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National memory and Turkish-Cypriot textbooks

National memory is existential to build a nation. Each nation-state or each nationalism creates its own national memory, which justifies the existence of the state in the particular territory and contributes to the unity of the nation. Therefore, cult of history and cult of the nation are not to separate. This turns the nation into a community of myths. The myths are symbolically influential structures, which help to the permanent functions of legitimization and regulation of the national being. In the myth, we find the past, the present and the future of the nation united. Therefore, national memory is impossible without myths. Cult of history and myths are the essential part of the national memory as the ideological system of the nation (Flacke, 1998, p. 19/20).

It is a well-known phenomenon that the national historiography reproduces the national memory through the adaptation of the mechanisms of forgetting and remembrance in a selective way. The ultimate goal of such historiography is not the accurate account of history but an effective and efficient contribution to national goals and unity.

“History is always selective: in the same way that it describes the group, it also constructs it, ‘invents’ it. In recent history, nation-states have incorporated just such a unity, where acknowledging the significance of history was linked with a missionary consciousness regarding the future and affecting the actions of the present” (Pingel).

History is not merely knowledge about the past. The conveying of such knowledge determines meaning for the present; it is constructed to give a particular direction for the future. Memory and forgetting refer to the past and construct a certain history. The views or aims of different groups concerning the future become of primary importance in articulating account of the past. In other words, when talking of the past, one implicitly talks of the future as well. (Papadakis, 1993 p. 88)

National memory is a form of the collective memory, which functions like a “theater” of certain chosen events, and is only indirectly transmittable through media, education, and not directly through the individual participation. These events need to be reconstructed in such a symbolic way so that they can operate “properly” in the national memory. There is no such a thing as the past as organic part of the memory, simply because there are no pure facts of the memory. Only after the symbolic reconstruction can “these events” or “facts” become functional for the national consciousness. And this process of symbolic re-construction is not free of political interests and orientations of the nation in the given moment. Above all, national memory is an unavoidable condition for the construction and embodiment of the national identity.

By looking into the national memory, identity, and the transmission of national memory in Cyprus, the crucial point is that the points of reference for memory and identity do not refer to Cyprus itself but to factors outside: Greece, Turkey and Greek and Turkish nationalisms (Pingel).

The reason for this is the fact that the ultimate aim to unite with "mother Greece" and "mother Turkey" respectively became the main goal of the nationalisms in Cyprus. The result was the denial of the state building within Cyprus and the development of the two mutually exclusive ethnocultural communities. Cyprus was not perceived as a self-contained territory, in which an independent state could be created but as a piece of territory, which assumes meaning only if it is a part of the "super family" of the Greek and/or Turkish nation.

The construction and the transmission of national memories in Cyprus are to be understood in this context of nation building in Greece and Turkey. The development of Greek nationalism in Cyprus through the nineteenth century of Greek intellectual expansion politicized the local ethnological traditions in Cyprus and turned them into dynamic elements of political change. The growth of the national consciousness and national assertion that culminated in a political vision of nation emancipation through union with Greece was the determinant element in construction and transmission of the national memory. The education system based solely on the justification and articulation of the policy for the union with Greece. A British colonial document of 1928 refers to the Greek-Cypriot education policy as follows:

"All Greek-Cypriot elementary schools use the 'Analytical Program' as published in Greece, definitely adopted by the Board of Education. No reading books are allowed in these schools, except those that have been approved by the 'critical committee in Athens'. The gymnasiums of each town and the teacher training school are recognized by the Greek Ministry of Education, and work under the regulations issued therefrom. Portraits of King Constantine and Queen Sophia, of Venizelos and other worthies adorn the walls of the classrooms together with elaborate maps of modern Greece, while that of Cyprus, if to be found at all, is as a rule small, out of date and frequently behind the blackboard." Ronald Storrs, Governor of Cyprus, 1928 - (CO - Colonial Office, Public Record Office) [CO 67 / 2243/17]

Indeed up to the de facto division of Cyprus by the intervention/invasion of the Turkish army in 1974, the Greek-Cypriot official history and narrative is nothing but legitimization of the demand for the unification of Cyprus with Greece. Therefore, one of the main characteristics of the Greek-Cypriot textbooks has been the construction of the concept of continuity of the Hellenism in Cyprus since ancient Greeks. Emphasizing the influence of the ancient Greeks on Cyprus underestimates all the political and cultural links with the other eastern Mediterranean countries (Kullapis, p. 281).

Another remarkable point is the use of the concept of "Cypriots" exclusively for the Greek-Cypriots. The impression one has is that all Cypriots are Greeks. For example one reads that: "[...] ultimate aim of the Cypriots during the colonial was nothing but unification with Greece" (Kullapis, p. 283).

The multiethnic structure of the population has been systematically ignored. The Turkish-Cypriots only appear in the Greek-Cypriot textbooks after the failure of the national aim of unification with Greece and the emergence of the independent Cypriot state, and this in a biased and ambiguous way. It is in-

teresting to note that the president of the bi-communal Cypriot state Archbishop Makarios used to refer to the Turkish-Cypriot citizens as "the co-habitant element" (το συνσικκον οσυχεισω). Between 1960 and 1974, there was no proper use of the word "Turkish-Cypriots". The Greek-Cypriot textbooks describe the Turks who came to Cyprus during and after the Ottoman occupation (1571) as "basically lazy and greedy". For example: "Life without hard work and suffering is not possible [...] unless we do injustice to the others and we live on their expenses. The Turks of Cyprus used to do so" (Kullapis, p. 284).

The Greek-Cypriot textbooks take into account the Turkish-Cypriots after the invasion/intervention of the Turkish army in 1974, which led to the division of Cyprus. Since then, the official Greek-Cypriot policy is to establish the unity of state and society. Therefore the international community must be convinced that the coexistence with the Turkish-Cypriots is possible. However, the inability to move away from the nationalist paradigm hinders the Greek-Cypriot community to develop a politics of recognition towards the Turkish-Cypriots. In fact, the politics of denial continues. "All secondary schoolbooks after 1974 are referring to the Greek origins of the Turkish-Cypriots. This has been never an issue before this period" (Kullapis, p. 284). The ethnic nationalism of the Greek-Cypriots and their concept of belonging, which appeals to ethnicity, blood and ancestry, ignored totally the civic bonds and the citizenship. The politics of denial of the "other" is an expression and a result of the ethnic nationalism, which turned against the Cypriot state and rejected the recognition of the multiculturalism of the Cypriot society. The words of the Greek-Cypriot Minister of Education in 1968, are a clear example for the ethnic-nationalist perception of Cyprus: "Cyprus does not belong to the Cypriots but to the whole Hellenism" (Kizilyürek, p. 25). The Turkish-Cypriot argument goes to the same direction: "Cyprus is Turkish".

Nationalism arrived to the Turkish-Cypriot community almost one century after it had arrived to the Greek-Cypriot community. The Turkish-Cypriots seem to have been affected by the Turkish nationalism during and after the emergence of modern Turkey. However, the gradual transformation of the Muslim community into a dynamic Turkish ethnic community on the island, that saw itself as part of the Greater Turkish nation, is not to be understood independently of the raising Greek-Cypriot national consciousness. There is a close relationship, perhaps a dialectical one, between ethnic antagonism and the development of the Turkish-Cypriot national identity. The call on ethnicity, although influenced by Turkish nationalism was encouraged by the British colonialism. Its aim was to divide and to rule, and it developed in reaction to the Greek-Cypriot national aspiration of Enosis (unification with Greece), which was perceived, partly for historical reasons as a threat to the existence of Turkish-Cypriots in Cyprus. It is not a coincidence that the spread of nationalist feelings among the Turkish-Cypriots gained momentum in the 1950s when the Greek-Cypriot demand for the unification with Greece reached its apex. This process of constant conflict has itself crystallized a Turkish-Cypriot sense of

ethnic identity in what was before only a linguistic-religious category. It was during this process that the Turkish demand for the division of the island and the unification with Turkey came to be pronounced.

The dreams of Enosis and partition were justified by the arguments that the Greek-Cypriots are culturally and spiritually one with the Greeks of Greece and the Turkish-Cypriots are one with the Turks of Turkey and they are part of the Turkish and Greek nations respectively.

In this nationalistic antagonism, each community tries to legitimize its own national goal and denies legitimacy to the other one. Accordingly, the existence of Turkish-Cypriots in Cyprus is for the Greek-Cypriot national memory not of any historical political significance and "most of them are in fact Christians who converted to Islam." For the Turkish-Cypriot national memory, "Cyprus was never Greek" and "Greek-Cypriots are in fact not Greek but remains of different nations, who passed through Cyprus throughout history" (Serter, pp. 7-8).

This gives us already a hint about the construction and instrumentalization of the national memory in both Cypriot communities, who are not ready "to cross their memories" or "to exchange their memories" but are rather insisting on a mutual denial. At this point, I would like to concentrate on how national memory is transmitted into the Turkish-Cypriot textbooks. For this purpose, I examined the history textbooks:

1) Vehbi Zeki Serter, *Kıbrıs Tarihi*, (The History of Cyprus), Nicosia, 1999, approved for use in secondary schools.

2) Vehbi Zeki Serter, *Kıbrıs Türk Mücadele Tarihi*, (The History of the Turkish-Cypriot Struggle), 2 volumes, Nicosia, 1978, in use in Lycee (higher level of secondary schools).

"Kıbrıs Tarihi" (History of Cyprus)

In the very first pages of the book, the author writes that Cyprus is a geographical extension of Anatolia and emphasizes the importance of Cyprus for Turkey to demonstrate that Greece had no historical connections with Cyprus and Greeks living in Cyprus are not Greeks. A comparison of the importance of Cyprus for Turkey and Greece reads as follows:

"Cyprus controls the Southern ports of Turkey. In case of a Russian threat, the Turkish army can be attacked from three different fronts and can ask for help only from the Southern ports of Turkey. Cyprus for Turkey is for the point of history, also very important. Our ancestors conquered Cyprus in 1571 for the cost of 80000 martyrs' lives. The Turks ruled Cyprus until 1878, for three centuries, and treated the native population in a very good manner. They brought freedom and justice to the island. The Turks have developed Cyprus and built so many of monuments, which gave Cyprus the Turkish Character. In short, one can say that Cyprus is historically, geographically, strategically and economically tied to Anatolia and a part of Asia Minor" (p. 7).

The author goes further to say that Cyprus has neither historically nor strategically importance for Greece. Greeks never ruled Cyprus. The fact that they created at ancient times some colonies in Cyprus for economical reasons, does not give them any rights over Cyprus.

“Cyprus is 600 miles away from Greece. Therefore. Cyprus has neither geographically no strategically importance for Greece. The Greeks, who exist today in Cyprus, are not Greeks. They are, as many foreign historians accepted, remains, relics of different nations that invaded Cyprus throughout history. Therefore. Greece has in this sense [the author probably means the ethnic sense] also nothing to do with Cyprus. But, as it is well known, Greece, dreaming of the Great Idea, tries to possess Cyprus. This effort is continuing, since 1878, increasingly. But, let us say it right now, so long the Great Turkish motherland exists, these dreams will never be materialized and will remain empty sweet dreams” (p. 7/8).

In this rather long quotation, one can already read what the author tries to “prove” in his 160-page book: “Cyprus is Turkish”, “Greek never ruled Cyprus”, “Greeks living in Cyprus are not Greeks”. In the following pages, the author develops his theory by giving his own interpretation about the Greek language derived from the Orthodox-Christian religion in Cyprus. Specifically, he demonstrates that the establishment of the Greek language as the official language by the Byzantine Empire in the 6th century resulted in the union of the mixed population of Cyprus under common language and religion. That is how this mixed population, which has nothing to do with Greekness came to consider itself Greek (p. 26).

So it done away with Greeks in Cyprus and with their rights. According to the author, Greek-Cypriots have no right to unify with Greece, and Cyprus is Turkish because Ottomans – What the author called Turks – ruled Cyprus for three centuries and 80.000 Ottoman soldiers died and became martyrs during the conquest of the island in 1571. As a famous Turkish national poem describes: “Land becomes patria only if there are people to die for its sake” (Arif Nihat Asya. Vatan, Poetry on Homeland).

The “discursive strategy” of the author is evident through his emphasis on the “80.000 martyrs”, in Turkish “sehit” – deriving from Jihad, holy war in Arabic – which attaches a “holy meaning” to the fact of the Ottoman conquest of Cyprus by using the political language of Islam (Lewis, 1988).

What we have here is an example of the capturing of history in the national interest. In Homi Bhabha’s useful phrase, nations are like “narratives” which tell themselves and others stories about who they are and where they have come from. History and nation are inseparable. The point about this mobilization of history is that it is an exercise in legitimization; it is not to be taken as a history lesson in the sense that it is an accurate account of the past. We might characterize it as “myth-history” in the sense that it sets out to celebrate identity and associated values, and to describe and explain the world in which such identity and values are experienced (Mc Crone, 1998, p. 51).

According to the author, Cyprus under Ottoman rule is a country of equality and freedom, but the “unthankful” Orthodox Church of Cyprus “exploited

the tolerance and betrayed the Goodness of Turks and rebelled against the Turkish administration. For this reason, the Archbishop and other Bishops were killed in 1821" (p. 70/71).

For the author, the British period in Cyprus is characterized by Greek rebellion for the union with Greece. In his words:

"After the Ottoman rule has been replaced by Great Britain, the Greek-Cypriots started a campaign for the unification of the island with Greece. The terrorist EOKA attacked in 1955 the Greeks, who did not wish the unification of Cyprus with Greece, the British and the Turks. This led to the inter-communal fighting" (p. 90/91).

"When the Republic of Cyprus established in 1960, the Greeks prepared a genocide plan to massacre all the Turks, in order to realize Enosis" (p. 105 and 113).

"At the end of 1963, the Greeks, for this aim, attacked the Turks, and gave examples of unique barbarism, which are rare to be found in the world" (p. 114).

"In 1964, Turkey send war planes to Cyprus. The coward Greeks and Greek-Cypriots disappeared. The 34 Turkish flagged war planes made the Greeks and Greek-Cypriots to vomit blood" (p. 118/119).

"In 1967, Greeks and Greek-Cypriots attacked and looted two Turkish villages. The barbaric Greeks tortured and killed the Turks. Among the dead bodies, some were cut into pieces" (p. 123).

"As the Greeks tried to materialize Enosis in 1974, Turkey intervened to hinder Enosis. Greeks who once resisted against the Italians by saying 'OXI' (in English: no) tried to do the same, this time with Turks. However, they had forgotten a point: in front of them, there was not an Italian but a TURK" (Emphasis from the author of the textbooks, written in capital letters) (p. 132).

"After the Turkish operation began, the Greeks gave examples of unique barbarism in the defenceless Turkish villages. They buried alive, without exception, the children, women, men, and elderly men" (p. 134).

The story, rather the tale, the author is telling us, finishes with a grand finale. The writer describes the "victory" of the Turkish army in Cyprus in July/August 1974, which brought about the de facto partition of Cyprus. Here is the grand finale in the words of the writer: "During the operations [of the Turkish army] towards East and West, the Greek and Greek-Cypriot forces kneed in front of MEHMETCIK'S [a word for sympathetic, smooth and humanist presentation of Turkish soldiers] sharp sword diffused, and collapsed. These were cowards Levant herds, what Grivas and Makarios called grandchildren of Greeks and considered invincible, who could kill only defenceless Turks. Haven't been thrown into the sea, the grandfathers of the same nation on the 9th of September 1922 in Izmir? The history is repeating itself. This time, the Turkish Armed Forces were defeating the Hellenic imperialism in Turkish Cyprus" (p. 135). All in all, the past is a powerful source of legitimacy for those who would change the present for a new future (Mc Crone, p. 52).

The partition of Cyprus, as "the new future", which is put forward as national goal by Turkish nationalism in Cyprus, leads the author to "charge" history with connecting the past-present-future in a national narrative, in the most selective way, which in turn, serves the legitimization of this "new future", of partition.

Before concluding, I would like to present in short some parts of the other book of the same writer, which is also in use in the Turkish-Cypriot schools.

Vehbi Zeki Serter, *History of the Turkish-Cypriot struggle 1:*

The introduction starts by stating that

“For every Greek who died for the unification of Cyprus with Greece (Enosis), died a Turk to hinder Enosis.”

“Cyprus was for 307 years under Turkish rule, but never under Greek rule. For the sake of Enosis and Great Idea, there was a lot of bloodshed, because the small, insignificant Greece had supported the Greek-Cypriot struggle for Enosis.

Turks of Cyprus are saved by their motherland Turkey.

In the morning of the 20th July 1974, Turks of Cyprus united with their motherland, which they were missing passionately for all these years. Turks of Cyprus will continue their holy struggle on the path of Great Atatürk, until the end, with support of our motherland Turkey, and will succeed”.

The very same arguments, as in the first book, are also here presented: “Cyprus is Turkish! The Greek-Cypriot struggle for Enosis is illegal and barbaric. The EOKA movement is merely a terrorist movement. However, Cyprus is and will remain Turkish” (p. 61).

The writer quotes statements of different Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot nationalist personalities as a response to the Greek demand for Enosis. An example: “I tell the Greeks, who are threatening the world peace, that because of Cyprus someone will be bleeding. However, this will not be the Turks but the Greek nation, which once spoiled with their blood the fields of Izmir” (p. 63).

According to the writer, the responsibility for the Turkish riots against the Greek inhabitants of Istanbul in 1955 lies on the Greek side, because they created such hatred among the Turks. (p. 70)

With regard to the inter-communal killings, the author refers to the victimized Turks and the aggressive barbaric Greeks. (p. 73) He does not hesitate to take political position in judging the events in a Manichean way. He writes that “the establishment of an independent state of Cyprus in 1960 was wrong, [his] opinion is that the best solution for the Cyprus question is the partition of the island” (p. 140).

Vehbi Zeki Serter, *History of the Turkish-Cypriot struggle 2:*

In the second volume, the author deals with the years after the independence and with the inter-communal fighting that broke out at the end of 1963 and continued in 1964. For the author, Greek-Cypriots had nothing in mind but to massacre the Turkish-Cypriots and for this purpose, they developed even a plan. The book is telling stories about the “spoiled Greeks” who were killing the Turks to achieve Enosis, and the “Turkish heroes”, who were bravely resisting to Enosis.

Here, Hollywood’s concept of “bad guys and good guys” achieved its apex.

“Greeks are dreamers and liars because the Greek [in third person singular] throughout the history is asking for SOMETHING [emphasis from the textbook author]. He demands Dollars from America, and Pounds from England. He demands money, he

demands territory. For example, from his neighbour Albania, he wants the Epiros, from Bulgaria, demands Macedonia. In the past, he wanted from Turkey the whole western Asia Minor. Now, he demands Cyprus. If he tomorrow wants Egypt because of some Greek element in Egypt, do not get surprised [...]. In order to defend our rights and freedoms, we will resist to you. And, for this aim, if we don't find a piece of stick or stone, we will take in hand the bones of our 80.000 martyrs who died for this land, and resisted to you" (p. 81/82).

Similar quotations or statements are often to be found in the book. The 80.000 martyrs give evidence for the Turkishness of Cyprus. And the Turkish struggle against Enosis takes its strength from these martyrs, but also the national struggle for partition of the island searches its legitimacy mainly in the Ottoman soldiers, who died during the conquest of Cyprus in 1571. The logic implied here is simple: "Where the Turkish blood is spoiled there belongs to the Turkish nation".

The 80.000 martyrs, who died in 1571, and the discourse around them leads to the denial of 80 % of the population, which is Greek-Cypriot, and lives today on the island and since 1974 is not allowed to enjoy the northern part of Cyprus. Ernest Renan's reply to the German historian Dr. Strauss, who had argued that the Alsace-Lorraine is German because many German lived and died there, is well in place here: "Let us respect the rights of the alive ones, as much as we respect the rights of the dead ones" (Kühner, pp. 11–12).

Epilogue

Walking along the line which divides Cyprus into two parts, one reads on both sides of the line the same slogans in Greek and Turkish:

»Δεν Ξχνω«, "Unutmam", in English "I don't forget".

This insistence on remembrance refers to the national memories in Cyprus: Next to these slogans, Greek and Turkish flags are waving and the walls are covered with the pictures of the national heroes of antagonistic sides. This set-up serves the same scope as the textbooks in Cyprus: to remember selectively, to register what happened to "us", and forget what we did to "them", to legitimize our own nationalism and to condemn "theirs".

The main concern of this selective memory is not to remember what happened in the past, but to instrumentalize the past for the political aims of the present and future. It is also hindering the emergence of empathy among the citizens on both sides, who are willing to indulge into "Vergangenheitsbewältigung", to cross their memories and establish communication. In fact, it distorts the communication among the two communities of Cyprus.

The national memories in Cyprus seem to have two major functions. With regard to the "other", they lead the members of the one's own ethnic group to the politics of denial, instead of recognition, and with regard to "us", they obstruct the development of critical thought and social critique. They create an artificial uniformity among the members of the respective ethnic groups. No one is responsible for the misdoings to "them". Hence no one is accountable.

“The hell is the other.” The most popular slogan in Cyprus, in both communities, is “We don’t forget!”. But do we really remember?

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