

DIVIDED CITIES

MA YROMEM

MEMORY AND IDENTITY

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Divided cities present an intriguing phenomenology in urban design where political and/or cultural circumstances lead to a schism in an otherwise holistic city. The consequence of such division is not only physically present, but also has a long lasting impression on communal and individual identity. This impact is further emphasized by local architecture and how the border is treated in each side of a division. This article uses the island city of Nicosia, Cyprus, located in the Mediterranean, as a case study to better understand how borders in divided cities relate to memory and identity establishment.

Architecture is entangled in a web of political, social, cultural, and economic powers. As a spatial practice, architecture has the capacity to reallocate cultural powers and to constructively contribute to social change. In divided cities, however, architecture is misused as an ultimate method of containing and managing intercommunal tensions. Giving physical form to fear and misunderstanding, these constructs only sustain and exacerbate long-standing problems, since “physical partition often affirms local assumptions about persecution and encourages one ethnic community to antagonize another” (Calame, 2009, p. 5). Division of the urban fabric destroys the essence of place, hinders communal identity and sustains distrust as competing groups manipulate images of the city and historical past for their own benefit. Intercommunal tension cannot and should not be addressed by erecting of walls, fences, and no man’s lands, but rather through open dialogue and exchange. Although divided cities are not prevalent in urban history, they represent the power of architecture as a cultural agency and demonstrate how, if misused, they can lead to urban dysfunction and permanent division.

Historically, the purpose of city fortification has been twofold: to provide passive security against external threats and to inhibit the social assimilation that usually accompanies a dense and cooperative urban environment. Although creating a wall around a city helps with the physical definition of a community, it also has the power to divide because it draws a distinction between those within and outside of the city. As Lewis Mumford noted, “physical barricades have historically provided a functional separation between civilized and uncivilized domains for resident communities” (Mumford, 1960, p. 54). The city boundary emphasizes social hierarchy and sustains prejudice and mistrust among community members.

Similar to city walls, permanent or temporary partitions in divided cities are constructed out of fear and distrust among different ethnic and/or social groups. In the case of Cyprus, the Green Line is a de facto international boundary between the self-proclaimed but unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and the Greek-speaking Cypriots in the south. The partition line is about ten kilometers long and varies in width between twenty meters and four meters as it runs through the urban and suburban terrain.

“We are destined to get worse, not better, for as long as there is the concept of fear and siege. So if fear is, at the core, the most dangerous emotion... then remove the fear. Now, how do you do that? Is it done by walls? Is it done by education? Is it done by being inventive about how you share the land? I’m not sure that I have any of the answers – plenty of the questions.”

-David Ervine, former Member of the Legislative Assembly, Belfast, 2001

As cities reflect local demographics in spatial form, each city can be perceived on a continuum between perfect spatial integration and complete segregation. As an example of a divided city, Nicosia, capital of Cyprus, reflects total spatial segregation between its two ethnic groups. Intercommunal rivalry in Nicosia frayed the normal urban functioning, resulting in a complete schism along its east-west ethnic fault-line. The Green Line has been a physical manifestation of a long and violent ethnic rivalry between the Turkish-speaking Cypriots in the north and the Greek-speaking Cypriots in the south. To understand the effects of partitioning on individual and collective identity in Nicosia, it is necessary to first unpack its complex history and evolution as an urban city.

BACKGROUND ON NICOSIA

Historically Cyprus was composed of two major ethnic groups: the Greek- and Turkish-speaking Cypriots. Although these two groups coexisted with tolerance and unity at the beginning, over time political events led to conflict and an eventual schism between the Turkish-speaking and Greek-speaking Cypriots.

Following the Ottoman Empire's acquisition of Cyprus in 1571, the ethnic and cultural schism became increasingly apparent. The Ottoman's millet system favored Muslim minority groups, resulting in institutionalization of ethnic segregation. Consequently, the Turkish-speaking residents settled primarily in the northern part of Nicosia, while the Greek-speaking congregated in the south. The social and commercial activities, however, remained open and active between the two ethnic groups in the city's central zone.

British occupation in 1878 further emphasized the ethnic segregation by swaying the political authority to church leaders. In 1914, Britain consolidated its hold over the former Ottoman Empire. Following World War I, Cyprus became an annexed colony of Britain and eventually a Crown colony in 1925.

Hoping for independence, more than 37,000 Greek- and Turkish-speaking Cypriots volunteered to serve in various British armed forces during World War II. Although many colonies were able to gain independence post-war, Cyprus remained a British colony due to its strategic location in the Middle East (Mallinson, 2005, p. 11). In order to legitimize and ensure their permanent presence in Cyprus, the British colonial authorities enforced policies that formalized ethnic divisions and accelerated inter-ethnic rivalries. These external influences "tended to disrupt the natural evolution of self-determination and the emergence of an inclusive

national identity, aggravating latent antagonisms between the Greek- and Turkish-speaking Cypriots" (Calame 2009, p. 127). Persistent inter-ethnic rivalry lasted from 1950 until 1975, leading to destabilization and destruction of the Cypriots' natural affinity for tolerance.

Simultaneously, the Greek-Cypriots campaigned for enosis (union with Greece) as a movement against British colonialism. As anticolonial violence directed at police was sometimes indistinguishable from inter-ethnic violence, tension between the two ethnic groups escalated (Calame, 2009, p. 128). In May 1956, the British military installed barbed-wire fencing and checkpoints in order to prevent Turkish-Greek confrontation, but this division only aggravated the two communities (Holland, 1998, p. 66). This division, informally known as the Mason-Dixon Line, was placed east-west through the center of the old city and the original path of the Pedieos River. In June 1958, the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan proposed the bifurcation of political institutions for Turkish- and Greek-speaking residents.

In February 1959, recognizing that a shared desire to achieve independence from Britain overshadowed their differences, Greek- and Turkish-speaking Cypriot politicians signed the London and Zurich agreement, which concluded the ethnic rivalry and established Cyprus as a sovereign nation. This desperate act of independence proved to be premature and short-lived as the newly formulated constitution institutionalized ethnic rivalries within its rigid quotas. The new quotas "adopted a democratic framework for national government without having first achieved national integration" (Calame, 2009, p. 131). Chaotic conditions and persistent violence prompted the British soldiers to install temporary physical barricades along the Mason-Dixon line. In December 1963, the

partition was formalized as “the Green Line,” which constituted a double-layered partition line between Greek- and Turkish-speaking Cypriots with a substantial no man’s land in between. Although the purpose of the Green Line was to temporarily halt hostilities and maintain a ceasefire pending future negotiation, this division remained an “unremitting obstacle to progress toward normalization in Cyprus more than forty years later” (Harbottle, 1970, p. 66-68). In March 1964, further fortification was installed when United Nations peacemakers monitored the ceasefire and took control of sensitive boundary areas. As a result, Greek-speaking Cypriots in the north and Turkish-speaking Cypriots in the south abandoned their homes to seek the security of a friendly enclave. In most cases, this meant crossing the Green Line and leaving their property behind.

Unfortunately, the partitioning process further encouraged animosity and segregation between the two communities. Turkey and Greece, concerned about the security of their citizens in Cyprus, took military action to protect and maintain the divide. The Turkish military took control of 37 percent of the island on July 22nd 1974. Fearing persecution, hundreds of thousands of Cypriots were displaced, leading to an almost near-perfect ethnic homogeneity of northern and southern parts of the island. According to the 1960 census, “about 40,000 Turkish-speaking Cypriots lived south of the future boundary, and approximately 200,000 Greek-speaking Cypriots north of it: by 1975 fewer than a hundred members of these statistical categories remained. Most of the nearly 250,000 refugees participating in this demographic reengineering exercise—about 40 percent of the pre-partition population of Cyprus as a whole—received no compensation for loss of their possessions, houses, and jobs” (Bakshi, 2014, p. 141). The prospect of European Union membership for Cyprus and several



Figure 1

Location of Cyprus in the Middle East and its proximity to Turkey and Greece; the Green Line runs through the historic city center dividing Nicosia into two.

comprehensive settlement plans by Kofi Annan (former UN secretary general) in 2004 proved futile. Sixty-four percent of Turkish Cypriot voters endorsed the reunification plan, but more than 75 percent of Greek-speaking Cypriot voters rejected it (Calame, 2009, p. 139).

PARTITIONING EFFECTS

The partitioning effect on Cyprus has been significant not only in terms of lives lost, but also the number of families that were forced to relocate from the mixed regions of Nicosia. More than 600 Greek-speaking Cypriot families had to abandon their homes following widespread hostility and intimidation. Continuous violence had a great impact on levels of stress, anxiety and trauma for individuals and communities. Political settlement was further complicated by the fact that each group refused to acknowledge the losses of the other. As Yiannis Papadakis warned, “if we still see ourselves as victims and do not acknowledge the pain of others, it would be very scary—we

have both been aggressors" (Papadakis, 2002). Ignorance and continuous rejection of the other group's suffering perpetuated animosity and conflict between the Greek- and Turkish-speaking Cypriots. The partitioning effect was not only expensive in its construction for both parties, but also left lasting psychological and emotional scars that have healed very slowly over the past 40 years.

The partitioning process in Cyprus was most disruptive in how it affected the physical fabric of Nicosia. The city division led to demoralization of residents and inefficiency as many public amenities were duplicated across the divide. Nicosia's historic center, previously known for its vibrancy and cooperation, was turned into a no man's land (Calame, 2009, p. 141). The Green Line eroded the urban market, which had been at the heart of Nicosia, leading to job loss and displacement of a large segment of the workforce. In addition, Cyprus's economy, which relied on agriculture and tourism, suffered significantly due to political and economic instability (Calame, 2009, p. 142). Given Nicosia's division, many institutions, facilities, and services had to be duplicated - a process that was costly, hasty, and redundant. Economic, social, and academic bifurcation in Nicosia led to a period of stagnation and perpetuated ethnic animosity. The biased academic system that was established on each side of the divide further propagated bigotry, resulting in a new generation of Cypriots that were engrossed in ethnic prejudice (Calame, 2009, p. 141). Greek- and Turkish-speaking Cypriots created national narratives that omitted or exaggerated certain events in support of each community's interests. The national narrative was then propagated in schools, persisting in communities and affecting the new generation's perception of the past while distorting the older generations' memories.

MYTHMAKING AND MEMORY CONSTRUCTION

Nicosia is just one example of a divided city where memories are distorted, bigotry propagated, and new myths constructed to support a particularly biased version of history. In such cities, representations of the past are often selective and distorted. In contested sites marked by power struggles, myth and storytelling are used to make rightful ownership claims over a particular place. As a result, "other groups currently residing there are seen as recent arrivals or as having an insignificant presence" (Bakshi, 2013, p. 199). National narratives are constructed in order to validate the community's presence. Explaining the connection between contested sites and myth making, Bakshi notes: "cities are often central to ethnonational conflicts, where tailored myths and memories are used to lay claim to the rightful ownership of certain sites. In this context, spatial practices that harness memory become a critical part of a purposive reconstruction of the past" (Bakshi, 2013, p. 189). Events and time frames that do not support the national narration are simply forgotten or ignored, while favorable events are embellished and proclaimed. Storytelling is a powerful tool in communicating past knowledge and creating a strong sense of heritage and history. Cities that are partitioned as a result of conflict often use storytelling to skew past events in their own favor.

Images of cities or physical places can be manipulated to support national narration. The same place within a city can be perceived differently depending on one's associated memories. Physical spaces related to painful memories can be destroyed, while others are celebrated and left as monuments to a heroic past; "the physical body of the city is embellished with memories that correspond to what is officially

remembered or forgotten" (Bakshi, 2013, p. 202). Destruction or construction of certain buildings can be used as a technique to manipulate or reformulate society's memories. As a result, "official policies of erasure are executed through the destruction of buildings, and transmitted memories continue to influence individuals' use of the city" (Bakshi, 2014, p. 189).

In Nicosia, the selective remembering and forgetting of historical events resulted in two divergent myths about the historic walled city center, a space that was shared between the two ethnic groups in the past. These myths were deeply embedded into individuals' memories and were propagated through the academic systems. As a result, the historic recollections of the past events have different key dates. Greek-speaking Cypriots' recollection of history overlooks the intercommunal violence that occurred between 1963 and 1974 and instead remembers the period of unification and peace between the ethnic groups (Papadakis, 2005). The school history books similarly overlook the 1963-1974 intercommunal violence, while stressing the Greek Cypriots' violence, strife, and displacement following the 1974 Turkish occupation.

In contrast, the Turkish-speaking Cypriots stress the period of war in 1963 as a dark time when many were forced to leave their villages to settle in the north under Turkish protection. Turkish-speaking Cypriots celebrate the 1974 Turkish intervention, which marks the founding of their 'homeland' (Papadakis, 2005, p. 149). These opposing narrations of Nicosia's past illustrate the prejudices and selective memories of these two populations. The nostalgic utopias are linked to the periods that align with each community's official memory discourses. Elements that do not fit into these narratives are simply left out of these imaginative constructions.

Myths also represent social and cultural values. Values represented in northern and southern Cypriot's narration have a significant presence in Nicosia's material reality and the way these two communities deal with the partition wall. Turkish-Cypriots' desire to forget the time when they shared the land with the Greek-Cypriots resulted in the erasure and renaming of all street and place names. The change in mentality of living in exile versus a homeland has manifested itself in the way that the Turkish-Cypriots perceive

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the Green Line. They consequently view the partition as a permanent international border with solid concrete walls and checkpoints. The Greek-Cypriots approach the partition rather differently. They view the buffer zone as a temporary divide, a makeshift construction and blockage that would be easy to dismantle (Bakshi, 2014, p. 201). Mythmaking is a spatial practice that functions beyond the fictional space. As Wortham noted, "place has an indeterminacy and creative potential that can be seized or taken advantage of, and prompted instead of swept away or denied" (Wortham, 2008, p. 39). Designers and architects can accordingly utilize the potential of myth-making to inform design decisions in both architectural and urban scale.

Places are both real and imagined, based on mental association, as well as physical form and character. As a result, designers and planners

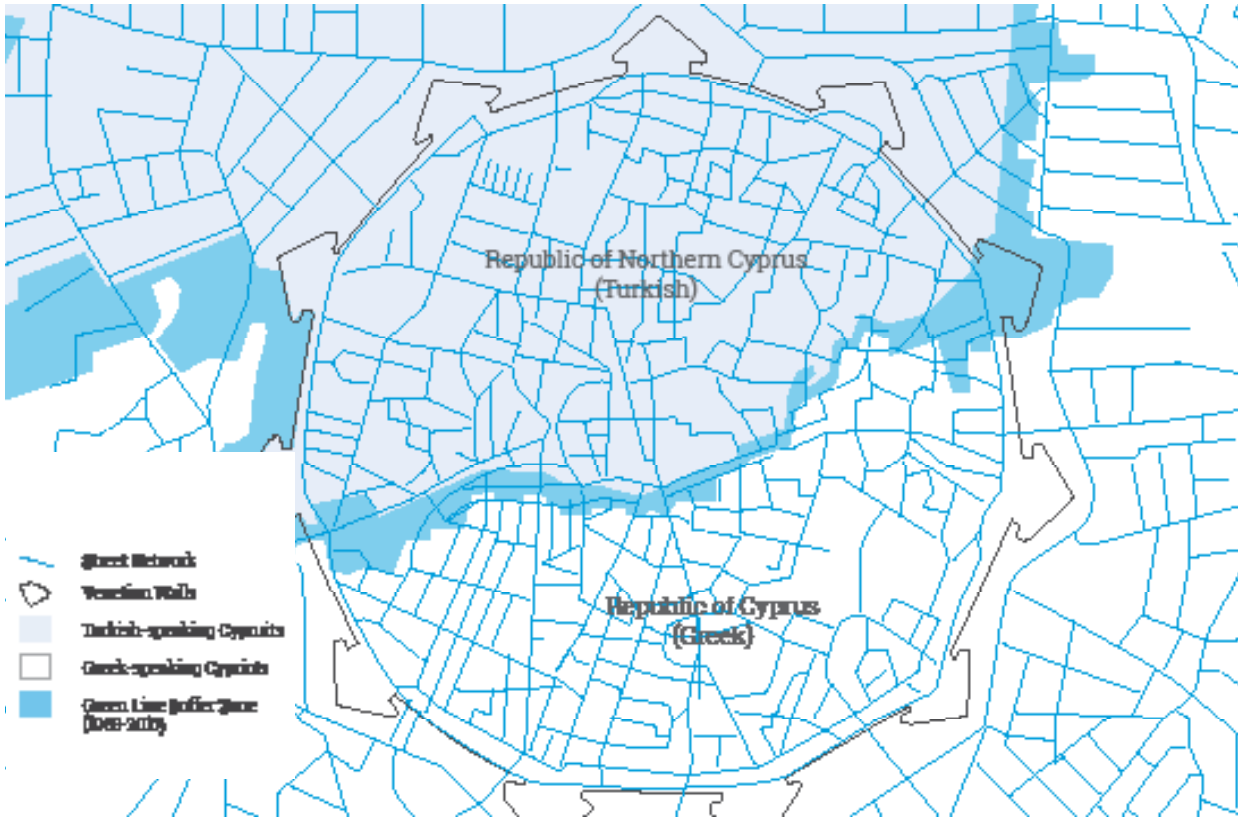


Figure 2
 Takeshift construction of a northern border by the Greek-Cypriots versus permanent materiality of a southern border created by the Turkish-Cypriots.

have as significant a role in imagined constructs of narratives, associations, and rituals as they do in the creation and destruction of physical spaces (Wortham, 2008, p. 32). The lack of diplomatic reconciliations could be attributed in part to officials' inability to understand the extent of influence that such imaginary and exaggerated narratives have had in sustaining the animosity between the Greek- and Turkish-speaking Cypriots. Myth is often associated with falsehood and fiction, carrying "a dismissive, pejorative connotation. However, as a complex cultural process mythology can be utilized as a method of stewarding and engaging design of

change" (Wortham, 2008, p. 38). By understanding the role of myth as a social construct, designers and negotiators can utilize the imaginative and physical reality of Nicosia in bringing healing and eventually harmony to the region.

IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE URBAN SETTING

Cities provide a stable platform for individual and collective identity formation. The city, as a "confluence of the complexity and density of human experience, is a framework for memories that are often collective, involving public life,

social interaction and group identities" (Becherer, 1984; Boyer, 1994). The perceived stability of space in urban cities, or 'enduringness of materials' based on Paul Ricoeur's ideology, allows for retrieval of the past in the present through the conduit of the built environment (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 57). Cities support and frame memories as they provide linkages between the past, present, and future through architecture and physical forms. Places, as they are seen and experienced today, support and create memories, while allowing access to images of the place in the past. Places may have been destroyed, reassembled, or reconstructed to project certain meanings, yet these same places still maintain potential as points of connection to other histories, retaining traces and material evidence of a past that may not coincide with official or objective documentations (Jordan, 2006, p. 25).

Identity formation is based on the culmination of experiences and events throughout one's lifetime. A person's or community's past provides a datum for evaluating one's sense of self and identity. As mentioned above, one's sense of the past may extend as far back as one's birth or it may include previous generations and heredity. Linkage to the past strengthens one's sense of identity through recollection of memories and events. Place memories offer a unique opportunity, as the history of places and buildings often surpasses one's lifespan: "place-based memories can offer people a link to the past and connections to a sense of identity—one which may differ from national identity" (Till, 2005, p. 32). In addition to fortifying one's identity, place can reinforce a sense of belonging and affiliation.

SELECTIVE MEMORY

The city uses the built form as it witnesses and records collective memory. Place memory, however, can be manipulated through processes of erasure or emphasis. Anita Bakshi's 2010-2011

interviews of English-, Greek-, and Turkish-speaking Cypriot shopkeepers reveal the selective recollection of memory in Nicosia before and after the partition. The interviewees all lived or worked in the walled city between the 1940 and 1970s, and many still maintain businesses in the currently bifurcated city center. Although these individuals experienced the same past, their memories of the Greek- and Turkish-speaking Cypriots' differ significantly. One Greek-Cypriot shopkeeper remembered serving Turkish customers, but did not recall the presence of the Green Line in 1963. His earliest recollection of the division was in 1974, when the Turks invaded Cyprus. Many of the Greek-Cypriots denied intercommunal violence or any problems whatsoever between the two groups and repeated the national narration that violence began only after the Turkish invasion.

The Turkish-speaking Cypriots similarly recalled trading with Greek-speaking Cypriots, but their memories differed in reference to 'normal times' or the times before the conflict. Turkish shopkeepers' recollections dated as early as 1955 or 1963. Their memories related to the time before intercommunal conflict were rather limited. However, when certain images of buildings were shown to the Turkish-speaking shopkeepers,

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they were able to recall spending time in certain mixed areas 1963, when the official narrative began. These selective memories can be attributed to the fact that "memories related to place in contested environments are heavily influenced by official constructions of the historic narrative and mythologies of place which filter down

into individual memories" (Bakshi 2014, p. 203). Shopkeepers' recollections closely followed the national narrative, illustrating the strong influence of national myths in "forgetting of entire sets of memories that fall before the origin point of national memory, leaving afloat and inaccessible the remembered city that corresponds to that time" (Bakshi 2013, p. 203). Photographs and visual material related to the everyday reality of place, however, allowed people to pull blocked memories into the forefront.

CONCLUSION

In the case of Nicosia, the Green Line has become a physical manifestation of distrust, impeding the nation's ability to heal and unify. According to the work of de Certeau, places are continuously constructed and reconstructed through everyday actions. As de Certeau noted, "places are the warehouses of memory, always haunted with myriad of possibilities for meaning and behavior" (de Certeau, 1985, p. 131). As disciplinary power in space becomes more totalizing, it also becomes prone to subversion. Through the dialectics of strategies and tactics, mediations of power can be reversed and meanings inverted. Architecture as a spatial practice can re-calibrate power in a community. Destroying the physical barrier

and providing space for open dialogue can subvert false historical narratives and encourage communal healing.

Large institutions, social groups, nations, and governments do not have a memory but are able to create one through the manipulation or collection of images, texts, symbols, places, and ceremonies (Assmann 2010, p. 55). Urban myths are used to restructure urban landscapes in the national imagination, and to lend support to official historical narratives. In addition, these narratives are instrumental in informing major urban design, regeneration, and reconstruction projects that emphasize or support the national myth (Bakshi 2014, p. 197). In the case of Nicosia, physical spaces, like historical memories, are erased or manipulated to support the community's version of history. These narratives, which are passed down over generations, contribute to the individual and collective identity formation. Given the perceived stability of place, urban architecture has the capacity to maintain and store multiple times in one location. In divided cities where the urban fabric is significantly transformed, memory can provide access to what is no longer present. Places that are still standing, however, can recount history in a more subjective manner. As a result, place and architecture become invaluable tools in tapping into and understanding hidden or forgotten histories. ■

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