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## **Cyprus and Belize – the role of neighbours in their stories**

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### **Introduction**

Living in a good neighbourhood has many benefits. Neighbours who tend their property well, who are friendly but not invasive in their interest in your life, who keep their children and pets off your land, and have no designs on extending their garden beyond the boundary line are all positives. Some unfortunates live with neighbours from hell: anti-social, noisy, inconsiderate and rude, who harass and bully.<sup>1</sup>

What is true of individuals living in close proximity is also true of nations. A small nation will always be affected by a nearby giant. “Living next to you,” said then Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, speaking of the United States, “is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant; no matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, if I may call it that, one is affected by every twitch and grunt. Even a friendly nuzzling can sometimes

lead to frightening consequences.” Robert Norman Thompson put it more succinctly: “The United States is our friend whether we like it or not.”<sup>2</sup>

How, then, does one conceptualize the neighbours? All nations have a creation story, as Canada’s Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, has noted.<sup>3</sup> These stories shape the way in which nations see themselves and how they view their neighbours. Are the neighbours viewed as friendly: helpful folk that one can trade with, and “hang out” with; do they keep themselves to themselves, and so can be ignored for most purposes, or are they seen as rivals, or even enemies – people who can’t be trusted?

This paper examines the stories of Cyprus and Belize, especially the way that neighbours are perceived, and how this affects the nation’s self-understanding and the effects of this understanding.

### **Cyprus – one state, two stories**

The two major distinct ethnicities on the island of Cyprus, “Turkish” and “Greek” have differing “creation stories.” The Greeks see themselves as heirs of Alexander and the great Greek civilization that followed him; the Turks as the heirs of the Ottoman Empire, as developed, reformed and reinterpreted by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

The accounts of history told by each of the two groups conflict and are, at a deep level, mutually incompatible. “Cyprus is Greek” leads to the demand for union with the Mother Country (*Enosis*). “Kıbrıs Türktür” leads to a return to Turkish rule, or, more realistically, partition. Rather than give a detailed account of Cyprus’ history, I want to look at the way in which the different viewpoints have produced different stories explaining and detailing the events of the first twenty years after the island’s independence.

Independence (in 1960) was an uneasy compromise that sought to build a state of Cypriots, with both partition and *enosis* constitutionally prohibited. The compromise failed – as the President, Archbishop Makarios famously observed, the settlement of 1960 created a state, not a nation.<sup>4</sup> The Constitution of the new state attempted to protect the smaller Turkish Cypriot community by giving it an unequal share of political power: although it accounted for only about 20% of the population, it received 30% of the seats in Parliament (and Cabinet posts), and 30% of positions in the Civil Service. Where the leader of a particular state institution was a Greek Cypriot, his deputy would be a Turkish Cypriot. In addition, the highest courts in the land had outside Presidents, to break the tie if the Cypriot judges split along ethnic lines.

The two sides have very different accounts on what happened next. The Greek Cypriot account is well expressed in the free booklet *Cyprus 10000 years of history & civilisation* distributed by the Cyprus Tourism Organisation.<sup>5</sup>

The Republic of Cyprus was proclaimed on 16 August 1960. The island became a member of the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Council of Europe and the Non-Aligned Movement. On the basis of the Zurich-London agreements Britain maintained two sovereign military bases on the island with a total combined area of 158.4 square kilometres, consisting of Dhekelia to the east of Larnaka and Akrotiri-Episkopi near Lemesos. Two treaties were signed as part of the Zurich-London agreements, the Treaty of Alliance and the Treaty of Guarantee. The latter gave the right to the three guarantor powers, Britain, Turkey and Greece, to take action in the event that the provisions of the Treaty were violated.

Although the Cyprus constitution safeguarded the basic rights and freedoms of all its citizens, it contained community provisions that made it complex and non-workable. In 1963 the President of the Republic proposed constitutional amendments which both the Turkish Cypriot community leadership and Turkey rejected. The Turkish Cypriots withdrew from the government and proceeded to set up an illegal “Temporary Turkish Cypriot Administration.” As a result of subsequent inter-communal conflict that ensued at the beginning of 1964, a United Nations Security Council resolution established a U.N. Peace Keeping Force in Cyprus.

In 1974 the military junta ruling Greece at the time staged a military coup in Cyprus aiming at the overthrow of elected President Makarios. Turkey used the coup as a pretext to invade militarily the island on 20 July 1974 and occupy 37%

of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus, displacing about 200,000 Greek Cypriots from the occupied northern part of the island. Despite international condemnation of Turkey and the acknowledgement of the rights of the Cypriot people drafted in various resolutions issued by the United Nations, the Security Council, the Commonwealth, the Non-Aligned Movement and other international organisations, Turkish troops still illegally occupy the northern part of Cyprus. On 1 May 2004, with its northern part still under occupation, Cyprus became a full member of the European Union. The accession act included a protocol which states that implementation of the *acquis communautaire* on the areas not controlled by the Cyprus government (as a result of the Turkish invasion) is suspended. This suspension will be removed as soon as the Cyprus problem is solved. Efforts and negotiations to find a just and functional solution to the Cyprus problem are continuing.”

The Turkish Cypriot account would go something like this:

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Although the independence agreements safeguarded the basic rights and freedoms of all its citizens, they closed the door to *Enosis*, and the complexity of the constitution required good will from all parties in order for it to function. Unfortunately, despite a decision of the Supreme Court against it, the Makarios government refused to bring forward legislation to set up separate Greek and Turkish municipalities in the major towns, as the Constitution required. Instead, in 1963 Makarios proposed a set of constitutional amendments that would have removed many of the Turkish Cypriots’ rights, as part of the strategy of the Akritas plan to achieve *Enosis*. Turkey rejected the proposals and intercommunal violence erupted. The Turkish Cypriots were excluded from the Cyprus government. To keep the peace between the communities, a United Nations peace force was established in 1964. For the next decade, many Turkish Cypriots lived in small enclaves for their mutual protection.

In 1974 the military junta ruling Greece at the time staged a military coup in Cyprus aiming at the overthrow of elected President Makarios, and installed Nicos Sampson, a known EOKA terrorist, in his place. After consulting with Britain, Turkey exercised her treaty rights to intervene militarily on 20 July 1974. When peace talks failed to stop Greek Cypriot attacks on isolated Turkish Cypriot populations, the Turkish troops advanced and now occupy 37% of the island of Cyprus. Around 40,000 Turkish Cypriots were forced to leave their homes in the

south, while about 200,000 Greek Cypriots left the northern part of the island. Despite ongoing efforts and negotiations to find an acceptable and just solution to the Cyprus problem, progress has been slow. In separate referenda held on 24 April 2004, Turkish Cypriots voted overwhelmingly for a settlement of the Cyprus problem, but the Greek Cypriots rejected it. Despite this result, a week later, the south of Cyprus became a full member of the European Union. The talks continue; but with little prospect of change in the near future. As a consequence, the Turkish Cypriots continue to develop the institutions of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, the state they established in 1983.

Small wonder, then, that the two communities view things very differently. The example of what has happened to public holidays will suffice. In general, these reflect the religions of Cyprus. In 1960, both Christian and Moslem holy days were state holidays. Since 1974, the TRNC has cancelled Christian holidays, and has added instead extra days to the two big Moslem holidays; in the Government-controlled areas, Moslem holidays were replaced by additional Christian ones in the 1990's. The National Independence days of Greece and Turkey were observed, and a holiday to celebrate Cyprus' independence was arranged for October (a more clement month for parades than August). The TRNC has removed the Republic's holiday, replacing it with a day commemorating UDI in November (1983). Turkish National Day, unsurprisingly, is not celebrated in the south. These differing historical narratives, self-perceptions, and views of the neighbours have had significant effects on recent events. The mutual incompatibility of the stories means that producing an account that both sides can see as acceptable has become almost impossible.

### **Belize – many peoples, many stories**

Belize's early history is also complex. Originally settled by people heading south from North America, the area came to be part of the Mayan lands. Some estimates put the peak Mayan population of what is now Belize at three million; the country today is home to only some 320,000 people in total.

After the collapse of the Mayan civilization, Belize entered a dark age, and was largely bypassed by the conquistadores. The swampy, mosquito-infested land made it hard to land boats; and there seemed little prospect of finding gold, given the apparent lack of any civilization. The way was left open, therefore, for British (usually Scottish) adventurers to exploit the natural resources of the area. Spain acknowledged these rights at the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), but Spanish attempts to take over the developing settlement at the mouth of the Belize River continued over the next century (including a brief period of Spanish control while Britain's attentions were focused on a rebellion further north). The Battle of St George's Caye in September 1798 is seen as pivotal – part of the creation story of what ultimately became Belize. A Spanish attempt to capture the Belize settlement was successfully resisted by a flotilla of boats manned by the British logger-settlers and 1200 or so of their slaves.

During the course of the nineteenth century settlement in Belize expanded, and new arrivals appeared. From the creation story perspective, the most significant of these were the Garifuna – the descendants of offspring from marriages between the indigenous Caribs and Arawaks and escaped slaves from West Africa. The first community arrived on the Belizean coast on November 19, 1832, and, although at first treated with suspicion by the British colonists, they soon came to be seen as docile and hard-working.

The Belize territory formally became a British colony in 1862, after a period in which the territory was administered from Jamaica as a more nebulously-sounding “part of the dominions of Her Majesty [Queen Victoria]”<sup>6</sup>, and remained so until being granted independence in 1981, much later than most of the colonies of the British Empire.

The ethnic patchwork of Belize was diversified in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the arrival of Lebanese traders, Mennonites from Mexico, and, latterly, of Salvadorians and Guatemalans looking for land, Taiwanese and mainland Chinese businessmen, and second-home seekers from the US and Canada.

Public holidays commemorate foundation story events. In Belize, the civic holidays celebrate both the battle of St George's Caye (September 10), when gallant British Baymen assisted by loyal slaves saw off a Spanish fleet (which was declared a public holiday on its centenary, in 1898); and Garifuna Settlement Day (November 19). Independence Day is celebrated on September 21<sup>st</sup>. Also celebrated is Baron Bliss day (recently renamed as National Heroes and Benefactors' Day; March 9), which commemorates the Portuguese baron and traveller, who, though he never set foot in Belize, is buried there and left large sums in his will to the territory.

Unlike the stories of Cyprus, the stories of the peoples who make up Belize are not mutually exclusive. Just as almost everyone can celebrate Burns Night or St Patrick's Day without having to be Scottish or Irish, so one can "become" Garifuna for a day. More importantly, the stories are, at some level, non-competitive. One can celebrate St George's Caye, the arrival of the Garifuna, the wisdom of the Maya and Creole culture without having to take a stand in seeing one, or more, of these as alien to one's own cultural identity.

There are, of course, tensions – but not usually as a result of conflicting stories. Most random violence is blamed on "Guatemalans," war between rival drug gangs. Chinese businessmen are, however, occasionally attacked as their success in business (especially retailing) is resented.

The stories are just as diverse, rich and complex as the Cyprus narratives, but there is an underlying consistency that has pushed Belize towards a shared account of the past.

### **The Effects of Stories**

How do stories play out? Can they be harnessed, for good or evil, to produce change or outcomes? Exclusive stories bring out the negative side of social capital. If solidarity requires the exclusion of the other, then bridging social capital is unlikely to develop.

Governing a large empire is hard work, and, where possible, it makes sense to outsource the work to the subjects. Both Belize and Cyprus were given measures of self-rule prior to independence. In Cyprus, the official policy was largely one of divide and rule – use the smaller Turkish Cypriot community, bolstered by certain privileges, as a counterweight to the Greek Cypriot majority. The British Governor-General, the ultimate authority in the land, worked with a Legislative Council of 12 members – six Greeks, three Turks and three British. Inappropriate Greek demands for enosis could then always be blocked by the six non-Greeks, reinforced by the Governor-General's veto.

In Belize, things worked out far better. Although there were potential ways in which ethnic tensions could have been cultivated (Kriol, of Caribbean heritage, versus Mestizo of Spanish/Mayan heritage), there would be little benefit to the colonial rulers to do so. Unlike Archbishop Makarios, George Price (his Belizean counterpart, who had abandoned the Catholic priesthood to enter politics) had a vision for a state that was inclusive. No-one wanted Belize to become part of Guatemala (or Mexico), or saw the other ethnic groups as being somehow being entitled to dictate the fate of the country. Although the ethnicities were different and somewhat distinct, there were enough similarities – in the Christian religion, for example – and sufficient cross-cutting ties to unite people across any constant predetermined boundaries.

### **The neighbours**

One part of divide and rule involves bolstering favourable sides against unfavourable ones. Thus Britain could use Turkish interest in the Turks of Cyprus as a foil to the enosis movement. The threat was that, if *enosis* were not abandoned, Cyprus would continue to be ruled from abroad – either as a British colony, or as a Turkish and Greek condominium. Given those horrors, independence, perhaps with the door held out to *enosis* later, was the least-worst option available for the Greek population. At the same time, British policy prompted Turkey to take more interest in Cyprus, rather than to leave



the Turkish Cypriots to their fate in a Greek-ruled state. For the Turkish population, given that British rule would ultimately come to an end, and partition was out of the question, independence, bolstered by a guarantee from Turkey, was acceptable.

Belize faced a different problem: a neighbour who wanted to take over the territory. Guatemala, as the successor state to the Spanish empire, claimed that most of Belize was an integral part of her territory. In 1859, Britain and Guatemala agreed on what the boundaries of Belize would be; but the Convention contained a catch: article (VII) committed Britain and Guatemala

“conjointly to use their best efforts by taking adequate means for establishing the easiest communication...between the fittest place on the Atlantic Coast near the Settlement of Belize and the Capital of Guatemala...”<sup>7</sup>

It is this condition that delayed Belizean independence. Guatemala claimed that, as Britain had not paid for the building of a road or railway from Guatemala City to the coast at Belize City, she had forfeited her claim to the territory Guatemala had “ceded” in 1859. It was only when Guatemala promised to give up this claim (in exchange for some rights of navigation through the sea channels in southern Belize) that Belize could safely become independent, without the risk of Britain being involved in another long-range war she had no appetite for.

### **The locals**

Even if there are baleful outside influences, why cannot the local people themselves transcend them? Why must Cypriots see themselves as Greek or Turkish, rather than as Cypriots, or, perhaps as Greek **Cypriots** in the same way Greek Americans see themselves as Greek **Americans**, or as Garifuna Belizeans see themselves as Belizeans first?

To try to cobble together a plausible compromise, the 1960 Cyprus Constitution was a complex document that comprises more words than Cypriots. When violence broke out in 1963, Cyprus seemed to be foreshadowing the path taken by Yugoslavia three decades later, rather than the peaceful transition to independence of Belize.

Belize did not face similar challenges. George Price, and his People's United Party dominated the home rule period prior to independence. There was an opposition party – but it also agreed that the Guatemalan threat had to be removed before Belize could truly become a nation. Since independence, a vibrant (if rather strident) democracy has led to hotly contested elections, many claims of corruption and chicanery, and governments thrown out of office after a maximum of two five-year terms.

The Guatemala issue still serves to rally Belizeans. In October 2012, Belize paid \$10,000 to the Organization of American States to make an ex gratia payment to the family of a Guatemalan, shot by a Belizean soldier, allegedly in self-defence, while the man was illegally panning for gold seven miles inside Belize. The payment was seen by many as capitulating to Guatemalan demands for compensation.<sup>8</sup> In his remarks on the celebration of Taiwan's national day, the Belizean Prime Minister, Dean Barrow, while thanking Taiwan for its diplomatic support, pointed out that both Taiwan and Belize faced territorial claims from large and powerful neighbours.<sup>9</sup> For Belize, the country can be united by talking of Guatemala; in Cyprus, talking of Turkey has diametrically opposite effects on the two major communities.

## **Conclusions**

Belize represents a relatively successful transfer of power from an empire to a new state. Although there are tensions within the political system,<sup>10</sup> it has held together, in a way that Cyprus was unable to accomplish. The Belizeans can unite against a neighbour that they all conceptualize as dangerous; Cypriots cannot. One group views the Neighbour to

the North as an invader, rapist and pillager; the other views it as a peace-keeper, saviour and guarantor. For one, it is a good neighbour; for the other, it's a neighbour from hell.

Could a reconceptualization of Turkey lead to a resolution of the Cyprus Problem? But Turkey isn't what America is to Canada: for most of the Cypriot population it's a more powerful Guatemala. Could the Cypriots start again, with the hope of a better outcome? Things do not look promising – despite the opening of the ceasefire line in 2003, and the large numbers of Cypriots now crossing, a political solution does not appear imminent. The outline of a settlement has been determined by the 1977 High Level agreement between Makarios and Denktash, but the political will to accept any manifestation of the agreement is lacking.<sup>11</sup> Mutual suspicion thwarts compromise, which is seen as weakness. The recent disputes over drilling for gas and oil, plus Turkey's reaction to Cyprus' EU Presidency, are worrying. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, unsurprisingly, has an extensive selection of material on Cyprus on its website. The "Recent Developments" section is blank (English version), and appears not to have been updated since 2008 (Turkish version).<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, Turkey and Cyprus dispute oil exploration concessions in the seas around the island, Turkey refuses to open its ports to Cypriot-flagged vessels, and direct flights to anywhere other than Turkey are still impossible from Ercan airport. In July 2012, Cyprus assumed the Presidency of the EU. Turkey and the north Cyprus administration warned of dire consequences if this were to happen prior to a resolution of the Problem, but Turkey's options are limited; in the event, apart from breaking off negotiations on accession to the EU, there has been little tangible effect.

An imminent reconstitution of a Cypriot state is unlikely. What is needed is a new story – one of Cypriotness. But how to construct an appropriate narrative? Just as the new Cyprus Republic needs to be redesigned from scratch; even though everyone knows what it will look like, a fresh start is necessary. Perhaps that is the only way to start a new story, perhaps one which speaks less of the neighbours.

## **Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> Britain even has a website, [www.nfh.org.uk](http://www.nfh.org.uk) set up to provide help to those suffering from such neighbours.

<sup>2</sup> Trudeau: Speech, Washington, May 25, 1969; Thompson, House of Commons debate, January 31, 1963; both from <http://www.earlegray.ca/component/content/article/10-scintillating-sayings-about-canada/264-canada-and-the-us-elephant>

<sup>3</sup> Harper thinks that for Canada the Battle of Vimy Ridge, 1917, is part of it: the first time that Canadians participated in a battle as Canadians, rather than as part of the forces of the British Empire. Australians and New Zealanders have a similar event at roughly the same time period – the Anzac forces fighting in the Dardenelles campaign.

<sup>4</sup> Statement to the *Cyprus Mail* March 28, 1963

<sup>5</sup> Available from [http://media.visitcyprus.com/media/eBrochures/High/10000\\_years\\_of\\_history\\_lrg.pdf](http://media.visitcyprus.com/media/eBrochures/High/10000_years_of_history_lrg.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> P.A. B. Thomson, *Belize: A Concise History*

<sup>7</sup> Text taken from Gustavo Adolfo Oreliana Portillo, *Background and Study of the Special Agreement between Guatemala and Belize to submit Guatemala's Territorial, Insular and Maritime Claim to the International Court of Justice*

<http://www.minex.gob.gt/ADMINPORTAL/Data/DOC/20100927171348408BACKGROUNDANDSTUDYBOOKOFTHESPECIALAGREEMENTBETWEENGUATEMALAANDBELIZE.pdf> p. 23

<sup>8</sup> See reports in *The (Belize) Reporter* 21 (making the claim) and 28 October (publishing an OAS denial), and *Amandala* 2 November, where the Belizean Prime Minister claims credit for the idea..

<sup>9</sup> "Belize salutes Taiwan on its 101 year of independence..." *The Reporter* 21 October 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Such as the decision by the Chief Elections Officer in February 2012 to deny a request for a referendum on off-shore drilling, on the disputed ground that 40% of the signatures on the requisite petition were invalid.

<sup>11</sup> The text for the High Level Agreement is available, *inter alia* at

<http://antifon.blogspot.ca/2011/02/cyprus-high-level-agreements-of-1977.html> - the Boutros Ghali "set of ideas" (1992) <http://www.argyrosargyrou.fsnet.co.uk/Ideas.htm> was followed by the Annan plan, finalized in March, 2004 (at [http://www.hri.org/docs/annan/Annan\\_Plan\\_April2004.pdf](http://www.hri.org/docs/annan/Annan_Plan_April2004.pdf)) followed the course charted in 1977. The devil, of course, was in the detail.

<sup>12</sup> Site accessed June 20, 2012