

A NEVER-ENDING DEBATE: THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM, ITS PAINFUL HISTORY AND THE MANY HARSH AND TRAGIC LESSONS FOR CYPRUS

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I. Introduction

In our lifetime, intentionally or through serendipity, there comes a moment to confront the past and the need to come to terms with it. Human nature is inexhaustible in its endeavor to search, to learn and excavate the truth. Self-knowledge, one might say, others may point to historical research, to account for the endeavor. On the other hand, history is replete with examples of refusal to recognize harsh and bitter truths of the past and reconcile with the idea of bringing many skeletons out from the closet. How many of us, one legitimately wonders, are prepared in short, with the need to dig deeply and unearth secrets and thus challenge conventional and convenient versions of history? France and *les années noires* of the Vichy regime (with the subject of collaboration and collaborationism occupying center stage), an issue that still torments French society, is a glaring example. In extreme cases, one is challenged with refutation of history, as was with France in Algeria, 1954-62. A similar issue touches Britain and its colonies, with the wide use of torture, which the colonial authorities made extensive use of. Both historical events may be cited as prime examples of what we label as denial of the past, i.e., refuse to acknowledge that an event ever took place.

Denial of a historical event, or selective amnesia on memory is neither accidental nor something new, a novelty in another words. It constitutes rather an inseparable part of human nature, a sad and unfortunate fact of its existence, by and large unavoidable, even a ploy, when it comes face to face with the need, the duty and the obligation to remember. Memory is necessary and indispensable, occasionally salutary, for remembering-in the positive sense, i.e., not on selective basis-and serves a dual purpose. First, it is the first line of defense against forgetting or any attempt to distort the past, or even manipulate memory and those remembering, and second, it assists all of us, towards the effort in becoming better citizens, in both our societies and throughout the entire world. Learning from mistakes and gross errors from the past, interpreting history correctly and properly, lest the latter repeats itself. In our era, with the globe living in dangerous

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and confused times, the proper study of history becomes more imperative than ever before.

For all the cataclysm that the study of history creates, since many uncomfortable truths come to the surface through research, just lately one work has arrived in propitious circumstances. Reading it, stimulates our interest in Cyprus' recent past, while it reminds of tragic historical realities that constitute an inseparable part of the country's colonial chapter. Furthermore, the book reveals one aspect of that same history, which-while being a powerful weapon in the hands of the colonial authorities-became, at the same time, a nightmare for the indigenous people and the armed resistance. Finally, its actual implementation continues to haunt our memory, of those living then and those living now. That aspect is called torture; the systematic and vicious use of sophisticated violence by the colonial regime, in other words, in an all out war. In this category, Cyprus was not alone, for Britain sought to apply violence with zeal and determination elsewhere, in fact since the early twentieth century, beginning with South Africa.

II. The Legacy of Colonialism: an Innocuous Chapter of Imperial History?

Caroline Elkins' new book, properly titled *Legacy of Violence*, arrives not a moment too soon.¹ The author is not a stranger to colonial history; far from it. She specializes in African history and Afro-American studies. Her credentials were fully established long time ago, in 2005 to be precise, when she challenged the existing status quo in colonial historiography in another book, titled *Colonial Reckoning*, for Kenya (1952-57). Elkins examined the uprising of the kikuyu tribe, better known as the Mau Mau. The story she is conveying in her new book is a nasty shock, for it obliterates myths and exposes a deliberate effort to create a picture of the past, one entirely different from the cruel reality of colonialism. In fact, her account is highly disturbing. In meticulous detail, she reveals the past of an empire, which-when confronted with national insurrection by the indigenous people-resorted to extensive and excessive use of force through torture. The purpose? To elicit information and as a means of pursuing anti-guerrilla warfare (during the Kennedy Administration, counterinsurgency, or coin, became the euphemism or the label for it).

Counter-insurgency, despite being popular as a term for use, is highly and intentionally misleading by definition, for it tends to obscure and obfuscate painful historical realities. It also alters on purpose the real meaning of a situation, seeking to replace proper terms with something else. An insurgent gives the impression of a human being who defies and resists authority or a regime (democratic or authoritarian), for many reasons, not necessarily colonialism. In our case though, the insurgents challenged the colonial status quo via guerrilla warfare as the means of doing so, in an unconventional or asymmetric war in military language. Lest the reader and the audience are misled as regards its real purpose, since it became synonymous with the resort to violence in the highest

¹ Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence. A History of the British Empire* (London: Penguin Random House, 2022).

degree, anti-guerrilla warfare is more appropriate and a far more accurate term to employ. Executions, massive displacement and resettling of people, severe curtailing of fundamental freedoms and basic human rights, heavy censorship, even atrocities, like indiscriminate executions, were identified with the strategy of battling guerrilla warfare and became an inseparable part of its practical implementation. Extra-judicial killings and assassinations were also part of the same strategy, all within the aim of winning the hearts and minds of the people. The famous phrase, attributed to General Harold Templer, when he first arrived in Malaya in 1952, however ambiguous its interpretation, then and subsequently (especially in Vietnam in the 1960's by the US), had its merits. After all, no campaign against guerrillas can succeed in its entirety via only military means.² The political aspect is crucial; the colonial power must demonstrate that it cares and makes a far better boss than those resorting to arms (in the case of Malaya, the MCP-the Malaya Communist Party-and the UMMA, the United Malay National Organization).

This is neither the time nor the place to offer a critique for the book, for others have already done so.³ Instead, I shall focus on Cyprus, which the author makes reference to, during the period 1955-59, when the anti-colonial war broke out, via guerrilla warfare, against the colonial master.⁴ Cyprus was not and could not have been the exception to a standard practice, which became notorious, especially when confronted with cases of emergency (a euphemism employed by the colonial regime), i.e., national uprising. What rather is novel, and the author breaks new ground, is the information that all those practices in torture, which the British Empire had already been long implementing in places like Palestine (1936-39), Malaya (mostly in the 1950's) and Kenya (1952-57), and the knowledge it had accumulated as a result, were put into deadly and devastating use in the case of Cyprus.

III. Anti-Guerrilla Warfare in Action

The art of interrogation is as old as the smell of liniment itself, from time immemorial to the present day. The objective is obvious: extract information, a process that becomes more than necessary during times of national emergency, or even war. Regimes engaged in armed conflict invest a lot in the process, since nobody likes to operate in the dark. Information is everything, if for nothing else, to avoid huge and unnecessary casualties, on one's part, because of ignorance, while inflicting maximum losses on the enemy. Being aware and knowing about the enemy's capabilities and intentions is necessary for a variety of reasons, not least of which is national security. Poland in the 1930's and the effort it invested in breaking the German military code (the famous enigma machine) stands as perhaps one of those momentous events that fully corroborate what I have just

² For what is perhaps the best overall historical treatment of guerrilla warfare, Robert Asprey, *War in the Shadows*, revised edition (Boston: Little Brown, 1994).

³ Among the many critiques, Lauren Benton, *Evil Empires? The Long Shadow of British Colonialism*. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 101, July-August 2022, 190-196.

⁴ Robert Holland, *Britain and the Revolt in Cyprus 1954-1959* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) for the diplomatic aspect of the anti-colonial struggle, from the British perspective. Also, William Mallinson, *Cyprus: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009).

pointed out. The ultra secret's contribution to the war effort is undeniable and indisputable, the precise amount notwithstanding. In peacetime, the less so in war, certain rules apply in collecting information. States recruit people for this purpose, while employing a variety of methods in achieving their ultimate goals.

Peace has its rules for those engaged in collecting information (others call it spying), not so in war, precisely because conditions in the latter case are radically different. That is why being a prisoner of war is not everybody's dream for the very first thing during interrogation is to extract as much information as possible from these hapless people. Not all armies follow the rules of war, especially those that attack and conquer. These rules, or international humanitarian law, apply within the context of *jus in bello*, regardless of whether war is just or not. This became necessary, following WWII, which witnessed barbarity and bestiality, which assumed monstrous proportions. Perhaps the worst atrocities were committed in conquered territories in Europe and in Asia, where the indigenous people, who had just come under foreign military occupation, were regarded and treated like the colonized. The situation became far worse and no rules applied in places where the resistance flourished, with the occupation authorities breaking all rules of engagement in a zero sum game against those bearing arms against them with the latter replying in kind.

There is good reason to draw parallels between the resistance and the occupier with colonial warfare, for practices in the latter case were implemented with full force and vengeance against the indigenous people. What is tormenting to know is that during guerrilla warfare in colonies, no rules of war applied, then and even now. Without doubt, no mercy was shown, in a direct confrontation, which ultimately became a test of endurance for both sides. Put in another way, it was a case of who would blink first, when the two combatants met and saw eye to eye. Colonialism, among its many sinister and malicious qualities, was also a crime against humanity. Arriving in places like India, the Philippines, Korea, Indochina, Africa (the famous scramble among the European powers in the latter part of the nineteenth century) and the Middle East, they transformed the original landscape in a flash, mostly in a negative way. Why did the Europeans and the US (a latecomer) and, last in the scene, Japan, engage in colonialism? Raw materials to get the industrial revolution going for one thing, and thus achieve modernization, imperial prestige and grandeur, geopolitics-the virus that had permeated socio-economic thinking, and managed to prevail as an ideology, displacing any competition-and the newly-emerging school of international relations that rendered strategically important all new and unconquered territories account for it. Thus, the fate of Korea was sealed, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Philippines changed a master in 1898, while at the end of the Great War, the Ottoman Middle East became prey to the victors, i.e., the Anglo-French.⁵

⁵ In the case of Japanese imperialism and Korea, Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1995). For what is probably the best treatment on the Ottoman Empire and World War I, Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans. The Great War in the Middle East* (London: Penguin, 2022).

Needless to emphasize, the indigenous population in the colonies reacted violently to the newly-created realities. Much was expected from Woodrow Wilson's fourteen points; the US President though, succumbed to the big power politics, colonialism and imperialism. The stage was set for the confrontation that ensued and culminated in 1945 to the present day. The illegal presence of former and new masters, hopes dashed, inalienable rights cruelly and unjustly nullified and a colonial policy envisaging racial superiority and ruthless oppression led to a number of uprisings throughout the Empires, British, French and Japanese. Even the US was not immune in its possessions (as in the case with the Philippines and Emilio Aguinaldo, 1899-1901). The reaction on the part of the colonial powers was swift and vicious. In Ireland (1916, 1920-21), in Palestine (1920, 1929, 1936-39, 1946-48), in Syria (1925-27), in Iraq (in the 1930's), in India (1919, 1945-47), in Malaya (1948-60), the Philippines (in the early 1950's), in Kenya (1952-57) and in Cyprus (1955-59). Violence became the main tool of suppression, and that included torture. It served two purposes. First, it wanted to convey a message to the locals as regards who was the master, i.e., racial superiority, and then teach them a lesson by punishing them for their resort to arms. Second, torture became the vehicle in extracting information. Information that is, which would lead to a better understanding of the armed resistance, its cells and leaders and the way they operated, leading to their apprehension. Ignorance in fighting the enemy is never a good tactic. Know thy enemy, on the other hand, has always served well those who adhered to it, both in theory and practice.

IV. Cyprus, 1955-59

Violence, however, led to counter-violence and oppression to intense reactions, both bordering on terror (an elusive, and occasionally dangerous, term to use, however one chooses to define and understand it). The systematic use of torture though, became official state policy with devastating consequences. This is where the author is at her very best, informing us of the standard colonial practice in adopting violence officially, in an effort to quell any uprisings, by hook or by crook. The colonial authorities did not show any qualms, nor did they exercise any restraint; quite the opposite. Cyprus was not Palestine, or Indochina, or Malaya, or even Kenya in regard to the scale, the magnitude and the ferocity of the struggle. No domestic displacement of the indigenous population was implemented by the colonial power, as in Malaya, in an effort to enervate armed resistance and dry the pool. Such a task was rather undertaken and successfully implemented by the leadership of the Cypriot Turkish community, whose summoning to the task was readily answered by the police auxiliary (created by the British) and those harboring extreme ideas (as was the case with two paramilitary organizations, Volkan and TMT). By early May 1956, in a manner carefully and well prepared and masterfully organized and executed, they forced the eviction of many Cypriot Greeks, who were residing in the northern suburbs of Nicosia. The event, unprecedented as it was, was nothing short of an effort to initiate and accomplish regional ethnic purification, the first step towards national ethnic separation. In this sordid game, they were triumphant. The sinister motive and purpose: to claim the impossibility of peaceful coexistence between the two communities (given their ethnic, religious and linguistic background and differences) and lay the foundations to allegations on the need for geographic separation.

By its own standards, the colonial experience for Cyprus was an ordeal and a huge one at that, which became considerably magnified during the anti-guerrilla war that the British authorities unleashed. It has been pointed out by many (primarily historians) that the British were caught unaware and completely unprepared, when on 1st April 1955 the anti-colonial struggle broke out. Colonial arrogance goes a long way toward explaining such an attitude, underestimation of the opponent's capabilities its corollary. That may well have been. A number of factors account for the British colonial mentality, not least of which was superciliousness in the sense of Britain taking its colonial subjects for granted, especially the Cypriot people, interpreting and understanding them perhaps as too complacent. Besides, nothing in the contemporary history of the country gave any indications of what was to come. True, in October 1931, the people rose and burned the Colonial House in anger, mainly for economic reasons (the 1929 depression and extra taxes imposed next year took a heavy toll on their lives), but the uprising was quickly and summarily extinguished. For the colonial administration and Britain, the uprising provided a unique opportunity to settle old scores with many, while the Cypriots were to be ruled the hard way: the Church (bishops were exiled), the Legislative Council (it was suspended) and popular agitation (many found themselves in exile and in jail).

What needs to be emphasized is the fact that after 1945 Cyprus acquired special importance in the eyes of London, because of its geographic location and the negative way geopolitics affected British politicians and forced them to interpret events. In a paradox of history, following the end of WWII, the Foreign Office contemplated acquiescing in the island's granting to Greece, only for the military and the Colonial Office to reject such an approach (the colonial power most probably did not want to give the impression of succumbing to pressure). Ernest Bevin's new thinking as regards the British Middle East, a scheme justifying liberal imperialism, touched Cyprus as well, when in July 1947 an attempt towards "self-government" ran afoul of many: the Orthodox Church and the right, who demanded "union and only union," while the left chose to participate, but was isolated, eventually forced to depart as well. The domestic political scene was in tatters; creating a united front was not feasible, for the ideological rift between the two domestic superpowers was enormous, their differences irreconcilable.

What proved decisive and gave a new and gratuitous and tragic dimension was the geopolitical aspect, which became a corollary of the Cold War. Suddenly and definitively by the Spring 1947, the US entered the picture decisively in the Eastern Mediterranean via the Truman Doctrine. Britain may have been forced to play second fiddle, given that WWII completely exhausted it, but was not yet over and done with. As a result, its colonial possessions in the area acquired new and strategic importance, while London was still Washington's valuable ally. Needless to stress, the way the regional and international picture was interpreted, rendered unthinkable any thought or suggestion of granting national independence to the colonies. In practical terms, the Atlantic Charter and the idea of self-determination gave way to the new reality of the global confrontation. Because of the power of the left inside the colonies, a connection was made between them and Moscow. After all, the Soviet Union was proud in presenting itself the mother of global revolution, world communism and anti-colonialism. Hence, colonialism's new

thinking touched western colonial possessions in a bizarre way: lest they fall into the communists, the latter being on the march, it became imperative-more than ever before-to support the colonial powers, i.e., Britain in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, France in the same regions and the Netherlands in Indonesia. The Truman Doctrine boosted the case of the colonial periphery, since the big power center, i.e., Washington, supported a resort to neocolonialism as a means of containing global communism. Britain and France had the first say and were given American blessing in their endeavor, only that neocolonial schemes and fantasies ran afoul of the force of local nationalism. In the case of Indochina, especially Vietnam, it assumed enormous proportions.⁶

It is within this context that all officials in London chose to view Cyprus and interpret its geographic position in strategic terms, especially in the early 1950's. Not so much as a strategic base, for the island simply does not fit such a prescription (it is not Suda Bay in Crete), but rather serves well as a listening post (echelon was at an inchoate state at that time). Another serious weakness of the island's morphology is that it does not possess any natural harbors to act as bases for naval vessels (hence the decision in the 1930's by the British to use Alexandria instead for their Mediterranean fleet), a reality that was already bypassed with the advent of airpower. Several forces were on a direct collision course in the island. British colonialism, which gave the impression of an immovable object, Cypriot anti-colonialism, acquiring the size of an irresistible force, but divided as regards the tactics to accomplish the strategy. Not so with the Cypriot Turks, who-by June 1948-and the establishment of the Anglo-Turkish Committee, entered the political arena, forcefully and decisively. Not many paid any intention to the possibility of collusion between the two later on.

In peripheral terms, two NATO allies would become deeply entangled, albeit for the wrong reasons: one reluctantly (Greece in no way wanted to challenge its security ties within NATO for the sake of Cyprus). As for the other, Turkey entered the arena of the Cyprus problem, not immediately, despite much British urging to do so, but in an assertive mood by late 1955, ready to challenge a lot and cash in on its geographical, or geo-strategic position. Ankara never failed to deliver a stern warning as early as in 1954 (during the UN General Assembly debate) over the geographic contiguity of Cyprus to Turkey and its deeper meaning and significance, an ominous sign that should have been taken into serious consideration.⁷ In international terms, Britain found much support among its western allies-when starting in 1954-the issue was brought before the UN General Assembly. An unenviable position occurred for Greece, when the African-Asian bloc and Eastern European countries were in the same camp with Athens, with the latter feeling alienated and deserted by its allies. As for the US, a dilemma needed to be resolved: does the US support Britain all the way, at the expense of anti-colonialism, as in the case of France in Indochina (after 1945), or does it stay put? Washington kept its distance, declining active support to London's request (through an aide-memoire in early 1954). John Foster Dulles, the US Secretary of

⁶ Among the many books on Indochina and the US's involvement, Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2012).

⁷ Claude Nicolet, *United States Policy Towards Cyprus, 1954-1974. Removing the Greek-Turkish Bone of Contention* (Manheim: Bibliopolis, 2001).

State, would not commit the US in the colonial tussle and support Britain, given what was at stake in the Middle East and the risk of communism and the Soviet Union profiting immensely. Moreover, the danger of NATO imploding because of Greece and Turkey over Cyprus could not simply be overlooked.

US intervention in Cyprus would be gradual, but not always siding with Britain. True, Washington voted with London against debating the Cyprus issue at the UN General Assembly in 1955. Its involvement became more active next year, with the dispatch of Julius Holmes (Special Assistant to the US Secretary of State), aiming to find common ground through mediation between the three (Britain, Greece and Turkey). His recommendations (for a national referendum and for British military presence), however, crossed the line for the British. In addition, another ominous factor had to be taken into consideration: Turkey and its concern over security. This much was realized by the then Vice President, Richard Nixon, during his visit there (July 1956) and his deep impression by Ankara's commitment to Cyprus. The Suez Operation (November 1956) and the proclamation of the Eisenhower Doctrine (January 1957) witnessed the US's becoming directly embroiled in the Middle East. Washington could not tolerate neocolonial *faits accomplis* by the Anglo-French, without its prior consultation and approval, which threatened the very foundations of its relations with the Arab states in the region in the face of the Soviet Union. The US would step into the picture decisively in mid-1958, after the Iraqi Revolution, when both London and Washington had to revamp their overall strategy in the Middle East. Turkey lost its luster, with Iraq's departing the Baghdad Pact and the western camp.

Another reason that brought the US into the foreground was that apathy, during a tag of war between two of its allies, was not a good strategy. Gone were the days of 1954. This became more than obvious during 1957-58, when the situation in the island was getting out of control. An all out war, involving three sides was the new reality. The US was a champion of national independence and self-determination, but in the case of Cyprus, British diplomacy, so it seems, carried the day, especially under Harold Macmillan. The new Prime Minister (from January 1957) sought to repair the damage done the previous year because of the Suez Operation and bring the two allies closer again. Macmillan managed to convince Washington on the necessity, not so much of prolonging colonialism, i.e., keeping Cyprus as a base, but rather in an ingenious twist, having bases in Cyprus (oddly enough, it was the Labor Party that suggested such an arrangement, in March 1956, according to Claude Nicolet). On Washington's part, lest the involvement and antagonism of the two allies in Cyprus led to conditions that were detrimental to western and NATO interests, it became a champion of Cypriot independence since early 1957.

Suddenly, the idea of Cyprus as an independent state came to the foreground, supported by many (primarily the US and Greece). Guaranteed independence, that is, attractive enough, but with far too many and conflicting interests (Turkey insisted on partition as a fallback position, continuation of British rule the preferable option), which became entangled in dangerous circumstances. Genuine independence, the offspring of self-determination, should have been the original strategy, not that the colonial response would have been much different. Only that

the aim of genuine independence stood better chances of being realized. In any case, 1958 was not 1955. Much water had run under the bridge. In Cyprus, too much blood had been spilled; what complicated infinitely the domestic situation was the inter-communal conflict, with the colonial power acting as a neutral observer, the fact that the latter employed extensively the strategy of *divide et impera*, notwithstanding. Shockingly and tragically, and gratuitously so, anti-colonialism was displaced and eclipsed by a new and pernicious reality that was artificially created. A reality, moreover, that threatened to destroy all the political and socio-economic fabric of the Cypriot society. The savagery of the inter-communal conflict, as it manifested itself in June 1958, threatened to engulf the entire population, culprits and innocents alike. Furthermore, another impression, artificially created, raised its head and submitted a preposterous version of the events taking place: it was a Greek-Turkish affair, which had nothing to do with colonialism. The new situation, in conjunction with the deep ideological polarization that was created, both intra and inter-communally, created a lethal cocktail and touched the lives of practically everybody. Such a reality was not new, as it was previously experienced, *mutatis mutandis*, in Ireland, South Asia and Palestine.

London rode the punch and recovered quickly enough from its initial surprise and shock, opting for stern action. Governor Robert Armitage's suggestion for a more liberal approach vis-à-vis the Cypriots was brushed aside, as Britain decided to employ all means necessary (total anti-guerrilla war, that is) in order to prevail. John Harding's taking over as Governor was no coincidence, as the author rightly points out. A former CIGS (Chief of the Imperial General Staff), having already been in the thin and thick of things as regards Malaya and Kenya, he was the right man to do the job properly in purely military terms. Torture was one of the means, as the author fully documents, where no restraints and no limits were placed. The ends justified the means, as it were. For those arrested, it was a harrowing experience. What is beyond dispute is the ordeal that awaited all those in custody. Fortitude, stamina, tenacity and resilience were never in short supply, let it be emphasized, by those who found themselves ensconced in the torture chambers. Some never made it; others did, not unscathed; still others were left with permanent body damages. All in all, the souls of those scarred have been left with an indelible mark; it will never and cannot ever go away. If statistics matter, fifteen confirmed cases of people who did not make it have been well documented and confirmed, as they died while in custody.

By and large, the Special Branch was responsible for interrogation techniques and all the *modus operandi* that accompanied it, in contradistinction to Malaya, where the army assumed the mantle. Two crucial components should be mentioned as well. First, it was not purely a British affair, as the colonial administration managed to lure into the colonial enterprise members of the Cypriot Turkish community, gradually transforming the entire affair into an inter-communal conflict. What added fuel to the fire was the active involvement and participation of Cypriot Turks in anti-guerrilla operations (the mobile police auxiliary was the best example) and interrogation techniques (the Special Branch did so, since Cypriot Turks were well acquainted with the language and the milieu of the battling ground). The new development, an affront and a direct challenge to the armed resistance, had

already been tested during WWII and in other places where colonial wars took place. In an understatement, it polarized an already explosive atmosphere, and a society fully entangled in and directly affected by total war, where all sides involved resorted to violence (for different reasons), and the indigenous people being caught in between. Precisely, as was the case in Europe and Asia and the colonies before. A vicious circle became the result, with the entire country slipping into the quicksand. Violence, for all intents and purposes, became the means and the vehicle to make policy and achieve tangible results, even though the rationale for those employing it differed substantially. On the part of the colonial regime, it was used as the main weapon to combat guerrilla warfare, unrestricted, with no rules observed, let it be said, with the new allies giving more than a hand. As for the guerrillas, they had to meet the challenge head on, albeit on a selective basis, but not on ferocity, all for the purpose of forcing the colonial power to quit and leave.

Cyprus reminded observers of Ireland (1920-21) and Palestine (1946-48). The similarities between George Grivas and Michael Collins, and other members of Jewish paramilitary groups, were many, especially in organization, ruthlessness and unrestricted use of violence, meeting tit for tat. To complete the circle, one has to add the Cypriot Turks, many of whom chose to participate on the side of the British, even for their own reasons (to this day, they cite resistance from fear of being dominated and exterminated). Anti-guerrilla warfare provided them with a unique opportunity to show and prove they were not just a minority of 18%. To the Cypriot Greeks, this was a nasty shock, while for EOKA and its leader, George Grivas, a nightmare and a reality that had to be dealt with. There was no simple approach, nor an easy, ready-made recipe to confront, even remedy it, a radical departure from the Organization's original intention of not touching the Cypriot Turks, for obvious political reasons. Even in the best of circumstances, indifference and inaction could not be adopted as policy on the part of the Organization, for popular pressure was simply unbearable in the face of assertive action on the part of the other side (like forcible expulsions, destruction of property and indiscriminate killings).

EOKA was drawn into the quagmire of violence and retribution, in two fronts: the left among the Cypriot Greeks, which was challenging the ideological supremacy of the right, proposing a rapprochement with the other community, and the Cypriot Turks, who chose their own separate way, aided and abetted by Turkey. The result of such a confrontation was a national catastrophe. A rapprochement with the Cypriot Turks at the time of a total war was interpreted by the right as collusion with the former. As for the violence emanating from those paramilitary groups like TMT, it was impossible not to join the vicious circle and then break from it. It was precisely the imperial game of pitting one political group, or ethnic community, against the other, so that colonialism could be prolonged. For the British, the Cypriot Turks conveniently became the reliable and trustworthy partners. Finally, for Turkey, one more reason to get itself actively involved, aside from geopolitics, i.e., Ankara would never allow a hostile power to control Cyprus and thus threaten Turkey's soft underbelly. Whether there was any truth in such allegations was irrelevant, but Ankara's narrative was not original. A precedent was already established with Korea in 1885, which-in the words of a German

officer-was characterized as a dagger directed at the heart of Japan. The innuendo was more than obvious: no hostile power to Japan would be allowed to rule and control Korea. With all these developments taking place, it was exceedingly difficult to win the people's hearts and minds. Even by the process of elimination, colonialism's chances of prevailing ideologically were next to zero. For a regime that religiously implements a policy of torture, alienation on the part of the same subjects it wants to lure is what it gets.

In contradistinction to Kenya and Algeria, where large number of settlers from Britain and France were present respectively, whose influence was decisive in the pursuit of anti-guerrilla warfare, this did not happen in Cyprus. The case with the British settlers, their violent response against the Kikuyu tribe (mainly for socio-economic reasons) and the use of some of the tribal chiefs by the British has been well documented by both David Anderson and Caroline Elkins. Alistair Horne did so in the case of Algeria, with the *pieds noirs* assuming a primary role.⁸ What can be cited constituting a similarity was the creation of internment camps, not so much in the sense of concentration camps in Nazi Germany, where people were physically exterminated. The British rather, put under arrest and interned thousands, suspending their habeas corpus and other fundamental liberties in an effort to curtail their activities and deny their use by the resistance. There were, however, internment and interrogation camps, where torture was extensively used.

In Cyprus, as a result of British malevolent ingenuity, and-let it be emphasized-the indefatigable efforts of the Cypriot Turkish community, the latter acquired the role of a counterweight, the balancer (in international relations terminology) in the domestic equation, with Britain the honest broker. Violence, irrespective of who employs it first, and for entirely different reasons, brings reaction, produces counter-violence in a vicious circle of torture, betrayal, double-crossing, and frequently death, all in the name of obtaining information for the pursuit of each protagonist's ultimate goals, or strategy. In other words, torture techniques, which via the passage of time become more sophisticated, become one of the tactics within the framework of the overall strategy of prevailing against anti-colonialism. Such an approach creates a climate of terror, fear, mistrust and deep suspiciousness, even mind paralysis, far beyond the necessary minimum that is created as a result.

It also becomes a question of racism, for inevitably, in the implementation of the strategy of anti-guerrilla warfare, the tactical army-initially at least-refuses to believe in any superiority of the opponent. In other words, losing is not part of its vocabulary, as it simply cannot acquiesce in any thought of suffering defeat. This feeling becomes infinitely stronger in colonies, if for nothing else, to justify colonialism and the presence of the metropolis in the periphery. It is, to put it in another way, the classic case of colossally underestimating one's opponent, because of racism, let it be stressed. All tactical armies in the world are raised within a certain doctrine, an ethos of purity, prevalence and superiority against their opponent. Nobody needs a lesson in military sociology to realize this simple

⁸ Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria, 1954-1962* (New York, Viking, 1979).

truth, which applies with tactical armies in the field. This has been amply demonstrated in the case of Europe, 1939-45, with Nazi military occupation and the war crimes and crimes against humanity the latter committed. In no uncertain terms, the Nazi regime became a colonial power, as was the case with Japan in Asia-Pacific.

During colonial warfare, where guerrilla tactics of hit and run are applied by the resistance, with maximum force, nobody should be deluded as regards the response of the colonial power. The colonial war becomes a racial war as well, for the tactical army will never acquiesce in allowing bandits (a popular labeling of the resistance) to rule the field and carry the day. For the British army, who prevailed against the Axis in WWII, it became more imperative than ever before to teach those bandits or rebels a lesson. Thus, its response, which was disproportionate and based on the full and maximum use of force. Anti-colonial war becomes a dirty war as well, with no ethical restraints, or boundaries on the pain the torturer will inflict on his victims, all in the pursuit of the war effort.

Cyprus, as has been sumptuously documented and demonstrated, became an experimental station in anti-guerrilla warfare and interrogation tactics, including torture, on a massive scale. By historical chance, the country was at the end of a series of colonial wars against Britain, where the aforementioned strategy was extensively employed (Palestine, India, Malay, Ireland, Kenya). The colonial power enjoyed an overwhelming knowledge in such practices, thanks to the experience accumulated in its possessions. Britain put the experience into use, in an effort to quell and crush the anti-colonial guerrilla warfare. Whether the colonial regime was successful in its endeavor via massive oppressive tactics, especially torture, is extensively debated. If by success, one means the capture of the leadership (George Grivas), then evidently Britain failed (despite information to the contrary, most notably by Peter Wright in *Spy Catcher*). As it also failed to get enough information leading to EOKA's inner circle, or in its attempt to defeat the Organization completely. This much was established as an admission by the last Governor, Sir Hugh Foote. British documents declassified later on made this perfectly clear. Britain was forced to leave as well, another indication of its defeat. The previously-mentioned observations, historically accurate as they are, need to be qualified, however. Britain quit Cyprus, but within a framework of having military bases in the island. True enough, EOKA proved quite tenacious, ever ready to draw on new recruits, but how relevant was it when another component of an already complex equation entered the picture, complicating the entire situation to the worst possible degree: the Cypriot-Turkish community and its active involvement via the decision of its leadership and the encouragement of the British? Finally, Britain left, but not the same way it did in Palestine (in 1948), or France for that matter in Indochina, following its defeat at Dien Bien Phu (May 1954).

When all is said and done, what is the legacy? In the case of Cyprus, the indigenous population had to endure an ordeal of revolutionary warfare and total war, with hardly any prisoners taken (a policy though, not always observed and not faithfully followed by everybody). Guerrilla warfare introduced new norms in the country, like massive mobilization leading to people's war. Anti-guerrilla warfare, on the

one hand, brought into the picture torture and sophisticated systems of interrogation. Word, however, should be said on the armed resistance (EOKA), whose survival and operational mode demanded calls to its members far and beyond the call of duty. It also called for strict measures of security, for any organization espousing guerrilla warfare demands and expects nothing less. Its very existence is at stake, especially in the face of an enemy that mobilizes for total anti-guerrilla warfare. Coincidentally, because of the same tactics, but a very different strategy, the same must be said of the TMT, where ideological cohesion became the force to keep them together.

Occasionally, innocent people were caught in between as collateral casualties. At other times, the rift between left and right became wider, driving both factions further apart. The ideological breach between the two, evident since the 1920's, reached its zenith in the late 1940's, because of the Greek Civil War (channeled into Cyprus, with dire consequences) and the global ideological polarization and confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union. As it was, the Cypriot left, chose not to participate (for many reasons, least of which dealt with the attitude of the Greek right during the occupation and resistance in Greece, 1941-44), opening itself to rumors and allegations of collaboration (with both the British and the Cypriot Turks), even treason. Many, within its rank and file, paid with their lives, under not so clear conditions that still incur accusations and counter-accusation and acrimonious exchanges. One legitimately wonders whether, in such a climate of deep ideological and political polarization, the left could really ponder its active participation with the right, anti-colonialism being common denominator? It is very hard to imagine, highly improbable to realize, for a man like George Grivas, deeply anti-communist (whose active participation with the British in 1944 against the left, bequeathed a bitter and long-lasting legacy surrounding his name, making him *persona non grata* for the left), to even consider broadening the base of his organization so as to allow people leaning to the left to join it.

The choices confronting the left, unenviable as they were by definition, because the party was caught in a cleft stick over the polarized climate and became virtual prisoner of what was taking place in the Greek Civil War, were not many. To go alone, provided that AKEL (the communist party) had the willingness and the capability to do so. Did it? As regards personnel, one may cite the thousands of WWII veterans. What about military equipment, though? AKEL was not a genuine communist party (by international standards) and a revolutionary one at that, a far cry from the Asian communist parties in China, Korea and Vietnam. Ally itself with the right? What role would it play, an eventuality guaranteeing its ideological enervation and possible political extinction? Stay neutral and allow its ideological adversary the upper hand? Reminiscing of similar situations in Europe during the WWII and Asia, the whole situation reached explosive proportions with far reaching and unpredictable consequences, where-by and large-innocent people paid with their lives, a tragedy that still reverberates to the present day.

The active participation of members of the Cypriot-Turkish community transformed the entire picture in a flash. Inter and intra-communal conflict became the name of the game. It suited the colonial master perfectly, to see its

subjects at each other's throats, using the one selectively against the other, to prolong colonialism, defeat the anti-colonial guerrilla warfare, or-in the last resort-retreat with honor, if worst came to the worst. Retreat with honor was initially unthinkable for Britain; too much was at stake, like imperial prestige and grandeur, which rendered such thoughts unthinkable. Only for London to relent under much pressure, albeit with a result nobody desired, much less anticipated, a disaster and a defeat for self-determination (not so much that neither union nor *taksim* were accomplished, but rather genuine independence was forever neutralized). Why a settlement was reached in February 1959? Domestically, it was unprofitable for Britain to insist on retaining Cyprus as a colony, as the cost was exorbitant. Internationally, anti-colonialism was gaining ground and momentum, forcing Britain to seek a political settlement, a *trois*.

Colonialism was an evil force, the more so its actual implementation. It was tantamount to territorial expansion and annexation, an offspring of imperialism. It was also economic exploitation, political subjugation, an attempt in ideological superiority and racism. Even though the overwhelming majority of the British colonies are free and independent states, the legacy of colonialism is still haunting us all. In the case of Cyprus, colonialism was not just a sad and tragic chapter, a mere and innocuous parenthesis, in the island's long history, which-one way or another-came to an inglorious end for Britain, It has left behind a bitter and excruciating legacy, an open wound, a wound that sought to square the circle through the triumph of communalism and take care of conflicting and diametrically opposing interests. A settlement at Zurich and London, which sought to keep all the big powers involved happy, (the UK, the US and their proxies-Greece and Turkey that is), except for the people of Cyprus. A compromise, finally, which aimed at the impossible: keep the two communities apart, so that they can be together, contributing eventually immensely to the country's forcible partition fifteen years later.

V. Conclusion

Is there a lesson to be learned in reading Caroline Elkins' book? There are many, in fact, and perhaps the most salient is reserved for the imperial metropolis: the necessity to come to terms with the past. Studying in an open and clear mind what took place centuries and decades ago, devoid of any prejudices and other ideological preconditions that vitiate the historical profession. The past and its intensive study reveal truths, cruel and chilling as they are, about many and everything. It is also the *conditio sine qua non* for human nature to make its subjects better citizens in their societies and our world. France with Indochina and Algeria, the US with Vietnam (but not with Korea, even though so much evidence has obliterated many myths that had prevailed, especially with the one dealing with the aspect of the civil strife of the War, 1950-53), may be cited as good examples.

Denying the past, on the other hand, is ill-advisable, no matter what the logic and the rationale are. What immediately comes to mind is Japan and an attempt by many to interpret the country's recent history (since the Meiji restoration and especially the early to mid twentieth century) in such a way so as to justify

imperialism and colonialism, Korea, Manchuria notwithstanding. Not to mention Japan's adherence to racialism as a belief, a *raison d'être* and its primary justification in pursuing the war effort. Sure enough, there are many ways to approach historiography, in using, abusing and misusing history, however different the motives and the ultimate goals are. Some prefer to ignore the past completely, bury history as it is deeply, like γ radiation under tons of concrete, for the consequences its open discussion might create. There may be wisdom in this approach, one may claim with justice. Looking persistently in the past, interpreting the future through the lens of what took place, regardless of the motives in doing so, tend to hold us prisoners, restraining our thinking, thus making us unable to move forward and progress accordingly.

Others prefer to counterfeit history, choosing to replace it with their own version. Not so much in denying the past, but constructing an entirely new version, worthy of the original. And then there are those who strive to manipulate it, seeking to profit from history's exploitation while addressing their audiences and pursue their own goals. Politicians and other speculators fall within this particular category, with their record of success somewhat mixed.

Finally, there are those like myself, who view history through a different prism, who seek to research, study in depth and understand the past in such a way so as to force it to teach us a lot. To study it meticulously, scrupulously and objectively and acquire historical consciousness. The aim? To put to permanent rest fantasies and myths that tend to be corrosive and alter history in such a way so as to coerce people in doubting the wisdom in studying it in the first place. Employ history, in other words, to terminate, once and for all-to the degree possible-any resort to noxious practices of the good old days, when the sun never set in the British Empire. A duty, to safeguard our future from practices, especially like those involving imperial fantasies and a toxic nostalgia to a past that caused so much harm and damage to its victims, in which the truth was carefully hid and tightly sealed. A past, furthermore, where the perpetrator not only got off the hook scot free, but never answered to justice for its crimes. An outrageous development, for all intents and purposes, in contradistinction to Cyprus and its people, who are still paying for crimes and sins they never committed, simply because they desired and fully deserved freedom and national independence. And yes, Caroline Elkins has provided us all with such a tool to appreciate the past and plunge deeply into history.