DRAWING ON THE WALL

ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION AND POLITICS IN A DIVIDED CITY

CHARLES WALKER
University of Auckland

What is different is, to begin with, what is excluded: the edges of the city ... the spaces of forbidden games, of guerilla war, of war ...[1]

Aphrodite's Island

The third largest island in the Mediterranean, Cyprus has an area of around 3,500 square miles (9,200 square kilometers.), about the size of Connecticut. Fabled birthplace of Aphrodite and home of Adonis, its strategic location at the crossroads of three continents — Europe, Asia and Africa — has made it a prize possession for ancient and modern empires.

In the course of its five thousand year history, Cyprus has been conquered by most of the major powers that had interest in, or sought control of, the Middle East. The list of successive rulers includes Egyptians, Greeks, Phoenicians, Assyrians, Persians, Ptolemies, Romans, Byzantines, Franks, Venetians, Ottoman Turks, and British.[2]

The first view of the capital, Nicosia, from the air reveals it's unique characteristics. The city lies in the middle of a vast flat plain and is surrounded by a massive, perfectly circular, stone wall 1.4 kilometers in diameter and five kilometers in circumference with 11 equally spaced polygonal bastions. Built in the 16th century by military engineers from Venice, it is the realization of an abstract idea — a fortified European *ideal city*; albeit that the main thoroughfares are distorted to accommodate an older, more eastern street pattern. However, the amalgamation of cultures that shaped Cyprus' unique identity has also contributed to its turbulent history.

When Turkish armies first arrived at the walls of Nicosia, in 1571, they found that instead of battering at the gates, they could capture the city by besieging one bastion. These awesome fortifications, designed to allow a wide field of fire for defending cannon, were in fact very difficult to supply, and reinforce and proved to be points of weakness. By the time the British colonized the island in 1878, after 300 years of Ottoman rule, the bi-communal character of Cypriot society had already been formed and consolidated. [3] The exploitation of bi-communalism through the British administrations' policy of "divide and rule" was maintained until Cyprus became independent in 1960, following a five year anti-colonial struggle. It is worth noting here that this campaign did not unite the population against the colonizer as it did in other countries. This was because the Greek majority had as its ultimate aim, not only independence from Britain but *enosis*, union with Greece — an objective not shared by the minority Turkish Cypriot population. As a result,

neither the island's newly acquired 'independence,' nor its proclaimed 'territorial integrity' were to be long lived. ... In July 1974, the ruling military junta in Greece engineered a bloody coup against ... Archbishop Makarios ... the first post-colonial president of Cyprus. A week later, Turkey invaded the island ... to 'restore constitutional order' and 'protect the Turkish Cypriot community.[4]

Since the hostilities of 1974 Nicosia has been divided by a militarized border, roughly suggesting an East-West axis. A "buffer zone" known as the "Green Line" and patrolled by United Nation peacekeeping forces separates the two communities. To the south is Lefkosia, capital of the (Greek Cypriot) Republic of Cyprus. To the north is Lefkosha, capital of the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus, a state born out of the events of 1974 and presently officially recognized only by Turkey. Diplomatically, it is a "non-place." The relative political status of the two sides is reflected in the levels of economic and physical development. The Greek Cypriot side has prospered from tourism and also, by virtue of the islands location in the eastern Mediterranean, from the flight of speculative capital from Beirut, Lebanon, from Israel, the Gulf and increasingly from the former Soviet Union. The result has been a prolonged, frenetic construction boom and the emergence of a built environment apparently uninformed by any spatial, morphological or infrastructural order. On the other (Turkish-Cypriot) side there is a fragile economy, unemployment, migrating youth population, a lack of development pressure and perhaps, of vision. Any new development that has occurred has generally taken place outside the walls of the old city, leaving the historic center to deteriorate. After dark the city is silent.

Yet, in a very real sense, Nicosia is still the hub of urban activity in Cyprus. Since the 1930s the total population of both sides has risen fivefold and now stands at around 200,000, one third of the population of the island. This growth has been accompanied by several

435

related scenarios. One is that the periphery of the city — the areas just outside the wall — has become central. Originally developed by the British, partially in accordance with garden city principles, these areas now accommodated government offices, businesses, shops, restaurants and cafes. Further out, this pleasant environment gives way to new road works and the unplanned, uncontrolled and wasteful concrete sprawl typical of so many modern Mediterranean cities. Another scenario is the reality of human and structural partition. The buffer zone that cuts through the walled city is a daily reminder of division and encourages the unrestrained growth of two separate parts. Meanwhile, both communities share a rich 6,000-year cultural and architectural heritage as well as increasingly scarce water resources, inadequate sewers and other infrastructures (a legacy of the British Empire) and thousands of rats.

While the potential remains to create significant urban buildings and spaces at the scale of the whole city, most efforts at achieving cooperation flounder under political pressure from both governments, anxious and suspicious of the intentions of those on the other side of the wall.

436

A Master Plan for Nicosia

Nevertheless, under the auspices of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), people on both sides have at least begun to recognize the value of the walled city and efforts have begun to restore some of the crumbling fabric. The municipalities, planners, architects, artists, writers, trade unionists and some of the more progressive politicians meet at irregular intervals to discuss issues of common concern. Official attitudes to these collaborations vary depending on the political climate of the day.

The UNDP initiative led to the proposals for the *Nicosia Master Plan.*[5] First articulated in 1979, the plan has been the only cooperative project between the two sides. Underlying the project is the idea that *"close and systematic technical cooperation can foster new bonds of understanding and may help overcome the prevailing fear and mistrust between the two communities.."*[6] The plan addresses issues relating to the development of Nicosia from 1980 to the year 2000. Issues range from conservation of historic buildings, to taxation, recreation, and construction opportunities.

Built into the plan are two scenarios: Nicosia with and without a buffer zone. It recognizes existing circumstances but retains a flexibility designed to allow a response to favorable political developments. Most of the work completed since 1980 includes the rehabilitation of two neighborhoods — Chrysaliniotissa on the south and Arab Ahmet on the north — through the restoration of housing and public buildings, traffic planning, and the creation of community services and landscaping projects.

The real strength and challenge of the master plan is that it goes beyond traditional more or less reactive, urban development controls. It also challenges much of the new orthodoxy in that it relies on the initiative of the public sector to actively shape the future direction of the city. The private sector which is actively financing construction outside the wall where there are fewer

controls, has failed to provide the impetus need to restore the economic base of the old city, to protect its cultural heritage or improve the life of its occupants.

After almost two decades, the plan is flagging. Progress has been slow and difficult, projects have been generally been limited to small scale "demonstrations" or restoration of historic buildings. So far this has not stimulated any wider private sector interest or investment in the qualitative development the of the old city. Neither, arguably, does the plan offer any new *architectural* vision of how things might be in a new Cyprus - although various suggestions have been proposed for the future of the buffer zone, including the establishment of a bi-communal university.

Education and the Politics of Division

While a comprehensive analysis of the Cyprus conflict requires a thorough historical analysis that is outside the scope of this paper, the role of education in developing attitudes towards identity and difference has been frequently noted.

> *[B]efore the British occupation of the island in 1878, both communities spoke a unified Cypriot dialect and used each other's places of worship with ecumenical latitude. The British, entering the picture with different concepts, undermined this symbiosis by handing control of education and culture on the island over to the ministries of the Greek and Ottoman mainland states. These then 'antagonistically collided' to segmentalize the two Cypriot communities and alienate them from each other. Small and manageable ethnic-communal and marker-criterial differences were sharpened and politicized into major ethnic cleavages by the political decisions of political entrepreneurs ...*[7]

> *(While the two communities have many common attributes) ... it could be postulated that the present perceptions of being different have been cultivated during the formal years of education and became exacerbated following the 1974 events and the physical separation of the two communities. Ideological (as well as partisan) predispositions influenced the degree to which people had been 'indoctrinated' by the symbolic universe created by the respective leadership of each community and, more importantly, by their two 'motherlands'.*[8]

Education is one of the few (some would say, the only) expanding sectors of the economy in northern Cyprus. Eastern Mediterranean University established in 1989, already has around 8,000 students, and smaller private universities have been established in response to a growing demand from the increasing numbers of high school graduates in Turkey and the Middle East who cannot find places in the existing tertiary systems of those countries

The mission statement of one of these smaller institutions, the European University of Lefke, anticipates

the future integration of both Cyprus and Turkey within the European and wider international community. This has influenced the design and development of courses and curricula, with English as the language of instruction. The Department of Architecture has drawn young faculty from (north) Cyprus, Turkey, Britain, the US, North Africa, and Latin America The department was established in 1990, and in 1995 had around 240 undergraduate students in the four-year B.S. (Architecture) program. Graduate programs were introduced in 1996. The campus on a hillside overlooking the clear blue Mediterranean evokes the classical ideal of a small rural community nourished by academia and agriculture.

On the other side of the hill is a reminder of a different reality — the border zone. Etched into the landscape are a star, a crescent and the words *"ne mutlu Turkum diyene,"* ("how proud I am to be called a Turk") — the words of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk asserting the independence of the new Turkish Republic in 1923. Ironically Ataturk had no interest in acquiring Cyprus.[9] A few kilometers in the other direction, by the sea, is the U.N. base currently staffed by Argentinean conscripts.

This is a sensitive place. While Lefke has always been a Turkish town, much of the surrounding orange growing area is contested and various "peace for land" deals have been touted at intervals since 1974. Between 1992 and 1995 I taught architecture and urban design at these two institutions in northern Cyprus. I will discuss three related projects run in the third-year studios. At present there are no architecture schools in south Cyprus. It is also worth noting that most of my students were born around 1974 and have never met their peers from the "other side."

This paper attempts — in the absence of any clear political consensus — to explore the potential of architectural education, particularly the design studio, to address the politics of (contested) space. More specifically, we were concerned with another way of looking at the divided city and for an alternative to the master plan assumption that the city is a technical product of experts.

The definition of urban meaning will be a process of conflict, domination and resistance to domination, directly linked to the dynamics of social struggle and not to the reproductive spatial expression of a unified culture. Furthermore, cities and space being fundamental to the organization of social life, the conflict over the assignment of certain goals to spatial forms will be one of the fundamental mechanisms of domination and counter-domination and the social structure.[10]

The built environment in Cyprus is increasingly the result of land and property speculation. Buildings as "repositories of memory" give way to crude, banal, badly constructed concrete boxes. Villages, abandoned by their original inhabitants are reoccupied and renamed by new immigrants from Turkey or retired Europeans. The history of Cyprus is being constantly revised by both sides, each anxious to implicate the other as responsible for the past tragedies.

Taking Positions
The Design Studio as "Public Space?"

The "design studio as core experience" has become the norm in architectural schools in Europe and the United States. In Turkey and the Middle East this may not necessarily be the case. Most students enter college directly from a highly structured high school system which encourages nationalism and a respect for authority. After the military coup of 1980, high school and college curricula in Turkey were revised and liberal faculty were purged. Schedules generally allow little scope for critical reflection on the relationship between education and society. Against this background overseas faculty members recruited to teach at Lefke were inclined to use studio as a vehicle to introduce, develop and explore ideas about contemporary contextual issues. In *Northern* Cyprus, contemporary experience is inexorably bound up with "the events" of 1974.

Whose City?

The city is an environment formed by the interaction and the integration of different practices ... It is maybe in this way that the city is truly the city.[11]

The first studio was concerned with potential urban regeneration strategies for the walled city of Nicosia based on an identification and understanding of "community requirements." Students worked in groups to research and document examples of other — *ideal, walled, divided* — cities and to make extensive physical and social surveys of existing conditions in Nicosia. The very process of making detailed surveys and visual records of building and space conditions, infrastructures, demographics, in an area characterized by military sensitivity, secrecy, community suspicion, illegal immigration, and a black market economy this is quite a task. Perhaps the most significant and contentious outcome of these studies was in the interpretation of information relating to social structures of the walled city center. In north Nicosia the center is also the edge, home to the poor, the elderly, the unemployed, petty criminals and smugglers. Many inhabitants are migrant workers from Turkey: building workers, fruit pickers, living in derelict buildings or in unlicensed accommodation, they line up every morning under the old walls hoping to be hired for a few dollars a day.

The surveys challenged a whole series of assumptions not only about the architectural project but also about the nature of the city and its citizens. In particular the idea that Nicosia has a distinct, unified, territorially-based "community." Certainly the community of north Nicosia is not a homogenous group and questions of territoriality, "identity" and "difference" spilled over into studio discussions. Turkish-Cypriot students did not necessarily identify with the Turkish population of Nicosia solely on the basis of ethnicity or religion. Many Turkish students, while acknowledging common nationality, distanced themselves from Turkish immigrants on the basis of class. Simplistic assumptions about ethnicity, poverty and crime were also challenged. Many (often rancorous) studio

437

discussions revolved around perceptions of "cultural" similarities and differences between these groups and were indicative of the uneasy relationship between dependent Turkish Cyprus and Turkey as savior and/or colonizer. Attitudes towards the partition also varied. While many areas near the border deteriorated due to lack of investment there are also a number of important public and civic institutions — the mosque /cathedral, the covered market place, museums and tourist attractions. During daylight hours cafes and restaurants, hard up against the green line, are busy. Partition evokes mixed feelings — tension and insecurity as well as safety and reassurance. For many people it is a simple fact of life.

Crossfire?

The second studio, building on the first, was intended to stimulate and provoke discussion of how urban development might proceed by addressing the existing reality of the area blighted by the proximity of "the Green Line." Less a wall than an agglomeration of oil drums, barbed wire, crumbling buildings, railings, banners, slogans, and flags, it is anything but green. In some places the buffer zone is only a few meters wide and allows various kinds of interaction — smiles, smuggling, banter or (very occasionally) bullets — between the guards on either side. Fraternization, particularly between Greek and Turkish Cypriot conscripts is not uncommon.

By explicitly addressing the built form of the whole city and, by extension, the possibilities for definition of, and connections between, public spaces students were forced to question the very nature and future of the political divide. Ironically, since 1974, both sides of the city have developed as separate and self contained municipalities. While sovereignty is contested, both sides have assumed *facto* equal standing and each has developed flexible territorial planning scenarios based partly, though not exclusively, on the UNDP Master Plan. This project also provoked lively discussion in the studio with students falling into three broad and sometimes overlapping groups: Those accepting or supporting the *status quo*, the (military) border stays; those who proposed a redefinition of the border — peaceful coexistence, but as two formerly hostile states (the "France-Germany" model); and those proposing reunification and a development of shared spaces and infrastructures. Significantly, this last group included *all* the Cypriot students in the class.

The studio also highlighted the great problem of urban architecture — the definition and creation of a contemporary "public" realm. Plans developed by the UN and the municipalities envisioned a network of public spaces, tourist facilities, museums and housing. Several buildings on either side have been carefully restored but await a use. The public sector may draw up the plans, but has neither the power nor the resources to implement them. The familiar US and European urban redevelopment pattern of privatization, eviction of poorer residents, and "gentrification" is unlikely under present conditions. Even some buildings which have been renovated under the UN plan lie empty because there is no perceived use for them under present circumstances. The other problem is that a true, unified, consensual public space may never

have existed in Cyprus. Students had already come up against the difficulties of defining *community* , even for one half of the city. For writers like Bruce Robbins in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, the UNDP idea of the non-coercive consensus reached through reason is an illusion maintained by repressing differences and particularities.[12] This was the premise of the final studio.

Crossings

The third studio project was for a *Center for the Interpretation of the History of Cyprus* to be built on the border and accessible to both communities. (*Who's history? Where's the front door?*) The site was an abandoned open space where the buffer zone is only a few meters wide. A wasteland, an urban edge in the heart of the city. Close to the mosque (cathedral) and the covered market. Surrounding streets run into the green line. Site surveys can be dangerous.

The illustration shows a project by Umut Koray reinterpreting the abstract, self-contained, idealized geometry of the city itself. Drawing on the wall as a symbol of unity, rather than division. A series of free-standing "monuments" accommodating different events within a circular wall are linked by an internal spiral ramp which is punctuated by eleven projecting glazed observation/rest areas. The center is conceived as one of a series of public pavilions set in a literal *green line* — a new public park which replaces yet acknowledges the existing buffer zone. Another by Qasim Mansoor proposes a floating roof structure - a pavilion providing shade but without walls - covers a part of the buffer zone leaving scarred and disintegrating buildings in place as a reminder of the disruption of 1974. Other functions are variously accommodated by linking new and existing buildings to develop a new public route accessible from both sides. Unlike the first self contained "object" this "incomplete" project invites further interpretation, participation and development.

Conclusion

There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes "the practice of freedom," the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.[12]

The mission statement of the University of Lefke posits the university as a potential community resource. One of the aims of the architectural program I have described in this paper was to test the proposition that the design studio can act as a "public forum" for debate and development of ideas about space and politics. In doing so, I have suggested that architectural education has to transcend the technical collaboration by experts proposed by the UNDP plan and critically interrogate the meaning of "public space." To this end, studio work was

publicly exhibited in (north) Nicosia. Political circumstances precluded any exhibition of the work in the South although student projects also formed part of a Turkish Cypriot Bureau of Architects exhibition of work done in relation to the UNDP Master Plan which was visited by Greek Cypriot architects and planners in 1994.

The studio programs allowed exploration of an idea which, if it were not for the political reality of Cyprus, seems very obvious: That the walled city should be considered as a whole. In other words, by focussing on the historic wall as a symbol of unity, rather than on the 1974 wall as a symbol of division it becomes possible to think once more in terms of the ideal city. But in doing so those involved must also begin to think more critically about the real histories and politics of space and less in terms of ethic/religious "narratives of loss."

... "the loving grip of the good society" warns us of the dangers inherent in the seemingly benign fantasy of social completion, a fantasy that negates plurality and conflict because it depends on an image of social space closed by an authoritative ground.[13]

NOTES

[1] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith, (Blackwell, 1991), p. 373.

[2] Joseph S. Joseph, *Cyprus-Ethnic Conflict and International Concern* (New York: Lang, 1985), p. 25.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Demetrios A. Theophylactou, *Security, Identity and Nation Building* (Avebury, 1995), p. 9.

[5] *UNDP: A Master Plan for Nicosia to the year 2000*, UNDP, (Nicosia, 1980).

[6] Ibid.

[7] Joseph Rothschild, *Ethnopolitics - A Conceptual Framework* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 85.

[8] Theophylactou, *Security, Identity and Nation Building*, p. 55.

[9] Patrick, Lord Kinross, *Ataturk - the Rebirth of a Nation* (London: Weidenfeld, 1967).

[10] Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 302.

[11] Raymond Ledrut, *Speech and the Silence of the City*, in Gottdeiner and Lagopoulos, ed. *The City & the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 122.

[12] Richard Schaull, *Foreword*, In Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1970), p. 15.

[13] Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), p. 326.

439