

A Missing Past, an Uncertain Future

The Case of the Missing Persons and its Implications for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation in Cyprus



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Snakes, insects, vultures, scorpions
You will never be able to gnaw and devour me
- never grow fat on me –
You will never be able to divide me up
- those like me are in the majority –

I will not die
I will drive a stake into the navel of this island
My roots into the coolest depths of the earth
My branches leaves in all directions
I will spread
And in my own shade
In Peace
I will live.

Gülfidan Erhürman, July 1988.
Translated by Aydin Mehmet Ali,
August 2000¹

¹ Erhürman, G. and Mehmet Ali, A., *Bize Dair-Pink Butterflies*, London: FATAL Publications, 2005.

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Cover photo: Facades of torn buildings in the 'dead zone', Nicosia, 2009.

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the issue of missing persons in Cyprus within the background of nationalism, ethnic identity construction, ethno-nationalist conflict, Conflict Resolution and reconciliation. It aims to link micro-level developments with macro-level policies. In this thesis, nationalism is defined in ethnic terms and stresses the ethnic elements in the formation of nations. Ethnic identity is considered to be a socio-political construct, based on shared myths of origin, elements of common culture and an association with a specific territory, which is used instrumentally by elites and political leaders. When mobilised it becomes a cause for inter-ethnic conflict. Ethno-nationalist conflict is often protracted and complex in nature, as is the case in Cyprus. External, internal, psychological and contextual factors have played an important role in the creation and perpetuation of the Cyprus conflict, causing large scale human rights violations, the separation of communities and the creation of an ‘us versus them’ divide. Cypriots suffered immense losses at the economic level, but mostly at the humanitarian level, of which the problem of the missing persons in Cyprus is a prime example.

I studied this issue both through a literature review, as secondary sources, and with interview data, my primary source. Both the Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaderships have politicised the issue and used it instrumentally to demonise the other community, thus creating cultures of victimhood. The two communities differ in their perceptions of the missing and the perpetrators, reflecting the political interests of their leaders. Since 2004 however, progress has been made with the CMP project in exhuming, identifying and returning the remains to the relatives of the missing. This work is generally regarded as positive and the bi-communal character is highly valued. Nevertheless, the CMP does not answer the relatives’ need for truth, i.e. the right to know the details around the disappearances. Legal redress is one means of truth-seeking, but is highly disputed. Questions that arise from this thesis refer to whether truth-seeking would breed resentment and thus affects reconciliation, or whether a truth commission might be desirable. More research would be needed to look into the current developments around the missing persons and their implications for reconciliation.

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