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# Non-apologies and prolonged silences in post-conflict settings: The case of post-colonial Cyprus

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## Abstract

Despite the growing use of apologies in post-conflict settings, cases of non-apology remain unaddressed and continue to puzzle scholars. This article focuses on the absence of apology by non-state and anti-state actors by examining the case of the Cypriot armed group EOKA, which has refused to offer an apology to the civilian victims of its 'anti-colonial' struggle (1955–1959). Using field data and parliamentary debates, and drawing on comparisons, this article analyses the factors that contributed to a lack of apology. It is argued that the inherited timelessness of Greek nationalism, and the impression of a perpetual need for defence, set up textbook conditions for the development of a hegemonic discourse and prevented an apology for human rights violations.

## Keywords

political apologies, Cyprus, Greek nationalism, reconciliation

## Introduction

In 1996, following 30 years of fighting against apartheid in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) offered an apology to its victims, when Thabo Mbeki, on behalf of the ANC, apologized to the innocent individuals killed by the ANC and to the families of the men killed in the party's detention camps outside South Africa. Similarly, in 1999 in

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Guatemala, the guerrilla group Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG – Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity) issued an apology for its excessive use of violence. The apology happened three years after the URNG had laid down its arms and followed the publication of a report that attributed 3 per cent of murders committed during the civil war to them. In 2002, the Provisional Irish Republican Army issued an apology on the 30th anniversary of Bloody Friday to all non-combatant casualties of the three-decade-long campaign to unite Ireland, which ended in 1998 with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. These apologies were all offered shortly after the respective conflicts ended, and made a significant contribution to addressing past injustices, reconciling society and healing victims by acknowledging wrongs.

Our era has been called the ‘Age of Apology’ (Shapiro, 1997; Brooks, 1999: 3). There are myriad examples of states, corporations and individuals addressing injurious actions in the past by issuing apologies. Globally, we see the increasing use of apologies between states and between state leaders and their citizens over current and historical matters of policy, culture and security. Scholars have largely focused on state-level apologies and moral or instrumental factors influencing the delivery of the apology and its success (Barkan and Karn, 2006a; Gibney et al., 2008; Nobles, 2008). However, apologies by non-state or anti-state actors are increasingly common and, as such, deserve more attention from scholars.

The examples above suggest that in post-conflict societies, once the regime is stable and a consolidated democracy has emerged, apologies by rebel or paramilitary groups are helpful to the peace process by renewing civic trust. Such apologies are not always forthcoming, however. Unlike the organizations mentioned above, EOKA (Εθνική Οργάνωση Κυπρίων Αγωνιστών – National Organization of Cypriot Fighters), a Cypriot anti-colonial armed group active between 1955 and 1959, refuse to apologize for injustices even now, more than 50 years after the conclusion of its activities.

Our examination of EOKA’s reluctance to apologize will provide useful insights into the patterns of silence, and the conditions which block the acknowledgement of truth in post-conflict settings. Our article is divided into three parts. The first provides an assessment of the literature on apologies and shows that present explanations fail to illuminate the situation of EOKA. The second presents the historical conditions within which EOKA killed civilians and asks why, despite the Republic of Cyprus’s acknowledgement of other prickly issues related to past violence, this was not possible in the case of EOKA. The last section explains how Greek nationalist discourse and its continuous emphasis on national enemies has prevented EOKA from apologizing.

## Apologies and non-apologies

Since the early 1990s a normative turn has informed the priorities of the international community, making reconciliation, transitional justice, apologies and a moral scrutiny of the past central tenets of post-conflict societies. The nature of violence in civil wars, involving not only regular soldiers but also irregulars and civilians, often results in significant civilian casualties. Therefore, in the aftermath of the cessation of hostilities, the objective is no longer merely a 'negative peace' – that is, the absence of violence – but a social transformation that will restore broken social bonds and reinstate collapsed institutions (Hamber, 2009: 55). In this dual normative context, apologies have become a useful tool of peace-building.

The scholarly literature has tended to focus on cases where there has been an apology, seeking to determine its effectiveness in promoting reconciliation and victim healing (Tavuchis, 1991; Lazare, 2004; Smith, 2008). Evaluation criteria highlight the extent of truth recovery and the genuineness of the apologizer (James, 2008; Macleod, 2007). But while trying to understand the obstacles to an apology, the literature tends to ignore cases where no such apology eventuated.

Political pressure from victims or third party groups, such as the government or tribunals, is the most likely motivator of an apology. In other cases, apologies are used as a trade-off: the expression of remorse in exchange for a mitigation of consequences or amnesty. The timing of an apology could indicate its use as a public relations tactic to gain votes or general sympathy and support (Bilder, 2008: 24–27). While these are genuine motivators, such 'quasi-apologies' – which could be either tactical, offering an explanation or excuses for the behaviour addressed in the apology, or formalistic – are seen as self-serving and therefore insincere (Macleod, 2007: v).

A more positive motivation revolves around a desire to create a bridging dialogue, which is then used for multiple purposes. Most importantly it reduces or eliminates 'the injustice gap', 'a gap between the way that things are and the way that they would be if things were fair' (Exline et al., 2007: 481). A bridging dialogue allows parties to a past conflict to become more cognisant of its underlying issues and consequences. A more inclusive collective narrative can be created, and groups can re-imagine their identity (Barkan and Karn, 2006b: 27). The healing created by this reconstruction helps prevent future obstructions in social relationships (Tavuchis, 1991) and breaks the cycle of hatred (Minow, 2003).

Ultimately, a perpetrator group may apologize to demonstrate *bona fide* empathy for its victims. This is the most genuine type of apology and the most likely to succeed; however, it is the least common in the political

sphere. It attests to a re-evaluation of their actions by the offenders and to their commitment to cooperation and change (Bilder, 2008: 24–27).

Political systems which force people to make alliances or hinder open and critical debate can easily prevent apologies by discouraging political elites from tackling the issue and risking the loss of coalition or voter support. No matter how strong the civil support for an apology, without elite subscription, an apology will never occur (Nobles, 2008: 108). Judicial repercussions and fear of reprisal through the court system can prevent an apology, as can the fear of backlash and punishment by the perpetrator's own group (Macleod, 2007: xv; Lind, 2008). The knowledge that a victim group could be empowered by an apology can stop perpetrators from speaking out, especially if they are not prepared to give up the power they wield through the media or the political system.

Perpetrator groups may also believe that they have nothing to apologize for (Nobles, 2008: 3), and that their cause justified any means or that the victims deserved the violence they suffered. This attitude demonstrates a lack of respect for the victims and their families (Coicaud and Jönsson, 2008: 87) as well as an inability to admit that even if the violence towards particular individuals could somehow be justified, their families did not deserve to suffer. Such an attitude may be testament to the perpetrator group's pride or its fear of humiliation (Dundes Renteln, 2008).

Finally, in the case of delayed apologies, the issue of collective guilt and responsibility becomes a significant impediment. With time, the original leadership, decision-makers or even group members pass away, leaving only those who try to keep the spirit and memory of the original perpetrator group alive, or at least benefit from their deeds. Members of new generations often reject apologies by arguing that they can't be held responsible for deeds they or their contemporaries did not commit. This claim is challenged by the idea that a structured organization is an agent whose existence transcends the individuals who comprise it (Thompson, 2008: 37). Groupings or collectives can even after some time accept responsibility for the actions of the group members, although those members may no longer be living.

The literature on apologies is mostly confined to a small number of well-known cases where an apology has been made, frequently with a relative degree of success. By focusing on specific debates, such as the timing and the functions of apologies – all of which presuppose the existence of apologies – other fundamental questions remain under-studied, such as that of why some societies silence aspects of their past and defer truth recovery. By analysing EOKA's refusal to address its past actions, we can provide broader insights into apologies generally and the prevention of truth recovery in societies emerging from conflict more specifically.

## EOKA and the 'anti-colonial' struggle

EOKA was formed in the mid-1950s as a response to British resistance to the demand by the Greek Cypriot community to achieve *Enosis* (unification) with mainland Greece. EOKA was led politically by Archbishop Makarios III and militarily by General George Grivas. Its intention was to use guerrilla tactics against the British to force them off the island and gain international sympathy; with the international focus on the 'Cyprus problem', Britain and the United Nations would be forced to solve the issue (Ehrlich, 1974: 11–12). On 1 April 1955, EOKA announced its presence to the British when bombs exploded in government buildings in several locations on the island (Holland, 1998: 52).

At the beginning of the struggle, the focus was on British military installations. The British, seeking an ally to prevent the loss of territory, turned to Turkey and encouraged the Turkish government to take an active interest in protecting Turkish Cypriot affairs (Clerides, 1989: 24). A conscious recruitment of Turkish Cypriots to the police and special forces was seen as collaboration with the enemy and converted the conflict into an inter-communal struggle in which EOKA was pitted not only against the British imperialists but also against Turkish Cypriot 'traitors'. The situation was further complicated because the main organization of the political Left, AKEL (Anorthotikó Kómma Ergazómenou Laou – the Cypriot Communist Party), agreed with EOKA on the overarching objective of *Enosis*, but objected to the use of armed struggle as the means to achieve this end. Instead of violence, AKEL proposed mass rallies that would unite both Cypriot communities. This made AKEL, in the eyes of EOKA (including its anti-communist leader, General Grivas), traitors and conspirators; consequently, leftists were targeted by EOKA as well (Hadjidemetriou, 2007: 347–348; Purcell, 1969: 263). At times AKEL labelled EOKA members 'thugs' in turn (Kakkoulis, 1990: 69).

There has not yet been an authoritative count of the number of casualties resulting from EOKA's activities.<sup>1</sup> The latest investigations based on the examination of British archives show that EOKA executed between 198 and 203 Greek Cypriots and 104 British soldiers during its struggle – a considerable figure on an island with a population of 550,000 people (Drousiotis, 2005a and 2005b). The fact that a significant proportion of those executed by EOKA were Greek Cypriots and only a minority were British has called into question the 'anti-colonial' nature of the struggle (Attalides, 1979: 9; Crawshaw, 1978: 200–257; Purcell, 1969: 272). Although most of EOKA's victims were executed as 'traitors', in reality the killings were often motivated either by anti-communist ideology or by personal vengeance.

The settling of old scores is a recurring phenomenon in civil wars (Kalyvas, 2006: 184).

EOKA's struggle ended with the signing of the London-Zurich agreements which formally established the Republic of Cyprus in 1960. Apologies most frequently occur immediately following the transition to peace and democracy. Conventional wisdom assumes that with the establishment of a new republic in Cyprus, the time would be ripe for an apology; EOKA could have freely and safely offered an apology without weakening the legitimacy of their struggle. Given the profound benefits of apologies, an apology from EOKA could have cultivated the ground for reconciliation. However, the historical injustice to the memory of those who were executed as traitors remains, even after five decades, largely due to EOKA's reluctance to acknowledge its crimes.

### **The timelessness of Greek Cypriot nationalism**

In order to explain the persistent reluctance of the 'Association of EOKA Combatants' (Sýndesmos Aghonistón EOKA) to apologize for past misdeeds to both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, we need to consider the passage of time as it relates to Greek Cypriot nationalism. The absence of a comprehensive political settlement on the Cyprus problem, in combination with the absence of apologies from the Turkish Resistance Organization (TMT) for Greek Cypriot casualties in the same period (1955–1959) could partly explain EOKA's unwillingness to issue an apology to Turkish Cypriot victims. The TMT was a paramilitary group in favour of partition (*taksim*) consisting of Turkish Cypriots. The group came about as a response to violence against the Turkish Cypriot community. Headed by Rauf Denktash and Riza Vuruskan, TMT provided defence for the Turkish Cypriot community and on occasion also attacked the Greek Cypriot community. However, the puzzle remains as to why EOKA has not apologized to Greek Cypriot victims.

The passage of time was a catalyst for the solution of other more intractable issues, such as the problem of those who went missing during the inter-communal violence of the 1960s and 1970s (Kovras, 2008), since it facilitated a change in the normative context within which domestic policy-makers and politicians in the two communities approached this humanitarian problem. In the case of EOKA's struggle, however, the passage of time had the reverse function, namely, to prevent an apology and an acknowledgement of past crimes. The conception of time is of paramount importance in Greek Cypriot nationalism – epitomized by EOKA's struggle – and has two overlapping expressions. It perceives the national community to be in a *constant* struggle to defend the nation from potential traitors that could

harm the community. This perception of time precludes introspection and excludes the possibility of re-evaluating past actions. Furthermore, time was the necessary ingredient which permitted these ideas to acquire hegemonic status, thereby preventing anyone from challenging this heroic reading of the EOKA struggle.

In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson discusses the paradox of the 'objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye' and the subjective antiquity of nations to the nationalist's eye (1991: 5). Connor (1990; 2004) similarly highlights the 'timelessness' of nations in popular perceptions, and juxtaposes the often conflicting factual and chronological historical approaches to the study of nationalism adopted by scholars with the omni-temporal presence of the nation in the hearts and minds of its members (2004: 44).

It would be analytically incoherent to attempt to explain the decisions taken by the Association of EOKA Combatants in rational terms. In order to understand those decisions it is necessary to discuss the texture of the nationalism that EOKA represents and its conception of time. It has been argued that there are two principal identities within the Greek Cypriot community: one informed by the sense of being Greek, and thus being affiliated to the Greek nation, the other informed by the sense of being a Cypriot, which tends to be a civic form of identification with the state, irrespective of the ethnic origin of its citizens (Peristianis, 2006; Mavratsas, 1999). EOKA's struggle – and its leadership – represents the hellenocentric identity; a discussion of its basic features will be useful to explain EOKA's reluctance to apologize for past misdeeds. According to Greek Cypriot nationalists, the Greek Cypriot community constitutes an integral part of the Greek nation, based on a common historical descent. Greek nationalism claims a linear and undisrupted continuity reaching back to antiquity. As the inheritor of 'the most glorious civilization', the Greek nation is a 'brotherless nation' (*ἔθνος ἀνάδελφο*), and wages a 'constant struggle' (Heraclides, 2007: 23) against barbaric invaders who repeatedly occupy Greece (and Cyprus).

A recurrent topic in Greek nationalist history and collective memory is the existence of domestic and foreign 'traitors' who betray the nation. The most recent and traumatic experience of national 'betrayal' occurred in Cyprus in the summer of 1974 when international powers, the United States and Britain, acting in league with the Greek Junta (which was regarded their puppet), paved the way for the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. Hence, betrayal is a particularly sensitive and central element in the Greek Cypriot version of Greek nationalism. For example, during the 2004 referenda for the reunification plan proposed by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Tassos Papadopoulos, President of the Republic of

Cyprus (2003–2008), labelled those supporting the Annan plan as *nenekoi*, named after Dimitrios Nenekos, a Greek chieftain during the Greek war of independence, who defected to the enemy for personal profit and inflicted major damage on the Greeks fighting for independence (Phillips, 1897: 233).<sup>2</sup> In brief, the presumed existence of internal enemies constitutes an intrinsic feature of Greek nationalism. This ‘reality’ obliges its members to be personally responsible and in a state of constant alert to protect the nation from traitors.

The preservation of an official memory is the central tool of resistance to potential sources of betrayal. The central role of memory preservation in safeguarding the nation is epitomized in the official educational doctrine of *Dhen Ksehn* (I Don’t Forget), which is entrenched in the education system in the Republic of Cyprus (Christou, 2006: 286). Any attempt to revise the official memory is perceived as revisionism and, as such, constitutes a form of betrayal.

The maintenance of this official memory is a stated objective of EOKA. The declared principles of the Foundation of the Liberation Struggle of EOKA 1955–1959 include the ‘national and physical survival of Hellenism in Cyprus through the preservation and cultivation of Greco-Orthodox values and traditions’, including, of course, the struggle of EOKA.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the texture of Greek Cypriot nationalism significantly decreases both the prospect and the scope of introspection and acknowledgement of past misdeeds, since such an activity would be seen as a betrayal. This attitude is also informed and reinforced by the fact that the Cyprus conflict is interpreted through the lens of broader historical antagonisms between Greece and Turkey. So long as EOKA’s struggle is seen as part of the Greco-Turkish conflict, any effort to scrutinize one’s own behaviour will be seen as exculpating the other side. Since all sides have an interest in political agendas that perpetuate crude representations, this linkage makes it more difficult for EOKA to apologize.

What emerges from this discussion is an idiosyncratic conception of time. In effect, this struggle to protect the community is constant and never-ending. A person who has betrayed the nation in the past can never rejoin the community. Papadakis (2008) shows in his extensive study of history textbooks that because ‘the Self (and enemy) were the same throughout history, any injury to the National Self in the past is an injury to the current Self too’ (p. 143). This conclusion is particularly relevant to understanding EOKA’s intransigence to acknowledge its responsibility for its crimes in the 1950s.

So long as those individuals executed by EOKA could be seen as having betrayed the struggle, and taking into consideration that the ‘anti-colonial struggle’ was seen as a morally flawless noble cause, there is no reason for

EOKA to justify its acts. A leading member of the Foundation of the Liberation Struggle of EOKA 1955–1959 revealed in a personal interview that those executed ‘were not killed because of their political beliefs but because they were traitors’, although she admitted that, in several instances, the executions ‘could be attributed to mistakes, or personal rivalries that we cannot control’.<sup>4</sup> This was confirmed by other members of EOKA who agreed that ‘some civilians were executed by EOKA because they were traitors; EOKA had to defend itself... so there is no reason to say sorry’.<sup>5</sup> In another case, the Association of EOKA Combatants insisted on labelling all its victims as ‘traitors’ and denying their families an acknowledgement of the truth. The Association’s response to the children of a Greek Cypriot victim of EOKA is revealing:

[W]e believe that even if it were possible to reveal the information, it would not be of any use to learn that their relative did A or B, nor they would have been relieved to know that their father was the cause for someone else to be arrested, tortured, imprisoned or even executed. We are sorry but the issue is closed for us (cited in Poupouris, 1999: 163).

The decision of EOKA leaders to treat the Left as ‘unpatriotic’ was influenced by developments in mainland Greece. During the Greek civil war (1946–1949), the political leaders of National Liberation Front (EAM), the primary rebel group which was guided by the Greek Communist Party (KKE), allied themselves with Slavic speaking ‘Slavomacedonians’. Allegedly EAM and KKE were planning the establishment of a multi-national federation in Macedonia in the aftermath of the conflict. The majority of the Greek population perceived such a position to be treasonous, given the bloody struggle of the Greek nation during the Balkan wars and the First World War to capture these places (Koliopoulos, 1999).

As noted, the leadership of EOKA – particularly General George Grivas – was informed by extreme anti-communist sentiments. During the Greek civil war, Grivas was the leader of Organization X, an anti-communist terrorist group, and it seems that his previous experiences were injected into the Cyprus context during EOKA’s struggle (Papadakis, 1998: 151). In his memoir, he writes: ‘The communists are our adversaries, whether we want it or not. It is advisable that we eliminate them as a political entity, so that they are no longer to be reckoned with the capable through their decisions, of influencing the national issue, as had happened until now.’ (cited in Drousiotis, 2006: 227).

Although the passage of time in social scientific terms could create opportunities for normative change and public acknowledgement, this does not hold true for EOKA. The symbolic capital of the (liberating)

legacy of EOKA explains its minimal truth recovery, acknowledgement of past mistakes and apologies. The fact that EOKA is seen to have won against the British militarily, and that it was the politicians' fault that *Enosis* was not achieved (Lyssotis, 2010), allowed the organization to avoid blame for the struggle's failures and contributed to the heroicization of the fighters and their actions.

Two questions remain unaddressed. Why has the state not apologized? And more interestingly, why did social groups – usually the main source of truth seeking – remain silent? In other societies, civil society has mobilized, even after several decades, forcing the state to address and apologize for past misdeeds. Consider, for example, the recent mobilization in Spain addressing the Republican memory and seeking an apology for its victims during the Spanish civil war. Why did this not happen in Cyprus?

### **Explaining the minimal demand: Hegemonic beliefs and elite consensus**

During transitions, the main tenets of what will be remembered and what will remain excluded from collective memory are set. A study of the two major transition periods in Cyprus' modern history (the birth of the Republic in 1960 and the events of July 1974) provides an insight into why the state did not apologize for the historical injustices of EOKA.

The political situation at the birth of the Republic is indicative that a hegemonic discourse had been established. As local researcher and author on the EOKA struggle, Drousiotis (2010) commented, '[EOKA] became the leaders, and they didn't accept any one to participate'. The status quo created by this consolidation of power in the hands of the offenders perpetuated an environment of non-acknowledgement. 'Once we confront EOKA's reality, that it is a minority organization, that it was actually futile in many ways because things would have been achieved in another way, we get into a problem', Andreas Panayiotou (2010) commented to us. Consequently, the legitimacy of EOKA and the liberation struggle are founded on a myth.

An examination of the parliamentary debates in the Cyprus House of Representatives and the speeches on the anniversaries of the coup (15 July) and the Turkish invasion (20 July), from 1974 until 2009, indicates that the official discourse adopted since 1974 has three overlapping tenets. Most remarkably, there is an absence of any references to intra-communal violence, even though such violence dominated parliamentary debates in the period preceding the Turkish invasion. Second, it seems that the trauma of 1974 acted as a political lesson on the dangers of intra-communal divisions if the Greek Cypriot community were to survive. The need for national unity, reconciliation and the strengthening of the legitimacy of state

institutions became central in the effort to reunify the island; in the aftermath of the Turkish invasion in the summer of 1974, President Makarios extended an olive branch to those responsible for the intra-communal violence that led to the coup and triggered the Turkish invasion. Third, there is a noticeable effort to accentuate the 'culture of victimhood' which attributed moral and political responsibility exclusively to Turkey in such ongoing issues such as the missing, refugees and those Greek Cypriots enclaved in Turkish occupied northern Cyprus.

Apparently, then, an invented unity became a central and consensually accepted element of the elite discourse. This unity was meticulously designed to avoid the problems caused by inter- or intra-communal incidents of violence before 1974 (Kovras and Loizides, 2011). Any reference to the struggle of EOKA, the inter-communal violence of the 1960s or the intra-communal violence of the early 1970s would have delegitimized and discredited the official Greek Cypriot narrative that lent credence to the view that the Cyprus problem began in 1974. Inconvenient issues, such as whether EOKA victims were conspirators, and if they were not, whether their memory should be acknowledged, were excluded from public consideration. Political life entered a state of exception where 'there is always some excuse to avoid the responsibility including the legal culpability of the situation' (Trimikliniotis, 2010).

The intra-communal violence of the early 1970s which triggered the Turkish invasion acted as a lesson for political elites to overcome the old divisions within the Greek Cypriot community. The exclusive focus on the wounds opened by the Turkish invasion, and the simultaneous erasure of the intra-communal past, became twin founding tenets of the transition. Unlike other political cleavages, such as left-right, that divided the Greek Cypriot community, the legacy of EOKA had the potential to unite the community. The disaster of 1974 made room for EOKA to further legitimize the glory and success of the liberation struggle and overshadowed the need to address intra-communal issues. A study of debates in the Cyprus House of Representatives reveals that this lesson transcended political ideologies and party affiliations.

Lessons from the past were gradually ingrained into the political culture, the party system and the political institutions of the republic, ultimately attaining hegemonic status. Glafkos Clerides, leader of the right-wing DISY (Democratic Rally), a centre-right party in the Republic of Cyprus, stressed in 1981: 'The primary historical lesson to be learned is... that the division and intolerance are sources of national disasters... Therefore, today we shall all work hard towards decreasing the tensions of the past and build a real and universal unity'.<sup>6</sup> For his part, AKEL leader Ezekias Papaioannou insisted in 1976: 'The current parliament is the product of

patriotic democratic cooperation. We have to safeguard what has been achieved in the objective of the patriotic democratic cooperation... for the salvation of Cyprus'.<sup>7</sup>

AKEL is a political party which enjoys a lot of grassroots support. It represents a significant proportion of EOKA victims. In power since 2008, AKEL has made verbal promises to address the issue, and yet to this point has abstained from doing so. Paradoxically, any attempt by AKEL to restore the memory of the victims of EOKA unilaterally would reassert the traitor discourse, as it would be perceived as an attempt to undermine the national cause of reunification, revise history and betray the common struggle. Since the anti-colonial struggle of EOKA remains the only legitimate point of reference for Greek Cypriots, it is very difficult, even for AKEL, to challenge a well-entrenched hegemonic belief (Colokasides, 2010). So long as the problem remains framed dichotomously and focused on apportioning blame, historical allegations of betrayal have shaped and continue to shape the political cleavages of the Republic of Cyprus, providing symbolic and moral value. For example, until recently, AKEL did not dare support its own candidate for presidency lest the organization be labelled 'semi-loyal' to the regime.

Electoral considerations may also hinder AKEL's movement towards an apology since 'the form of government that we have is not facilitating consensus politics'.<sup>8</sup> The presidential system in the Republic of Cyprus requires that a candidate receive the absolute majority of votes; if no candidate reaches this threshold, a second round of elections takes place (Loizides, 2009). It is virtually impossible for any party alone to promote its own candidate; therefore, alliances – especially in the second round – are important to the electoral system. All parties seek to polarize the long-standing cleavages in order to earn the votes of the base of their respective parties. At the same time, it is imperative to design a flexible agenda to permit collaboration with other parties (Loizides, 2007). Any unilateral decision, such as an acknowledgement of EOKA's crimes, would challenge the foundations of the post-1974 consensus and is perceived as a suicide mission because it might lead to a party's exclusion from a potential alliance. Having already initiated an ambitious policy of revising history textbooks, thereby challenging a number of the founding tenets of the Hellenocentric identity, it is difficult for AKEL to promote a policy whereby the state would acknowledge EOKA's atrocities. Such an attempt would thwart electoral alliances with political parties claiming historical affiliations with EOKA – that is, all Greek Cypriot parties with the exception of AKEL. More importantly, such a move would alienate a significant segment of the electorate, making them less likely to vote for AKEL in the second and more critical round.

## Opportunities and civil society

As Bermeo (2003) aptly puts it, 'Pacts make democracies more durable, but also make the deepening of democracy more difficult' (p. 166). Although the consolidation of the democratic regime succeeded, largely due to the 'pacted' nature of the transition, this was at the expense of the development of a vibrant civil society which often acts as a source of truth seeking for victims' groups. The reasons as to why EOKA have not apologized have been explained above; but why have civil society groups which would put the issue on the political agenda been either absent or ineffective?

Civil society is considered a new concept for Cyprus. While there are recent developments in areas such as volunteering and single issue organizations, social justice issues have remained off the table. The size of the population of Cyprus, 800,000 in the Republic and 1.1 million on the whole island makes social cohesion a foremost value. Institutions such as the family and the Church perform almost invasive roles, since they are such dominant and powerful organizational entities from which a person cannot deviate to take up other social or political issues.

A civil society group was established in 1995 with the primary objective of forcing EOKA to issue an official apology. There was no specific reason for the group's decision to form in 1995. It would seem that the orientation of the Republic of Cyprus towards the European Union improved the prospect of addressing human rights issues. The group's organization remains very loose – indicative of the willingness of the members not to provoke a reaction from EOKA. At least until 2009 they did not have a formal organization, name or structure. As the leader of the group explained in a personal interview, the 'symbolic capital' of EOKA was so immense that any previous attempts to form a similar organization were doomed to fail. The tactics of the group are deliberately moderate to avoid endangering the overarching objective, namely, the apology, because the group is afraid of provoking a nationalist backlash. Michalis Michail, a prominent local journalist, explains:

We are not interested to know the persons who pulled the trigger, but why this happened, and we are not interested in initiating criminal proceedings. Our objective is just an apology, an acknowledgement that these persons were not traitors and that they were murdered either because of mistaken information or for other political reasons. (Michail, 2009)

The Association of Relatives of People Murdered for their Political Convictions struggles to keep the issue on the agenda and to lobby political elites, even though they only aim for the rehabilitation of their relatives

(some of whom were killed as a result of the perpetrators' personal motivations), rather than for the condemnation of the perpetrators.<sup>9</sup> It is often unknown who the perpetrators were.

A new window of opportunity for the acknowledgement of EOKA crimes opened in the early 2000s. The mobilization of civil society between 2002 and 2004, at the time of the Annan plan, propelled human rights to the centre of the political agenda on both sides of the divide. This led to the solution of the humanitarian problem of the missing persons and the subtle acknowledgement of the Republic of Cyprus of state responsibility for the lack of investigation into the disappearances of Turkish Cypriots in the 1960s (Kovras and Loizides, 2011). However, it remains to be seen whether AKEL will be able to take advantage of this partially open window and fully address the remaining issues by the end of its term in 2011.

## **Conclusion**

This article adds to and challenges the current literature on political apologies by seeking to discover what prevents apologies. It draws on the case of EOKA, which has persistently objected to apologies, truth recovery and reconciliation, thereby silencing through a dominant discourse the memory and rehabilitation of particular victims of the anti-colonial struggle, to shed light on similar cases.

This article points out that the inherited timelessness of Greek nationalism and the impression of a perpetual need for defence set up perfect conditions for the development of a hegemonic discourse during the transition from a British colony to independent republic, and at the time of the de facto partition. This, in turn, prevented the development of a civil society which was strong, and broad enough to be able to resist the dominant discourse of denial of EOKA's violations and to challenge the traditions of forestalling an apology. Angola (MPLA, UNITA or FLEC), Mozambique (RENAMO) and Nepal (Communist Party of Nepal) face similar challenges with respect to historical memory, truth recovery and reconciliation. Like Cyprus, these countries have not seen apologies. Understanding the obstructions to apology in Cyprus could help clarify resistance to reconciliation and apology in these other cases.

Fears of weakening legitimacy or being labelled a traitor make for convincing arguments for a refusal to apologize. But other cases show that this is not inevitable. When Thabo Mbeki apologized to the victims of the ANC and the families who had suffered losses as a result of the anti-apartheid struggle, his apology did not diminish the importance of the ANC's historical contribution. Instead it may have even strengthened society's confidence in the ANC's integrity.

While much literature focuses on what reconciliation is and how it occurs, it is important to examine the other side of the coin as well: the prevention of reconciliation. An analysis of EOKA's failure to apologize shows how resistance to critical self-reflection and a persistent silencing of truth preclude the rehabilitation of victims and the establishment of a spirit of cooperation in the wider community.

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### Notes

1. The number of people assassinated by EOKA remains a hotly debated issue both in academia and public debates; for different figures, see Markides (1977: 19), Vlachos (1980: 96) and Branch (2010: 407).
2. *Ephialtes* is another symbol of betrayal, referring to the defeat of the Greeks in the Battle of Thermopylae (408 BC), when Greek positions were revealed to Persian forces. *Ephialtes* is the most representative example of traitor in 'Greek' History; so the term is used here not only to refer to the traitors but also to link it to our argument on the 'timelessness' of the Greek nationalism.
3. The Foundation of the Liberation Struggle of EOKA refers to the creation of EOKA including their manifesto and declaration of the Liberation Struggle and includes only members of the struggle. The Association is essentially a veterans' league of all those who were members of EOKA and supporters of the liberation struggle; in reality this often includes people who had no direct involvement in the liberation struggle. See also [http://myweb.cytanet.com.cy/iaae5559/greek\\_main.htm](http://myweb.cytanet.com.cy/iaae5559/greek_main.htm).
4. Personal Interview, EOKA Member, Nicosia, 2 February 2009.
5. Personal Interview, EOKA Member, Nicosia, 14 October 2010.
6. Parliamentary Speeches, Cyprus House of Representatives, 15 July 1981, 269.
7. Parliamentary Speeches, Cyprus House of Representatives, 17 October 1976, 149.
8. Personal interview, Christoforos Fokaides, Nicosia, 18 October 2010.
9. Personal interview, Relative of EOKA victim, Nicosia, 21 October 2010.

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