos in 1931 was opposed to *Enosis*. It is crucial to note that geopolitically, the Turkish-Greek relations were completely transformed from what they had been in the first quarter of the 20th century.

Third, a notable gap is the absence of discussion to the assassination of Antonios Triantaphyllides, a leading lawyer appointed as one of the five commissioners of the Colony's Advisory Council, returning from Larnaca to his home in Nicosia on 12 January, 1934.⁴⁴ Rumours were rife that he was 'punished' by his former peers, as he had previously been an influential member of the EREK, for his collaboration with the British after the October uprising –he had crossed over to the enemy British 'camp', enjoying a massive salary in a high administrative position, his enemies insisted. However, he argued that the only way forward was negotiation to gradually achieve autonomy. In any case, the Communists were blamed for the murder and, 12 months later, Stavros Christodoulou, considered to be a member of the Communist Party, was accused of the assassination. He was acquitted in a high-profile case.

This probable political assassination remains a taboo subject for both Cypriot society and historians, and a cold case that no one seemed interested in solving let alone investigating publicly, until Cypriot historian Andrekos Varnava opened it up with an extremely interesting monograph he published. In this context the communists, who for the nationalist historiography were supposedly 'defeated', were serious enough of a threat for the British colonialists to conspire to make such a plot. The charges could not be substantiated and were thrown out of court.

Scarce Sources and Expediency in a Fluid and Contradictory World: Rethinking the History of the Cypriot Left

A century after the emergence of Cypriot communism, the official Greek Cypriot narrative clings to the myths about 'the ancient desire' and 'natural inclination' to unite with 'the motherland'. With hindsight, it is apparent that the Communists who opposed this project, arguing that *Enosis* is an ideological project that would divide the

⁴⁴ Andrekos Varnava (2021), *Assassination in Colonial Cyprus in 1934 and the Origins of EOKA: Reading the Archives against the Grain*, Anthem Press, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1g13k0v>

working class and divert attention from the necessity of a united anticolonial and anti-imperialist front of Greeks and Turks, are today fully vindicated. Yet official Greek Cypriot history treats and vilifies them as traitors. Much of the ‘official’ history tends to undervalue, if not ignore altogether, the anticolonial struggles of the Left and often denigrates the Left. There are also some who claim to be on the Left but are inclined to nationalism, especially amongst the intelligentsia.⁴⁵ Hence, the use of labels ranging from ‘leftism’, ‘sectarianism’ and ‘immaturity’ to slanders and insults alleging ‘betrayal’ of the liberation struggle, which is uncritically equated *exclusively* with Enosis (union with Greece). However, liberation from British colonialism was a long struggle for self-determination, which took different forms and claims: from independence, including a Republic within a Socialist Balkan Federation (as the Communist strove for in the tumultuous interwar years), to forms of self-government as well as incorporation within another state, i.e., *Enosis*. In response to *Enosis* the Turkish Cypriot nationalists pursued ‘Taksim’ i.e., partition. The exact *shape* of the form of the state that would emerge after the liberation from British colonialism was to be decided by the multi-ethnically composed Cypriot people when exercising their right to self-determination. However, the international and local context was such that imposed major constraints on such choices; nothing is decided in vacuum. The attempt to ‘monopolise’ or claim some form of exclusivity of the liberation struggle is a misconstruction of history. The claim that the anticolonial liberation struggle is equated to the Enosis project of the Greek-Cypriot is a false depiction of the past *imposed* by the postcolonial regime that emerged in Cyprus made up by former EOKA fighters under president, archbishop Makarios. The bi-communal cohabitation in the consociational governmental regime was short lived: by the end of 1963 intercommunal strife wrecked the processes intercommunal cooperation and burned the institutional bridges, a pillar of which was the Left and workers’ movement. History became a major ideological domain for the nationalist ideology and the Greek-Cypriot official narrative left no room for any alternative to the official line that anticolonial liberation meant ‘struggle for Enosis’. Historical, political and social scientists have long

⁴⁵ For an analysis of this see Trimikliniotis, N. (2022) ‘Επίμετρο – Ο Ανταποικιακός Αγώνας, το Εθνικό Ζήτημα και η Αριστερά στις Αρχές του 20ού Αιώνα’ (Epilogue – The Anti-colonial Struggle, the National Question and the Left in the Early 20th Century), Christofis, N. (ed.) (2022) *Μεταξύ Έθνους και Τάξης: Αριστερές και Κυπριακό, 1920-1974 (Between Nation and Class: The Left and The Cyprus Problem, 1920-1974)*, Psifides, Thessaloniki, and Trimikliniotis, N. (2005) ‘Το Εθνικό Ζήτημα, η Αριστερά και το Κυπριακό: Αντι-ιμπεριαλισμός ή Αντι-εθνικισμός;’ *Θέσεις* vol. 92, July- September 2005.

challenged this.⁴⁶ The hegemony of nationalism is maintained via different methods and this process can take different shapes and forms, as a kind of ‘joker of politics’.⁴⁷

The Communists of the 1920s managed to correctly predict that the *Enosis* campaign would divide the two communities and allow the local elites and the colonialists to divide and (continue to) rule. Hence the importance of the volumes on Cypriot Communism.

To appreciate these two volumes, one must locate and contextualise them within the few other sources and studies available on Cypriot Communism of the 1920s and 1930s. This paper will not embark on a general review of the bibliography on Cypriot communism. There are certainly interesting works on the emergence and operation of Cypriot communism, some are hostile to Cypriot Communism,⁴⁸ others adopt an approach that avoids taking a position, rather they analyse by locating the Cypriot communist party within the context of the political and social actors.⁴⁹ The aim of

⁴⁶ Attalides, M. (ed.) (1977). *Cyprus Reviewed*, Nicosia: Jus Cypri; Attalides, M. (1979). *Cyprus, Nationalism and International Politics*. Edinburgh: Q Press; Kitromilides, P. (1977). ‘From Coexistence to Confrontation: The Dynamics of Eth-nic Conflict in Cyprus’. In Attalides, M. (ed.), *Cyprus Reviewed*. Nicosia: Jus Cypri, 35-70. Kitromilides, P. (1979). ‘The Dialectic of Intolerance’. In Worsley, P. and Kitromilides, P. (eds), *Small States in the Modern World: Conditions for Their Survival*, revised edition. Nicosia: New Cyprus Association and Cyprus Geographical Association, Cyprus. Kitromilides, P. (1982). ‘To Ιδεολογικό Πλαίσιο της Πολιτικής Ζωής στην Κύπρο’ [The Ideological Framework of Political Life in Cyprus]. In Tenekidis, G. and Kranidiotis, Y. (eds), *Κύπρος – Ιστορία, Προβλήματα και Αγώνες του Λαού της* [Cyprus – History, Problems and Struggles of its People]. Athens: Estia. Kitromilides, P. (1998-99). ‘Κυπριακές Πολιτικές Στάσεις και Επίλυση του Κυπριακού’ [Cypriot Political Positions and the Solution to the Cyprus Problem]. *Σύγχρονα Θέματα*, Vol. 68-69-70, 108-110. Kızılyürek, N. (1990). ‘The Turkish Cypriot Upper Class and Question of Identity’. In Mehmet Ali, A. (ed.), *Turkish Cypriot Identity in Literature*. Fatal Press, 20-32. Kızılyürek, N. (1999). *Κύπρος: Το Αδιέξοδο των Εθνικισμών* [Cyprus: The Stalemate of Nationalisms]. Athens: Mavri Lista; Kızılyürek, N. (2009). *Οι Τουρκοκύπριοι, η Τουρκία και το Κυπριακό* [The Turkish Cypriots, Turkey and the Cyprus Problem]. Athens: Papazisis; Trimikliniotis, N. and Bozkurt, U. (eds), *Beyond A Divided Cyprus: A State and Society in Transformation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

⁴⁷ Michaelangelo Anastasiou (2022) *Nationalism and Hegemony: The Consolidation of the Nation in Social and Political Life*, Routledge, London.

⁴⁸ For instance, Adams, T. W (1971) *AKEL: The Communist Party of Cyprus*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press; Papageorgiou, S. (1984/2004) *ΑΚΕΛ το άλλο Κ.Κ.Ε. [AKEL, The other Communist Party of Greece]*, Nicosia: Epifaniou; Kamilaris, G. (2016) *Η Αριστερά στη Σύγχρονη Κυπριακή Ιστορία* (The Left in Contemporary Cypriot History), Nicosia: Author’s own publication.

⁴⁹ Georghallides, G. S. (1979) *A Political and Administrative History of Cyprus 1918-1926 with a survey of the foundations of British rule*, Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre and Georghallides, G. S. (1985) *Cyprus and the governorship of Sir Ronald Storrs: the cause of the 1931 crisis*, Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre.

the paper is to confine its analysis to the question of how communists and those who align themselves with the Left in Cyprus view the history of Cypriot communism.⁵⁰

Among the sources available, of importance is a four-page letter by the Greek veteran Communist and journalist Orpheus Economides to the Central Committee of AKEL, written some 35 years after the events (9/8/1976), as well as two relevant unpublished AKEL texts. First, the unpublished *Essay on the History of the KKK-AKEL*,⁵¹ approved by the Central Committee of AKEL, originally written by Minos Perdios in 1968.⁵² The second source is another unpublished text, *History of the KKK-AKEL, From the Early 20th Century to 1981*, intended as the official history of the party.⁵³ This was drafted by party historians and approved by the party leadership, but was never published; intra-party rivalry during the perestroika, but especially the split that followed in 1990, apparently prevented the attempt to find a consensus on the party's history. The two 'histories' however have circulated informally, but they are not readily available.⁵⁴

There is a remarkable study by Yannis Lefkis (Yannis Papangelou, 1899-1991), *Rizes* (Roots).⁵⁵ He was a Limassol-based Communist intellectual and a founding member of the Communist party in the 1920s. While written some 50 years later, with the problems that such an endeavour entails, this text is an important source.

⁵⁰ This paper does not imply that a Marxist/class analysis is neither the main, nor the sole framework of interpretation of a historical political-ideological phenomenon in its own terms. Valuable contributions from different perspectives are welcome and contribute to the debates.

⁵¹ Perdios, M. (1968) *Δοκίμιο για την Ιστορία του ΚΚΚ-ΑΚΕΛ (Essay on the History of the KKK-AKEL)*, unpublished paper, approved by the CC of AKEL.

⁵² Perdios contemporary and initially close associate of Ploutis Servas, but who later became one of his main critics in Limassol. He played a key role in deposing Servas from the position of Secretary General in 1945.

⁵³ ΑΚΕΛ, *Ιστορία του ΚΚΚ-ΑΚΕΛ: Από τις Αρχές του 20ού Αιώνα μέχρι το 1981*, [AKEL, *History of the KKK-AKEL: From the Beginnings of the 20th Century until 1981*], (unpublished), CC AKEL, Nicosia, 1985.

⁵⁴ See Trimikliniotis, N. (2022) 'Επίμετρο – Ο Ανταποικιακός Αγώνας, το Εθνικό Ζήτημα και η Αριστερά στις Αρχές του 20ού Αιώνα» (Epilogue - The Anti-colonial Struggle, the National Question and the Left in the Early 20th Century"), Christofis, N. (ed.) (2022) *Μεταξύ Έθνους και Τάξης: Αριστερές και Κυπριακό, 1920-1974 (Between Nation and Class: The Left and The Cyprus Problem, 1920-1974)*, Psifides, Thessaloniki. For a more elaborate analysis, see Trimikliniotis, N. (2022) 'Ξαναδιαβάζοντας το Κυπριακό Ζήτημα στο Τρίγωνο Κύπρου-Ελλάδας-Τουρκίας: Ο Ανταποικιακός Αγώνας, το Εθνικό Ζήτημα και η Αριστερά από τον 20ό στον 21ο Αιώνα' (Rereading the Cyprus Issue in the Cyprus-Greece-Turkey Triangle: The Anti-Colonial Struggle, the National Question and the Left from the 20th to the 21st Century), *Θέσεις*, vol. 160, July- September 2022, 117-153.

⁵⁵ Papangelou, Y. (1984/1991), *Ρίζες* (Roots), Limassol.

Various memoirs have also been published, which, while valuable, are rather selective due to memory deficiencies, and, intentionally or not, the later attitudes of the authors determine what they remember and what they forget. Important is the volume, initially published as articles in *Phileleftheros*, by the former General Secretary Fifis Ioannou (1945-49), a journalist at the time, many years later, in the early 1970s.⁵⁶

Also of importance is the small study by the historian Kostas Grekos, *The October Uprising and the KKK*. This is one of the few texts by a professional historian who had also worked for the Cypriot trade union movement and the Left.⁵⁷

New studies have appeared on nationalism and Communism that contribute to our understanding of Cypriot Communism.⁵⁸ Focusing on the early period, Yiannos Katsourides published a book in English.⁵⁹ The study is certainly useful and contains aspects of history unknown to many besides those who have access to material of the history of the party and the movement. However, its major weakness is that it reproduces the characterisations of the pioneer Communists in the *Essay on the History of KKK-AKEL* by Perdios. Katsourides quotes and cites Communist leaders of the 1950s who had been ardent proponents of the party's shift towards *Enosis* in the 1950s and who had every reason to undervalue and denigrate the pioneers of Communism. These are the leaders who deposed Servas. Katsourides seems to follow Perdios' line, often uncritically. It is thus not surprising that Communist pioneers are depicted suffering from 'Leftist sectarianism' and 'anti-Marxism'. Katsourides reproduces without comment more or less the arguments levelled by Perdios about 'immaturity', 'deviationism' and 'low educational and ideological standards'.⁶⁰ How-

⁵⁶ Ioannou, F. (2005) *Έτσι Άρχισε το Κυπριακό*, Philistor, Athens.

⁵⁷ Grekos, Kostas, *Η Εξέγερση του Οκτώβρη και το ΚΚΚ*, (The October Uprising and the CCP), Nicosia. It is beyond the scope of this paper to refer to various publications on the October uprising by nationalists; they generally ignore or undervalue the role of Cypriot communists.

⁵⁸ Some old sources include the following: Colonial Government of Cyprus, *Communism in Cyprus* (Nicosia, 1955) prepared by the Cyprus Intelligence Committee. T. W. Adams, AKEL: The Communist Party of Cyprus (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1971); George C. Fidas, 'The Evolution of Cypriot Communism', *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 6:1/2 (Spring/Summer 1973); Heinz A. Richter, 'Die Kommunistische Partei Zyperns 1926 -1944', *THETIS* 3 (1996), pp. 207-216; Yiorghos Leventis, 'The Politics of the Cypriot Left in the Inter-War Period', *Synthesis: Review of Modern Greek Studies*, 2:1 (1997), pp.1-15; Heinz A. Richter (2003) 'The Cypriot Communist party and the Comintern', *The Cyprus Review*, Vol. 15 No. 1 (2003), 99-119, <https://cyprusreview.org/index.php/cr/article/view/396/351>

⁵⁹ Katsourides, Y. *The History of the Communist Party in Cyprus: Colonialism, Class and the Cypriot Left*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2014.

⁶⁰ Katsourides, Y. *The History of the Communist Party in Cyprus*, pp. 106-108.

ever, a closer examination is required to explain the perpetual harsh criticisms and condemnation of the Communist pioneers by later Communist leaders and authors. One must locate the position of the CPC on the national question, in the context of the shifts and turns of the line the Comintern and other communist parties on the national and colonial question from the 1920s till the 1940s.⁶¹ Moreover, the book by Katsourides largely reproduces the attempt approach that depicts the pioneers of Cypriot communism as heroic but rather misguided, ‘immature’ and ‘sectarian’ on the national question. This was the line taken by AKEL after 1974. The criticism levied against communist pioneers can be explained by the *new* leaderships in the effort to legitimise their change of policy, particularly the shift of the party line towards *Enosis*, in the 1940s and 1950s. In 1952, the party considered that the original CPC anti-*Enosis* line (i.e., the slogan for an independent socialist republic in Soviet Socialist Balkan Federation) was ‘sectarian’ and a ‘Trotskyist Leftist deviation’. At the time, the party expelled those who failed to unequivocally express support for ‘*Enosis* and only *Enosis*’,⁶² adopted in the 1949 congress.⁶³ Those who questioned the new

⁶¹ See Young, Robert J.C. 2001. *Postcolonialism: A Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell and Anne Garland Mahler and Paolo Capuzzo (eds) *The Comintern and the Global South. Global Designs/Local Encounters*. Routledge, 2023.

⁶² This was slogan that apparently Nicos Zachariades had told the delegation of Cypriot communists to adopt during the meeting on the 8th of November 1948, which sought the advice of the Greek Communist Party. The delegation made of the General Secretary, Fifis Ioannou and the leader of the Trade union, PEO, Andreas Ziartides. AKEL changes its line, but this was no automatic process or without disagreements. As a result of this contact, Fifis Ioannou, who returned to Cyprus about 10 days before Ziartides, convened the C.C. which adopted the position of Zachariades and the slogan “Enosis and only Enosis”. Fifis Ioannou was deposed and replaced by Ezekias Papaioannou. From the 17 members of the C.C. the proposal was opposed by five members, Adam Adamantos, Vasos Vasileiou, Kostas Partasidis, Miltiadis Christodoulou and Ploutis Servas. See Michalis Michael “Η συνάντηση ηγετών του ΑΚΕΛ με το Ν. Ζαχαριάδη μετά τη Διασκεπτική” (“The meeting of AKEL leaders with N. Zacharias after the Conference”), *Dialogos*, May 7, 2022, available <https://dialogos.com.cy/i-synantisi-igetou-toy-akel-me-to-n-zachariadi-meta-ti-diaskeptiki-2/>. Also, see Peonides, P., A. Ziartides, (2005) *Χωρίς Φόβο και Πάθος (Without Fear or Passion)*, Nicosia and Ioannou, F. (2005) *Έτσι Άρχισε το Κυπριακό (This is how the Cyprus problem began)*, Athens: Philistor.

⁶³ This is expressed in the decision to expel Ploutis Servas and others in 1952. which accused Servas of being “uninterested in equipping the party with a Marxist-Stalinist national policy, it adopted the sectarian line of Soviet Cyprus within the framework of the Soviet Balkan Federation, which is a Trotskyist leftist deviation. He later modified it to the line of autonomy (Constitution within the framework of the British Empire) and when the party as a result of its contact with the masses and in the conditions of the anti-fascist struggle, found the right line of national restoration, Servas discovered the famous theory of the automatic, struggle-free realization of the Union at the end of the war.” See, Demetris Papademetris, “27.8.1952: Το δεύτερο μέρος της απόφασης της Κεντρικής Επιτροπής του ΑΚΕΛ για την αποβολή των Πλουτή Σέρβα, Χριστοφή Οικονομίδη (Νούση) και Γώγου Κακογιάννη. S-964”, *Ηλεκτρονική Ιστορία της*

position, showed sympathy for the previous position AKEL had held, for a gradualist road to self-determination via autonomy, and refused to fully and publicly support the new line, were expelled as ‘opportunists’ and ‘sectarians’.

After the 1974 catastrophe, AKEL, in 1976, under the same leadership, for the first time published the pictures of the Communist pioneers and praised them for their ‘heroism’ and their ‘foresight’.⁶⁴ The party recognised that, ‘during the 50 years of the party’s many-sided work, there have been errors and marks of weakness’, but considers these to be ‘quite natural, as the conditions were difficult and complicated’. The party communique hastens to add that it never concealed its weaknesses, rather ‘earmarked and corrected them’, citing as examples that ‘in 1945 it fought against factionalism and in 1949 against opportunism and sectarianism’.⁶⁵ Without naming them, the communique’s apparent references are the expulsions of Servas, Fifis Ioannou, Adamantos, etc., who were later *partially* and *de facto rehabilitated*.⁶⁶ The apparent process is long but incomplete, inchoate, and rather silent, only semi-rehabilitating. It is obvious that times were changing, and a historical sociology of Cypriot Communism is now warranted.⁶⁷

The difficulties of AKEL to publish *the* history, or at least *a* history of Cypriot Communism, can be read as a complex story that can be understood only by appreciating the party’s structures and history, its internal power dynamics and contestations, its habitus and modus operandi. The complex relation of CPC to the Comintern and

Κύπρου, http://papademetris.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1522%3As-964&catid=147%3A1950-1952-14&Itemid=117

⁶⁴ CC of AKEL, 1983, *AKEL, The Party of the Working People*, AKEL, Nicosia. This is a shorter version, 148-page long, of the 400-page long Greek publication *ΑΚΕΛ, Το Κόμμα του Εργαζομένου Λαού* (AKEL, Nicosia, 1978), celebrating the 50-year anniversary in 1976, published in 1978.

⁶⁵ CC of AKEL, 1983, *AKEL, The Party of the Working People*, p. 16

⁶⁶ The pictures of Servas and Ioannou never appear in the above party publication. Later on, under Christofias, Fifis Ioannou is partly rehabilitated, as Christofias wrote the preface to the book by Fifis Ioannou, Ioannou, F. (2005) *Έτσι Άρχισε το Κυπριακό (This is How the Cyprus Problem Started)*. Athens: *Philistor*. Subsequent leaders of AKEL, Andros Kyprianou (2009-2021) and Stefanos Stefanou (2021-), have continued the processes of partial rehabilitation for Ploutis Servas and Adam Adamantos by being speakers at meeting AKEL had organised to honour these political figures.

⁶⁷ Trimikliniotis, N. ‘The National Question, Partition and Geopolitics in the 21st Century: The Cyprus Problem, the Social Question and the Politics of Reconciliation’, *Global Discourse*, vol. 18, issues 2/3, 2018, 303-320, doi.org/10.1080/23269995.2018.1461440. Also see, Trimikliniotis, Nicos. (2022) ‘Ξαναδιαβάζοντας το Κυπριακό Ζήτημα στο Τρίγωνο Κύπρου-Ελλάδας-Τουρκίας: Ο Αντιαποικιακός Αγώνας, το Εθνικό Ζήτημα και η Αριστερά από τον 20ό στον 21ο αιώνα’ (Rereading the Cyprus Issue in the Cyprus-Greece-Turkey Triangle: The Anti-Colonial Struggle, the National Question and the Left from the 20th to the 21st Century), *Θέσεις*, vol. 160, July- September 2022, 117-153.

the contradictions and changes of the international communist movement line is an additional factor complicating matters. As for the internal factors, the banning of the CPC in 1931, forcing it underground, gave communists an opportunity to engage in trade union activity as an excellent political outlet that largely ‘sheltered’ the party from possible divisions on ‘dogmatic’ issues that plagued other parties. The downside of this, however, was that it forced serious theoretical debates underground, generating traditions that prefer a kind of pragmatic ‘practical’ approach, by focusing on handling the ‘practicalities’ of everydayness, rather than grappling with the Marxian ‘theoretical practice’. Hence, there is little theoretical debate on the strategy for socialist transition in Cyprus, which would be part and parcel of the anticolonial struggle as guide for political action. Also, let’s not forget that the pioneers were no longer in the leadership to defend their old positions. This pragmatism is entrenched in the party modus operandi, which allowed for flexibility for the leadership to change its position and the party’s central slogans would shift and change without much debate based on theoretical grounds or reference to previous positions.

The dominant view amongst Cypriot Communists is that the road to socialism passes through different ‘stages’ of the struggle; the first stage of which is a national liberation against colonialism. The task here is establishing an anti-imperialist front that would lead the anticolonial struggle.⁶⁸ With the establishment of AKEL in 1941, the illegal CPC became as secret internal organisation as the driving force, until it was dissolved within the broader party, with the communists assuming the leading role. AKEL adopted ‘scientific socialism’ as its leading theory/ideology, and democratic centralism as its organisational mode to be fully ‘Bolshevised’ in a transition between 1945 to 1952. This is a 20-year delay process when compared with other communist parties, which coincided with the shift of the party line from self-governance to *Enosis*. The new leadership rejected the position of the pioneers of communism on the national question and the debate on the subject was frozen on the national question. AKEL was simply the historical continuation of the CPC within AKEL and that was it.

⁶⁸ There were some who took a different line then, however these were minority views, mainly inspired by Trotskyist critiques. Even today there are those who criticise AKEL for ‘stagism’, a Stalinist remnant, suggesting that the Left in Cyprus can only reemerge if it steps out of the confines of the “national question. See L. Fischer, D. Economou (2015) “Cyprus at the Crossroads”, *Jacobin* 26.5.2015, <https://jacobin.com/2015/05/cyprus-communists-syriza-greece> and L. Fischer (2017) “Reuniting Cyprus?”, *Jacobin*, 27.1.2017, <https://jacobin.com/2017/01/cyprus-reunification-negotiations-akel-kke-greece-turkey>. Some defend the stagist approach, see Katsourides, Y. (2014) “The National Question in Cyprus and the Cypriot Communist Left in the Era of British Colonialism (1922–59)”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 16:4, 474-501, DOI: 10.1080/19448953.2014.940765

In this context, since the 1950s, openly debating the history of the party was hardly a priority. It was a mass party from the 1940s with the aim of appealing to broader masses and with the adoption of Marxism-Leninism as its guiding ideology, and it faced a fierce anti-communist propaganda by the Right and the church. The engagement in everyday affairs and institutional politics made theoretical and ideological debates, including the party's history, an *internal* matter for the cadres' education and for the higher echelons of the leadership in international relations with other communist parties and internal ideological education.⁶⁹ It was not a core part of the decision-making process for learning, adapting and sharpening of theoretical/ideological or scientific production of knowledge for strategic purposes. This led to a general refraining from engaging in theoretical debates and the production of theoretical texts. The *habitus* of the party cadres was one of prioritising and focusing on immediate practical tasks of everyday politics, which was translated into a reluctance to critically evaluate past positions that may cause current or future rifts and divisions over what is perceived as a bygone era. The result is the long absence of a genuine debate about the strategy not only of the past, but also about the future.

Everything changes, however. Scholarship since the 1990s has debunked the nationalist attempts to monopolise the liberation struggles, as new generations of scholars have produced excellent studies based on a variety of methodology and archival material that has transformed the research agenda on Cypriot historiography. This has opened space for such debates, coming from different disciplines such as sociology,⁷⁰ anthropology, social psychology and history.⁷¹ Sadly, these insights have had a marginal effect on the asphyxiated public sphere dominated by irredentism, and nationalism has left little space for a proper historical enquiry in what is called 'public

⁶⁹ There have always been commemorations and has numerous internal lectures and seminars on history of the communism, but there is no systematic 'official' history as such.

⁷⁰ Trimikliniotis, N. (2019) '100 Years of Sociology in Colonial and Post-Colonial Cyprus: Mapping Public Sociology and Critical Thought of a Small Divided Island-Country', *Cyprus Review*, Volume 31: 1, Fall 2018, 133-191.

⁷¹ Papadakis, Yiannis. 'Narrative, Memory and History Education in Divided Cyprus: A Comparison of Schoolbooks on the "History of Cyprus"'. *History and Memory*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2008, pp. 128-48. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2979/his.2008.20.2.128>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2022. Rebecca Bryant and Yiannis Papadakis (eds)(2012) *Cyprus and the politics of Memory. History, Community and Conflict*, I. B. Tauris 2012; Psaltis, C. & Lytras, E.& Costache, S. (2011). *History Educators in the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Community of Cyprus: Perceptions, Beliefs and Practices*. UNDP-ACT. ISBN: 978-9963-703-05-0; Çiftçi, D. (2018) 'Remembering the Past: The Collective Memory and Historiographies of Cyprus', *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 7(3), 152-162.

history'.⁷² Some serious critiques did emerge only after 1974, but EOKA's irredentism in the form of the Enosis ideology was never officially challenged; in fact it continued to be celebrated, and was 'saved' by distinguishing EOKA (1955-59) from EOKA B (1971-1974). In any case, by the 1990s, there was gradual rehabilitation of the old right and nationalism. As memory faded, the *Enosis* and irredentism is celebrated by the Right, whilst there is an emergence of a new vigorous nationalistic far right, including neo-Nazi groups, which connect to elements of the 'old right'. It is not merely the continuation of an ossified political or intellectual polarisation, which artificially benefits from the polarisations, despite the fact that many such political cleavages and polarisations have played some role in establishing 'taboos' and 'totems'. We are dealing with various forms of contestations in a society polarised and fragmented ideologically and politically: old cleavages are being renewed and revamped in the new context where the political game and the terrain become more regional and global. A central element of the polarisation and discord in the struggle of ideas is about *history* and the future of a geopolitically divided country. This, essentially, is a manifestation of a rather ambivalent everyday life, of a fluid, at times violent, but 'lived' Cypriot independence that is contradictory and contested in a postcolonial divided 'border society'⁷³ where the notion 'border' and 'boundary' is a key characteristic of the society, reflected in country's division and its troubled past.⁷⁴

There is still a major gap in the study of the Left, particularly in the first half of the 20th century. As Bryan Palmer points out, scholars of the Left ought 'to combine a more rigorous intellectual engagement with the writing in the field and imaginative

⁷² Kelley, Robert. 'Public History: Its Origins, Nature, and Prospects'. *The Public Historian*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1978, pp. 16–28. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3377666>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2022; Jones, Arnita A. 'Public History Now and Then'. *The Public Historian*, vol. 21, no. 3, 1999, pp. 21–28. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3378956>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2022; Kean, H., Ashton, P. (2009). 'Introduction: People and their Pasts and Public History Today'. In Ashton, P., Kean, H. (eds) *People and their Pasts*, Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230234468_1

⁷³ The term belongs to Andreas Panayiotou, A. Moudouros, N., Misiaouli, A. (eds) (2022) *ANTHOLOGY Historical Texts and Analyses on the Evolution of the Positions on Cyprocentrism, Cypriot Consciousness, Cypriot Identity and Cypriotism*; Panayiotou, A. (2012). 'Border Dialectics: Cypriot Social and Historical Movements in a World Systemic Context', Trimikliniotis, N., Bozkurt, U. (eds) *Beyond a Divided Cyprus*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137100801_4 and Panayiotou, A., 'Συνοριακές Εμπειρίες: Ερμηνεύοντας τον Πατριωτισμό της Κυπριακής Αριστεράς' [Border Experiences: Interpreting the Patriotism of the Cypriot Left], Trimikliniotis, N. (ed.) *Το Πορτοκαλί της Κύπρου [The Orange Colour of Cyprus]*, Nisos, Athens 2005.

⁷⁴ However, it must be noted that 'peaceful' coexistence as political cooperation (with contradictions / disagreements) within a commonly run independent state lasted only three years, between 1960-63, but this is beyond the scope of this essay.

and disciplined research into a history where there remains much to explore'. Inevitably there will be disagreements:

'Let our differences be aired on the basis of accurate representations of interpretive positions. If this means reading more carefully and fully, backing away from pigeonholing assessments of arguments and analytic stands that we find uncongenial, so be it. We need to be both more demanding of ourselves and humbler before the challenges posed in writing the history of Communism.'⁷⁵

The publication of the two volumes on Cypriot Communism has extended an interesting debate, as the interest in the study of Communist and socialist and other radical alternatives seems to be gaining a new impetus in Cyprus. This is likely to continue further with other studies, including AKEL's own scheduled volume, by various authors to mark its centenary anniversary. This is not confined to Cyprus. Internationally, important new studies have sought to examine the relation between the Comintern and the Global South,⁷⁶ beyond archival studies, and these works pave the way for new readings, shedding new light and understandings on the relationship between the revolutionary movements and the relations between the various parties and movements, and Moscow. As Paolo Capuzzo and Anne Garland Mahler (2023, 7) point out,

'approaching this history from a more decentralized perspective can challenge the prevailing narrative on the Comintern, which has often treated affiliated organizations as though they faithfully followed directives from Moscow. Instead, communists in the Global South frequently ignored Moscow's directives or implemented them in more radical ways than instructed. The history of the Comintern has been characterized as "an unresolved debate between what can be termed history 'from above' and 'from below'"'.⁷⁷

We are referring here to 'a dynamic as a constant negotiation' and mediated on the ground in the dialectic of the struggles, in the specific circumstances of each colonial context. Such encounters took place within the colonial relations and colonials

⁷⁵ Palmer, Bryan D. 'How Can We Write Better Histories of Communism?' *Labour / Le Travail*, vol. 83, 2019, pp. 199–232. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26741327>. Accessed 6 Sep. 2022.

⁷⁶ Anne Garland Mahler and Paolo Capuzzo (eds) *The Comintern and the Global South. Global Designs/Local Encounters*. Routledge, 2023.

⁷⁷ Anne Garland Mahler and Paolo Capuzzo, 'Introduction: The Comintern and the Global South — Global Designs/Local Encounters', Paolo Capuzzo and Anne Garland Mahler (eds) *The Comintern and the Global South. Global Designs/Local Encounters*. Routledge, 2023, p.7.

themselves influenced each other. In the context of Cyprus, there are only scattered references to such encounters and relations.⁷⁸

Today it is essential to rethink the past in a way that contextualises and *connects* Cypriot communism to the international context. This was more than apparent in the interviews the present author conducted with the 90-year-old veteran intellectual,⁷⁹ who had been entrusted to deliver to AKEL the documents and belongings of Vatis: the encounter of a young Cypriot Communist with other colonials fighting against colonialism, was a source of inspiration, knowledge and comradeship that gave them a sense of purpose, courage and worldliness. The veteran spoke with nostalgia of his encounters with fellow leftists from British Guiana in London, the colonial metropolis. He underscored that it was only at that moment that he appreciated how crucial it was in the anticolonial struggle of a small country in the British Empire to be part of something much broader, a piece in the puzzle of the global struggles for liberation. On his first day at the London School of Economics in 1953, he spoke with keenness and a spark in his eye as if the encounter, some 70 years earlier, had happened just the previous day, of how he ran into a meeting at Holborn Hall. The speaker was the deposed prime minister of the British Guiana (under British dominion), Cheddi Jagan, leader of the People's Progressive Party. Churchill had ordered the British army to overthrow the elected government and suspended the constitution on the grounds that the country would turn Communist.⁸⁰

Cypriot Communism, and more broadly the Cypriot Left of today, is a product of its history and times. It was a 20th century political response of the colonial workers' movement in Cyprus within the global context of liberation struggles following

⁷⁸ There is little on the subject in the works by those who have studied this period Leventis, Y (1997) 'The Politics of the Cypriot Left in the Inter-War Period', *Synthesis: Review of Modern Greek Studies*, 2:1 (1997), pp.1-15; Katsiaounis, R., *Η Διασκεπτική, 1946-1948, με Ανασκόπηση της Περιόδου 1878-1945*, Nicosia, Κέντρο Επιστημονικών Ερευνών, Cyprus Scientific Research, 2000; Katsiaounis, R., 'Cyprus 1931-1959: The Politics of the Anti-colonial Movement', *Επετηρίδα του Κέντρου Επιστημονικών Ερευνών*, XXXIII, Cyprus Scientific Research, Nicosia, 2007, pp 441-469; Richter, H. A. (2003) 'The Cypriot Communist Party and the Comintern', *The Cyprus Review*, Vol. 15 No. 1 (2003), 99-119; Katsourides, Y. (2014) *The History of the Communist Party in Cyprus: Colonialism, Class and the Cypriot Left*, I. B. Tauris, London.

⁷⁹ The interviews with the veteran intellectual took place in London in April and May 2022. Numerous other interviews have also been conducted and others are scheduled in the ongoing study.

⁸⁰ He spoke, on 22 October 1953, and was covered by the press at the time. See John Prados and Arturo Jimenez-Bacardi, 'CIA Covert Operations: The Overthrow of Cheddi Jagan in British Guiana', *The National Security Archive*, 6 April 2020, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/intelligence/2020-04-06/cia-covert-operations-overthrow-cheddi-jagan-british-guiana-1964>

the October revolution that found resonance in its local context. Understanding the encounters of representatives of this movement with other socialist, Communist and anticolonial movements of the world is crucial if we are to understand history.

Let's hope to see further publications on the history of the Left, communism, socialism, and nationalism in Cyprus⁸¹ as related, compared and contrasted to various regional and global processes. Rather than reading the Cypriot Left as an 'exception', it is high time to properly historicise and connect the local as manifested in the Cypriot social formation to broader, regional and international transformations. In this sense, the history of Cypriot Communism can escape the narrow and peripheral confines of the history of the Left in a small colonial country: rather it can be viewed as part of the broader story of decolonisation, liberation, and emancipation. Moreover, this is not *only* about the past, but *equally about the present and the future*. As the Cypriot veteran in 1953, then a young Communist student, told me: 'At that time I realised that I was at the right place and at the right time: little Cyprus was part of something much bigger than I ever imagined and I was there to witness and feel it!'

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⁸¹ Another important volume published is edited by Nicos Christofis (ed) (2022) *Μεταξύ Έθνους και Τάξης: Αριστερές και Κυπριακό, 1920-1974 (Between Nation and Class: The Left and The Cyprus Problem, 1920-1974)*, Psifides, Thessaloniki.

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