

# State Housing, Social Labelling and Refugee Identities in Cyprus

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## Abstract

*The focus of this paper is on the urban neighbourhoods of the displaced State properties, which were constructed in the Republic of Cyprus from 1976 onwards to re-house the internally displaced Greek Cypriots. This was a large scale, low cost State housing project that resettled people, according to income and family size, in purposefully built neighbourhoods, which were constructed on the edges of urban environments. Through the State housing policy a new social identity was constructed, which was recognised as a refugee or internally displaced person, i.e. a social group which felt labelled by their spatial positioning in the built environment. In this paper the experience and construction of the Cypriot refugee/displaced persons neighbourhoods is discussed, as well as the question of temporality through the concretisation of the 'camps' into 'neighbourhoods'. The paper addresses the ambivalent framing of these urban spaces (in terms of the figure of the internally displaced person and the refugee) and the political manipulation of the displaced persons by the State. Notions of labelling, social class and segregation are also discussed in relation to the urban development of State housing in Cyprus.*

**Keywords:** social housing, displacement; segregation, Cyprus, refugee identities, urbanism, conflict, housing, resettlement

## Introduction

The urban neighbourhoods of the State properties in the Republic of Cyprus were built to re-house the internally displaced Greek Cypriots who were forced to leave their homes in northern Cyprus during the 1974 war.<sup>2</sup> Research has been carried

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<sup>2</sup> It is calculated that approximately 150,000-200,000 Greek-Cypriots fled from the north of the island and 45,000 Turkish-Cypriots from the south (O. Demetriou, *Life Stories: Greek Cypriot Community, Research Report-Displacement in Cyprus Consequences of Civil and Military Strife Report 1 (2012)*. (Oslo: PRIO Cyprus Centre), 5, available at [http://www.prio.no/Global/upload/Cyprus/Publications/Displacement\\_Report\\_1\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.prio.no/Global/upload/Cyprus/Publications/Displacement_Report_1_ENG.pdf), accessed: 2 December 2018.



Photo 1. From tents to fabricated homes. Planners at work

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out on how the experience of displacement has shaped both the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities and their uprootment and resettlement in different parts of the island.<sup>3</sup> In this paper, however, I focus on the Greek Cypriot experience of the displaced persons resettlement in State built housing estates constructed in the south of the island. This low-cost grand State housing project was initially under-

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<sup>3</sup> R. Bryant (2012). *Life Stories: Turkish Cypriot Community, Displacement in Cyprus - Consequences of Civil and Military Strife*, 2. PRIO Cyprus Centre: Nicosia; O. Demetriou (2012) *Life Stories: Greek Cypriot Community*; N. Trimikliniotis and C. Demetriou, *Displacement in Cyprus Consequences of Civil and Military Strife. Report 3, Legal Framework in the Republic of Cyprus*(Oslo: PRIO,2012)

taken in 1976 with international aid, and with the hope that it would only be a temporary solution following the war. The resettlement of people into this large housing project – with more than 14,000 housing units in a country whose population is under one million – was carried out according to each family's income level, and the estates were placed on the edges of cities, near industrial areas which could absorb the new influx of workers. Through their placement at the periphery of urban and economic life, the prejudice that accompanied living in them meant that this social group felt labelled by their spatial positioning. In 1997 a political decision was taken and the deeds of the homes were given to their residents by 2005, transforming the State housing units from public to private. These 'displaced housing projects' are spaces that have become attached to the notion of 'internal refugee', even though in recent years they are urban spaces that are increasingly being inhabited by elderly refugees who are slowly passing away, families on low incomes and migrant families that seek cheap accommodation.

These State purpose-built housing neighbourhoods are predominantly colloquially called in Greek *sinikismoi*, which is literally translated as 'settlements' in English. They are mostly referred to in the south of Cyprus as 'refugee neighbourhoods' even though the State officially refers to them as displaced housing estates. I choose to use the colloquial Greek local name *sinikismoi* throughout the paper. It is important to note that I came to this discussion from the position of a socially engaged arts researcher, an estate resident, and having worked in the conceptualisation and realisation of different art activities in the State displaced housing's in Cyprus since 2011. The material you will read in this paper has arisen from ethnographic and participant observation, as well as from my civic engagement with the arts in the context of different *sinikismoi* neighbourhoods in Nicosia. In the paper I reflect on this experience and on the construction of the refugee neighbourhoods, the concretisation of the camp: the internally displaced person and the refugee, the political manipulation of the displaced persons, labelling, social class, and segregation in the urban development of State housing in Nicosia.

### **The Construction of the Refugee Neighbourhoods**

The displaced housing estates found in the government-controlled Republic of Cyprus were constructed hurriedly from 1976 to 2000, and they form the primary example of communitarian architectural environments (of common living) on the island. There are 69 State housing estates and they include low rise blocks of flats and

homes. Through this scheme, the Cypriot government provided low-cost houses free of charge to 'low-income' families following their displacement from the north of the island. In the period of 1975 to 1986, 12,500 families found what was meant to be 'temporary' housing in such projects. These were comprehensively planned to include basic services such as shopping centres, community centres, open spaces, schools, playgrounds, medical centres and homes for the elderly. To date, the State has constructed approximately 14,000 housing units across the island.<sup>4</sup> All houses, blocks of flats and communal spaces were constructed with the same basic architectural design, building components and materials, thus implementing the concept of industrialisation within house construction. Repetition of individual components was used in the design, thus facilitating mass production, ensuring low costs and quicker delivery at a time of need. In Cyprus, through the 'displaced housing projects', what was being attempted was to find a temporary solution for large numbers of homeless people that had been living in tents.

The social theorist Roger Zetter, who was Director of the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University, carried out extensive research on the issue of the refugees and displaced persons in the Cypriot context, and the rehousing processes of the Cyprus Republic after 1974. He presented the contradictory nature of re-housing displaced Greek Cypriots by indicating that they were integrated in the south part of the island but at the same time were differentiated because of the characteristics of this State housing programme. Zetter indicated the unique nature of the displaced housing programme because of its magnitude and its quality. The displaced – or a large number of them – were re-housed in permanent shelter funded by the Cypriot government. Zetter also emphasised their fiscal integration in the 1980s and 1990s due to the rapid economic development of the post-destructive period that the resettlement housing project brought to the island.<sup>5</sup> These built environments of the city are isolated in terms of their presence within the context of the public sphere, but they have an intense public presence as a reminder of war, of ethnic

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<sup>4</sup> State Housing, *Department of Town Planning, Cyprus Ministry of Interiors*, 2019. Information only provided in Greek, available at <[http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/tph/tph.nsf/page46\\_gr/page46\\_gr?OpenDocument](http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/tph/tph.nsf/page46_gr/page46_gr?OpenDocument)>. [Accessed: 26 June 2019].

<sup>5</sup> R. Zetter, 'Rehousing the Greek-Cypriot Refugees from 1974: Assimilation, Dependency and Politirisation', *Cyprus in Transition 1960-1985*, ed. J. Koumoulides (London: Trigraph, 1986); R. Zetter, 'Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol 4. No. 1, 39-62(1991); R. Zetter, 'Reconceptualizing the Myth of Return: Continuity and Transition Amongst the Greek-Cypriot Refugees of 1974'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1(1999).

identity and of collective memory. The lack of substantial dialogue in relation to the Cypriot displaced estates, to which the locals refer to as ‘*prosfigikoi sinikismoi*’ (refugee settlements), became the springboard for carrying out research based on the social narratives of these built environments. The Cypriot State developed these spaces hurriedly and an urban legend says that at the start they even used architectural plans for estates that were built in the UK. The hurried nature of this endeavour is presented not only through the swift architectural construction but also through the fact that they created new communities. The State, through its policies, did not re-house the displaced villages and towns together. Instead, they

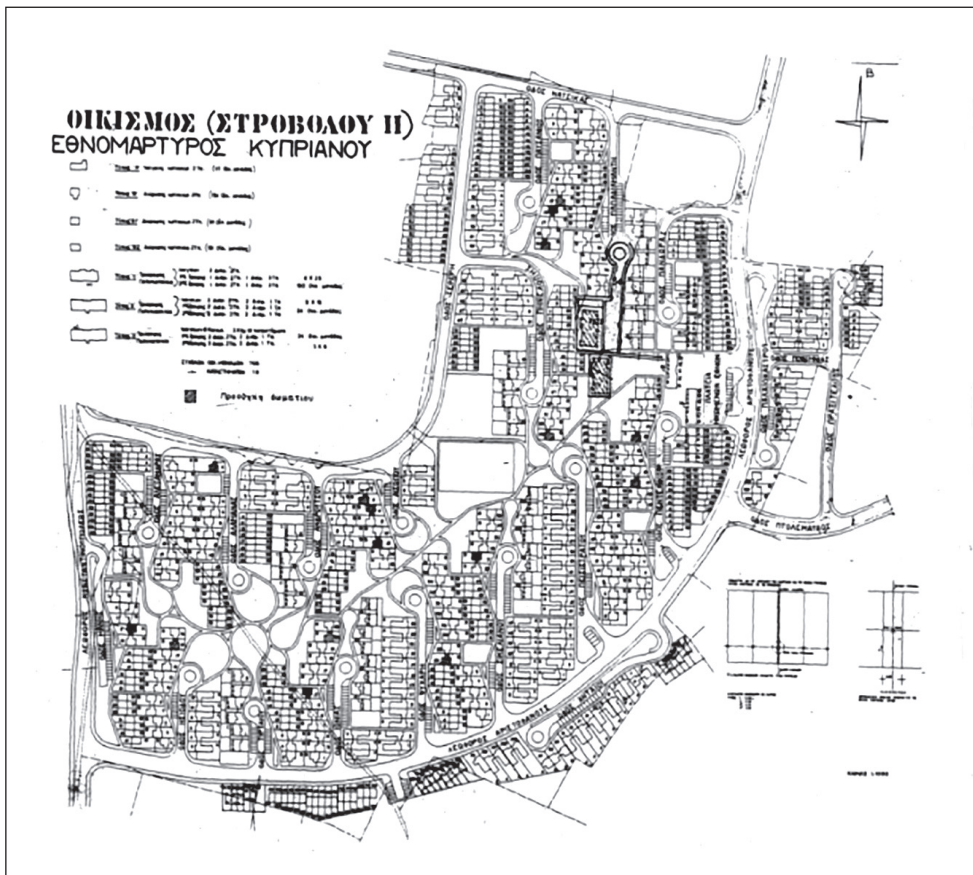


Photo 2. Strovolos II Estate was the first refugee neighbourhood constructed with 500-1000 housing units

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satisfy basic consumer needs.<sup>6</sup> These plans also included the understanding that there would be:

- A relatively low density in the residential building;
- A limited use of blocks of flats;
- A variety of housing types, thus avoiding repetition and ensuring an anthropocentric dimension;
- Creating the feeling of a neighbourhood;
- Ensuring that there would be a garden at the front and at the back of the attached houses, and providing communal open spaces for the blocks of flats.

Criteria for choosing the appropriate space for the creation of the State housing:

- Connection with main road arteries and the system of public transport to ensure easy transportation;
- Close to organised industrial areas and other areas of work, so that there would be an easy integration of the work force;
- Pleasant natural environment;
- Land with good strength levels for foundation purposes, sufficient ground absorbency and good drainage possibilities for rainwater;
- Existing infrastructure and services;
- Government or private land with a low acquisition cost;
- Traffic system for pedestrians and cars;
- Main road networks connecting the estate with the urban traffic network, collection roads, intranet, access roads in the neighbourhoods (cul de sac);
- Adequate standards of sunlight effects, good ventilation, nice views and ensuring a certain amount of privacy;
- Provision for green spaces;

Percentages of use of the total area of land in each estate:

- 25% construction
- 30% courtyards
- 30% roads and parking areas
- 15% green spaces

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<sup>6</sup> E. Tselika, 'Sinikismoi, 'Conflict Transformation Art Booklet 3,' PhD Conflict Transformation Art, Birkbeck University of London, (2015), 39-43, available at [https://evanthiatselika.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/booklet\\_no3\\_digital.pdf](https://evanthiatselika.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/booklet_no3_digital.pdf).

**First Phase – Large Scale Estates:** 500 – 1000 residential units

(Example, Photo 2)

- Housing provided for as many refugees as possible within a short time period
- Low cost land
- Close proximity to urban or suburban areas—existing residential development which was either dispersed or rudimentary
- Autonomous cores, augmenting and completing existing infrastructure in the area
- Attraction points for further residential development in the region

**Second Phase – Smaller Estates:** 200 – 300 residential units

(Example, Photo 3)

- Reduction of the need for immediate mass housing
- Easier integration and assimilation within the existing structure of the region
- Reducing and / or eliminating the risk of ghettoisation

The State housing project was initially undertaken with the hope that it would only be a temporary solution and to cover the urgent needs. The lower income social groups were housed first within the estates (Housing Policy, Department of Town Planning, and Cyprus Ministry of the Interior). At the start, because there were many displaced people living in camps, construction was hurried; the State even used ready-made plans of UK council estates. The estates were first placed in large empty suburban areas that could easily be connected to the main transport arteries of the city.<sup>7</sup> These first estates were large and isolated, and before long many problems became evident. The displaced people felt marginalised and separate from/outside to the city. Subsequently, in the second phase of the project, the Department of Housing built smaller estates, reducing the number of units in each development from 500-1000 to 200-300. In this phase, the reduction was to assist the ‘easier integration and assimilation within the existing structure of the region’ and to help in ‘reducing and/or eliminating the risk of ghettoisation’.<sup>8</sup> The smaller estates enabled better spatial integration in certain areas, but the displaced

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<sup>7</sup> Pafitis, cited in Tselika, ‘Conflict Transformation Art Booklet 3’, 41.

<sup>8</sup> Pafitis, cited in *Ibid.* 43. This new urban planning policy, which focused on making smaller estates and situating them within the city fabric, concurs with observations made by political scientist Iris Marion Young: where neighbourhoods and towns have an income mix, those less well-off benefit from the ‘neighbourhood effects’ of dwelling together with those with more resources. Neighbourhoods and



continued to feel a social stigma for many years.<sup>9</sup> One of the residents I interviewed indicated that when you would tell people that 'I live in an estate, you said it with a certain amount of caution', as it 'differentiated you from the rest'.<sup>10</sup>

These displaced housing estates, the *sinikismoi*, are spaces associated with the notion of the 'internal refugee'. Even though the State refers to those who left their homes in the north as displaced persons, in line with international humanitarian policy terminology, Cypriots colloquially refer to them as refugees. These 'displaced persons' estates are ethnically charged spaces, as they have been often utilised by politicians as a reminder of war and a re-affirmation of ethno-national identity and collective remembrance.

### **The Concretisation of the Camp: The Internally Displaced Person and the Refugee**

The ethno-national facet of the urban segregation, so prevalent within the divided urban framework of Nicosia, raises a series of questions regarding the relationship between the city and ethno-nationalism. The fractures/divisions brought on by the ethno-national conflict are spatialised in the way that the Greek and Turkish Cypriot ethnic groups have been separated in the city space via the buffer zone. Anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin argues that space divisions based on ethnic identity in Cyprus are associated with British imperialism.<sup>11</sup> Until the rise of nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which was influenced by events in mainland Turkey and Greece, Cypriots 'did not necessarily conceive of each other as distinct communities in ethnic or national terms'.<sup>12</sup>

Anthropologist Rebecca Bryant concentrates her research on the cultures of nationalism existent in Cyprus and demonstrates that the island's independence from the UK in 1959 provided a political space that was already framed by the terms of ethno-nationalism.<sup>13</sup> The State was formed in 1960 based on a difficult constitution that provided guarantees for the two ethno-national groups. The inter-communal

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towns with a mix of affluent and less affluent people can support better parks, public buildings, and streets than can towns populated with mostly lower income people, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 212.

<sup>9</sup> Tselika, 'Conflict Transformation Art Booklet 3'.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>11</sup> Y. Navaro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 2012) 11.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> R. Bryant, *Imagining the Modern*, (London: IB Tauris, 2004).

troubles of 1963-1964, the Greek coup d'état of 1974 and the subsequent Turkish military action resulted in an ethnic cleansing and separation which changed the demographics of the population and led to displacement and uprooting in both communities.

Nationalism and its emergence in Cyprus in the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>14</sup> formulated the imagining of belonging to a Greek *ethnos*, and it can be linked to the development of a Cypriot print media and the breakdown of the traditional structures of authority. This is also evident in the subsequent development of a modernised Turkish ethnicity. Literacy, printed materials, and education were important to the growth of these new forms of power and redefinitions of ethno-national identity, as the world entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bryant argues that education was necessary to the development of the nationalist ideologies of both Greece and Turkey,<sup>15</sup> as it embodied community traditions and it signified historical continuity.

Following the conflict in 1974, the bi-communal actions of the 1990s and the lifting of the restrictions of movement in 2003, a culture of Cypriotness has been developing that has been transforming the two communities' relationships to their motherlands. The concept of Cypriotism and the struggles to restructure the understanding of identity have been consistently developing despite the nationalist sentiments and displacement that are encountered on both sides of the dividing lines.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In 1878 the island was given over to the administrative control of the British Empire, but remained officially part of the Ottoman Empire. In the aftermath of World War I, the island again changed hands, and in 1925 Cyprus was declared a British crown colony. At this time in Cyprus, there was a heightened struggle by the Greek Cypriots for union (*enosis*) with Greece, which became increasingly violent in the 1930s, escalating with the insurgency of EOKA (Greek Organisation of Cypriot Fighters) in 1955-1959. Finally, in 1960, the UK granted the island its independence and the Republic of Cyprus was established. The UK acted as a guarantor power alongside Turkey and Greece, whilst retaining – to the present day – two military sovereign bases. The constitution of the independent island lapsed in 1963, with the enclosure of Turkish Cypriots into enclaves F. Anthias and R. Ayres, 'Ethnicity and Class in Cyprus', *Race & Class*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (1983); V. Calotychos (1997) *Cyprus and Its People: Nation, Identity and Experience in an Unimaginable Community (1955-1997)*. Westview Press: Boulder CO; C. Mavratsas, 'The ideological contest between Greek-Cypriot nationalism and Cypriotism 1974–1995: Politics, social memory and identity', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1997) 717-737; Y. Papadakis et al (2006), *Divided Cyprus: Modernity, History and an island in conflict*, Indiana University Press: Bloomington).

<sup>15</sup> Bryant, *Imagining the Modern* 134.

<sup>16</sup> Mavratsas, 'The ideological contest'.



Photo 4. Completion of blocks of flats, Strovolos

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The displaced housing estates constructed by the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) are directly linked to the image of the refugee camp, an image that has become a regular occurrence in the global media. The experience of displacement for the majority of Greek Cypriots took place in the summer of 1974, resulting in a situation where many people lived in tents for several months. Displacement for the Turkish Cypriot community had begun a decade earlier, when ethnic friction and inter-communal violence pushed large proportions of the community into enclaves. Following the displacement in 1974, ‘the Service for the Welfare and Rehabilitation of Displaced Persons’, was established in order to address the problem of displacement

and to offer assistance and support to displaced persons'.<sup>17</sup> The service provided housing assistance to the displaced following a series of schemes, which also included gaining access to 'housing in a government condominium' within the specifically constructed neighbourhoods.<sup>18</sup> Access to a housing unit in this state-built housing scheme was and still is limited to individuals who are permanent residents of Cyprus and who possess a refugee identity card and fulfil a series of financial criteria.<sup>19</sup> Many of the displaced persons residing in these housing neighbourhoods also owned or still own property in the north, rendering the legal aspect of displacement in terms of property rights as one of the most challenging and emotional facets of the Cyprus problem.<sup>20</sup>

Roger Zetter noted how shelters and settlements have shifted in the turbulent political climate of the last 45 years. He indicated that 'refugee housing' in Cyprus 'is unlike the stereotyped image in other countries'.<sup>21</sup> Forced migration in Cyprus was embodied in the built environment of the RoC through the government's housing policy, which moved the Cypriot refugees 'rapidly from tents and prefabricated shelter into permanent dwellings within comprehensively planned estates, located primarily 'on the urban periphery'.<sup>22</sup> Writing approximately ten years on from the start of the construction of these housing estates, Zetter informs us that the refugees were 'being rapidly assimilated into the urban economy in the factory estates springing up near the housing areas'.<sup>23</sup> A very different image is presented approximately 40 years later, and the 'richly-planted gardens' that Zetter observed are at times overgrown and abandoned,<sup>24</sup> as the first generation of residents (displaced persons) is gradually passing away.

The 'refugee neighbourhoods' in Cyprus are managed by the Department of Town Planning and the Service of Displaced Individuals. An ambivalent relationship between the notion of the refugee and the internally displaced person is observed here – which is largely reflective of the time period in which the displacement

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<sup>17</sup> N. Trimikliniotis and C. Demetriou, *Displacement in Cyprus Consequences of Civil and Military Strife*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>21</sup> Zetter, 'Labelling Refugees', 42.

<sup>22</sup> Zetter, 'Rehousing the Greek Cypriot Refugees', 108.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 109.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

of Greek Cypriots occurred. The discourse in relation to internal displacement has become much more prominent in the last 20 years, as internal conflicts increased during the 1980s and 1990s. The legal definition of the term ‘refugee’, as outlined in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees is an individual who due to fear of persecution is outside of his or her country of nationality.<sup>25</sup> What is currently understood as a refugee, however, is actually reflected in much broader terms. Refugee studies’ theorists Alexander Betts and Gil Loescher indicate, the ‘term “refugee” means different things in different contexts’.<sup>26</sup> It includes ‘people fleeing a range of causes including authoritarian regimes; conflict; human rights violations; large-scale development projects; environmental disasters’ and extends to the uprooting of people who are displaced within their country of origin.<sup>27</sup> Political scientist Emma Haddad also points out and reaffirms this ‘false dichotomy between ‘refugee’ and ‘internally displaced person’, and argues that there is ‘no conceptual difference between the refugee’ and the internally displaced person.<sup>28</sup> Both groups have been subjected to forced migration, although they are differentiated by access to impenetrable ‘international political boundaries’.<sup>29</sup> This notion is reinforced by Roger Zetter, who points out that Greek Cypriot refugees are not refugees, since they have not been forced ‘outside their country of origin’;<sup>30</sup> nevertheless, he continues, ‘they exist in what UNHCR describes as a “refugee-like situation” and display the familiar characteristics of refugee populations’.<sup>31</sup>

The geopolitical position of Cyprus means that the notion of the refugee is also understood within a Middle Eastern context, particularly in terms of the false element of temporality which is demonstrated as camps of tents turn into camps of concrete. This is illustrated through the contribution of a participant in an event organised as part of the project *Unconscious Architecture* in 2012.

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<sup>25</sup> UNHCR, 2019. ‘Convention and Protocol relating to the status of refugees, 1951’. *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)*, available at <<http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>>. [Accessed: 26 June 2019].

<sup>26</sup> A. Betts and G. Loescher, *Refugees in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> E. Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 43.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> R. Zetter, ‘We are Strangers Here - Continuity, Transition and the Impact of Protracted Exile on the Greek-Cypriot Refugees’, in V. Calotychos (ed.) *Cyprus and Its People: Nation, Identity, and Experience in an Unimaginable Community 1955-1997* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 308.

<sup>31</sup> (*ibid*)

**Yiorgos Kakouris** — ‘We can also mention [...] the temporality of the Palestinian settlements on the West Bank that are truly temporary. But in fact, there still exists the same construction and concretisation of the spaces. Specifically, we have the tents that turn into homes that turn into gardens and so forth’.<sup>32</sup>

This concretisation of the camp which we observe throughout the Middle East, for example the Shuafat Refugee Camp,<sup>33</sup> gains prominence as hundreds of thousands of refugees are passing through European countries, and tents are slowly giving way to pre-fabricated hosting spaces.

The ‘history of displacement of Cyprus, the island at the edge of Europe and the Middle East, is embodied in the estates and correlated with the ‘ethnic conflict’.<sup>34</sup> Chronologically, the overall interpretation is one that considers the displacement of Turkish Cypriots from 1963 onwards and the displacement of Greek Cypriots in 1974.<sup>35</sup> What solidified the ‘refugee identity’ for Greek Cypriots was the fact that not all members of the community had been displaced; thus, a differentiation occurred in their move to the south of the island.<sup>36</sup>

### **Political Manipulation of the Displaced Persons, Labelling and Social Class**

What is observed in Cyprus is a situation where the government for years manipulated the image of the displaced for political gain. As anthropologist Peter Loizos wrote in reference to Cyprus:

The refugees had been told a very great deal about themselves in newspapers and broadcasts and the formation of their view of themselves was not simply a direct result of dislocation, but was also caught up in the political process.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Tselika, ‘Conflict Transformation Art Booklet’ 51.

<sup>33</sup> This concretisation of the camp can be linked back to the divided city context explored in Chapter 1 and is exemplified in the Shuafat Refugee Camp, which is the only West Bank camp that lies in the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem and is administered by the Israeli authorities. Originally established in 1965 to house around 1,500 refugees, Shuafat today is unofficially home to approximately 18,000 people of which around 50% - 60% are registered refugees (United Nations Relief and Works Agency, *Shuafat Report*, Shuafat, 2013). Shuafat Camp Profile, available at <<http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/west-bank/camp-profiles?field=12>>, accessed 19 November 2013. It is a ‘refugee camp’ of concrete, made up of many closely spaced blocks of flats.

<sup>34</sup> O. Demetriou, *Research Report – ‘Displacement in Cyprus Consequences of Civil and Military Strife’* 4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> P. Loizos, *The Heart Grown Bitter: A Chronicle of Cypriot War Refugees* (Cambridge: Cambridge

Through its policy of establishing built camps that were differentiated from the city fabric, the State created a label of differentiation for a section of the population. This was a label that the subsequent generations fought hard to disassociate themselves from. Zetter indicates that the housing programme and the criteria through which the displaced Greek Cypriots gained access to it, are vital components of the formation of the refugee 'label and identity'.<sup>38</sup> Their differentiation 'in physical terms by the housing programme and from each other by their eligibility for different types of housing' resulted in sentiments of exclusion and mistrust.<sup>39</sup> This was not only amongst the displaced people themselves, but also from non-displaced working-class Cypriots who felt resentment towards their displaced compatriots who were granted access to State housing and financial aid.

The differentiation amongst the Greek Cypriot displaced persons was not only related to social and political factors, but also to economic ones. The resettlement was carried out according to income level and the estates were placed on the edges of the city, near industrial areas which could absorb the new influx of workers. Through their placement on the periphery of urban and economic life, the prejudice that accompanied living in the *sinikismo* meant that this social group felt labelled by their spatial positioning.

Through my research, practice, and life in one of these neighbourhoods, it has become evident how urban segregation is defined by labels that are attributed to different social groups, and which in turn shape how a place is conflictingly inhabited. Zetter has noted that 'within the repertoire of humanitarian concern, refugee now constitutes one of the most powerful labels'.<sup>40</sup> The concept of labelling and the way in which individuals or groups become identified as refugees demonstrate 'how an identity is formed, transformed and manipulated within the context of public policy and especially, bureaucratic practices'.<sup>41</sup> The Cypriot rehousing of the displaced is inextricably linked with the way that a State forms their policies and procedures and through which identity labels are defined. This process of labelling and assigning people to social groups and social identities is a 'relationship of pow-

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University Press, 1981) 128.

<sup>38</sup> R. Zetter, 'The Greek-Cypriot Refugees: Perceptions of Return under Conditions of Protracted Exile', *International Migration Review*, (1994) Vol. 28, No. 2, 310.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> R. Zetter, 'Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity'. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, (1991) Vol. 4. No. 1, 39.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 40.

er' according to Geoff Wood,<sup>42</sup> as the process of classification that State policy can implement is authoritative, and the label is imposed from top to bottom. Wood describes labelling as the process 'by which policy agendas are established and more particularly the way in which people, conceived as objects of policy are defined in convenient images'.<sup>43</sup> Labelling occurs not only between people and the State, but also 'between people through constructions of social othering and identity creation'.<sup>44</sup> Every label reflects the 'professional, bureaucratic and political values which create them'<sup>45</sup> and a 'process of designation',<sup>46</sup> as 'it involves making judgements and distinctions' and 'it is non-participatory'.<sup>47</sup>

Labelling and the way that it is authored and practiced by the State is reflected in the Cypriot displaced estates, as the State opted for a policy of rehousing the displaced in large estates on the periphery of cities, based on income criteria and family size rather than geographical origin. This created an identity or a label that represents the outcome of a conflict and reflects a political decision that has shaped a social group in Cyprus, which has been utilised by politicians for political gain, and that has assisted the promotion of an ethno-nationalist discourse. In the case of the *sinikismoï*, what is observed is social segregation brought about by the State creation of spatial environments. Through its rehousing policy, the government created a new community and social class which was reinforced in the spatial narrative of the city, that of the Greek Cypriot refugee, and *sinikismoï* resident. Presently, many of the empty houses and apartments in the estates are seeing a newer group of migrant inhabitants moving in due to cheaper rents. So, we now see one low-income social group (the displaced) slowly being replaced by another (the migrant), thus revealing an element of class segregation, which is associated with these urban neighbourhoods.

### **Segregation and Class in the Urban Development of State Housing in Nicosia**

Social class is an element that is associated both with the understanding of the internally displaced in Cyprus and with the urban neighbourhoods that were built

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> G. Wood, 'The politics of development policy labelling'. In Wood G. (ed.) *Labelling in Development Policy. Essays in Honour of Bernard Schaffer* Labelling in Development Policy. Sage Publications: London, (1985) 347.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Zetter, 'Labelling Refugees' 45.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 45.



to rehouse them. The State policy initially prioritised large families and those on low income rather than attempting to regroup the displaced according to place of origin.<sup>48</sup> Urban rumour has it that this could also have been a conscious decision by the government as it did not wish to group together villages due to fear of social organisation and community unrest. Several participants brought this issue up in my interviews and in events I have organised, stating that because the low-income social groups were housed together in large peripheral urban areas, a number of social issues developed related to drug and alcohol use, violence and exclusion. This class differentiation was also reinforced by a public attitude which frames the displaced persons as greedy, due to their claim for benefits.<sup>49</sup>

Urban segregation according to racial backgrounds is a notion whose beginnings can be found in the Indian British colonial capital of Calcutta in the 1700s.<sup>50</sup> The spread of colonialism deeply marked how societies developed and how race became a prominent concept in world politics of both the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Darwin's species classification and theories of racial supremacy further reinforced the divisionary patterns based on the colour of people's skin. Segregation, as a word in itself, 'was first used for techniques of racial isolation in Hong Kong and Bombay in the 1890s'.<sup>51</sup> Racial segregation prevailed and governed early 20<sup>th</sup> century politics, and these patterns left a deeply embedded global mark in urban environments..

Sociologist Michael Banton indicated that patterns of race relations can differ markedly across the world.<sup>52</sup> Groups and categorisations of people can be more segregated within the urban environment in comparison to the rural one, and in the city it is more usual for people of different classes and races to live in certain areas, belong to different social clubs and for their children to attend different schools. However urban research has demonstrated that the process of migration is also strongly related with cities.<sup>53</sup>

The Cypriot State housing was mostly built in urban environments to rehouse the population displaced from the north of the island. The State decided to locate

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<sup>48</sup> Zetter, 'Rehousing the Refugees' 110.

<sup>49</sup> Demetriou, *Research Report 3*.

<sup>50</sup> C. Nightingale, *Segregation: A Global History of Divided Cities* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 75.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>52</sup> M. Banton, *Racial Minorities* (London: Fontana Press, 1972) 64.

<sup>53</sup> Y. Abu-Laban and J. Garber, 'The Construction of the Geography of Immigration as a Policy Problem', *Urban Affairs Review*, (2005) Vol. 40, No. 4 521.

these estates within urban territory, and yet most of these people were farmers, and already outsiders to urban life. A particularly interesting aspect of the urban planners' ideas in how to develop the areas was their decision to dedicate a large amount of space to courtyards and green spaces (a total of 45%). This was not unrelated to the fact that the inhabitants of these newly built homes came from different villages all over Cyprus. The anthropologist Anne Jepson wrote of the gardens in the estates and how we interpret the idea of rootedness in the case of Cyprus. She observed, having visited the estates that the small gardens are in line with the small housing. The refugee neighbourhoods, as she wrote, are on public view and the gardens are well kept and similar to one another. It is observed that these gardens trace the memories of the gardens in the villages, which the inhabitants left behind, and they contain common plants such as lemon trees, which can be found in every single garden. Simultaneously, there are vines, flowers, herbs, broad beans, tomato, and egg plants.<sup>54</sup>

This is confirmed in an interview I carried out with a flat owner in 2011:

**Chryso Marangou** — 'We have a garden here but we live in a block of flats. The garden or courtyard of the building have in actual fact been divided according to the number of flats in the building. Everyone arbitrarily got a piece and considered it his. The first thing they all did when they came in to the homes was to plant the garden, before even fixing the inside of the house. They planted trees, flowers. That is why I said previously that there were many arguments. It was for this exact reason. You took one metre more than me in the yard [...] I planted three trees, the other guy planted four. This meant that coming into the estates the people would often clash over a very small piece of land in the common green space. Or, if one was watering the garden, the other one would get upset. The relationship though with the land and the plants remained very close.'

Now these first elderly Cypriot residents who planted these gardens are slowly passing away. Even though their children often chose to move out of these estates, which are prescribed by the label of displacement, their grandchildren are now sometimes moving back into the neighbourhoods, as they have become embedded in the city fabric. The large number of houses and apartments in the estates, which

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<sup>54</sup> A. Jepson, 'Gardens and the Nature of Rootedness in Cyprus', in *Divided Cyprus: Modernity, History and an island in conflict*, (eds.) Y. Papadakis, N. Peristianis and G. Welz (eds) (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press 2006).

stood empty for many years, have also now become the home of newer inhabitants that tend to be migrants, due to cheaper rents.

**Pantelitsa Kyriacou** — ‘There are many foreigners and migrants living here, especially now. Many people built their own homes, moved out of the estates and rent their homes to Filipinos, to migrants, to Romanians, etc. And it has changed. If you go somewhere, for example, if you go shopping or wherever in the neighbourhood you will mostly see foreigners.’ (resident interview, 2012)

So we now see one low-income social group (the displaced) slowly being replaced by another (the migrant). Migration to the RoC began to rise in the 1990s and it countered the previous patterns of emigration by Cypriots looking for a better life in the UK, the US, South Africa and Australia. Due to the rapid economic growth which caused a shortage in the local labour force, Cyprus adopted a migration model that is similar to Germany’s ‘gastarbeiter’ system. The main aim is to close the gap in the labour market by importing unskilled or low-skilled employees, whose stay in Cyprus will be temporary in nature, who will not compete with Cypriots in the job market, and who will not resort to public resources or funds.<sup>55</sup>

Beginning with the most recent census of population (2011), it is estimated that 170,383 non-Cypriots reside permanently in the area controlled by the Republic of Cyprus, which is 20,3% of the entire population.<sup>56</sup> Non-EU female migrants constitute 15% of total female labour force in Cyprus, and 97% are recruited for the domestic work sector. Most domestic workers and caregivers come from a number of South East Asian countries, such as the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and India. This particular sector often has a hard-working environment and recruits low-skilled employees who are also positioned at the low socioeconomic strata.<sup>57</sup> For

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<sup>55</sup> D. Officer and Y. Taki, , *The Needs of Refugees and the Integration Process in Cyprus* (Nicosia: UNHCR, 2013), available at [https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2018/02/The\\_Needs\\_of\\_Refugees\\_and\\_the\\_Integration\\_Process\\_in\\_Cyprus\\_2013.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2018/02/The_Needs_of_Refugees_and_the_Integration_Process_in_Cyprus_2013.pdf), last accessed 14 September 2017.

<sup>56</sup> According to census of population carried out in 2001, the percentage of non-Cypriot was 9.4%. The total number of non-EU migrants is 64,113, among whom 41,114 (64,12%) are females and 22,999(34,88%) are males. The largest non-EU migrant communities are from the Philippines (9,413), Russia (8,164), Sri Lanka (7,269), Vietnam (7,028), Syria (3,054), and India (2,933). Source: Cyprus Statistical Service, 2016, available at [http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/populationcondition\\_22main\\_en/populationcondition\\_22main\\_en?OpenForm&sub=2&sel=1](http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/populationcondition_22main_en/populationcondition_22main_en?OpenForm&sub=2&sel=1) (accessed on 14 September 2018)

<sup>57</sup> N. Trimikliniotis, ‘Migration and Freedom of Movement of Workers: EU Law, Crisis and the Cypriot States of Exception’ *Laws*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (2013), 440-468.

years, these domestic workers were the prominent migrant encounter in the social housing estates in Cyprus, as they were the caretakers of the elderly residents. This started to change, and now migrant families and migrant house shares are an increasing prominent feature of the neighbourhoods. They are attracted to the areas due to their lower cost and their proximity to employment opportunities as they have become integrated in the urban environment.

An element of class can therefore be discussed in terms of these neighbourhoods of the city. In the 1920s, the first steps towards political and union organisation of the workers in Cyprus were taken, and this is clearly due to the influence of the social revolution of 1917 in Russia, and the newly founded communist party in Cyprus (KKK), as the main instigators of class ideology and the workers movement.<sup>58</sup> The process of urbanisation, which meant the transformation of peasants into proletariat, saw the formation of class consciousness and integration into the class political struggle.<sup>59</sup> This development demonstrates also how class struggles defy ethnic patterns of communitarian division,<sup>60</sup> and challenge a linear perception of identity in our times of translocationalism. In the chapter titled 'Belongings in a Globalising and Unequal World: Rethinking Translocations', Floya Anthias discusses how there are a number of ways multiplicities of identities might exist.<sup>61</sup> She warns us that 'identities cannot be thought of as cloaks to put on at will or to discard when they no longer fit or please. This is because they are more than agency-driven labels or subjectively constituted'. As she points out, the notion and recognition of a multi-layered understanding of identity does not actually resolve the difficulty with the idea of identity, as it has been perceived as a marker of sameness or difference.

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<sup>58</sup> Anthias and Ayres, 'Ethnicity and Class', 65.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> This is historically appropriately exemplified by the Greek and Turkish Cypriot miners' strike of 1948, which is renowned for participation of the now divided ethnic communities and included the participation of women and children. It was declared by the Federation of Labour and the Turkish Cypriot miners' union and lasted for more than three months where we see the two ethnic communities collaborating over working and class rights. At this time, Cyprus was still a British colony, and the workers were demanding better pay, shorter hours and improved working conditions from the Cyprus Mining Company [A. Alecou, *Communism and Nationalism in Postwar Cyprus, 1945-1955: Politics and Ideologies Under British Rule* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan 2016) 106-107].

<sup>61</sup> F. Anthias, 'Belongings in a Globalising and Unequal World: rethinking translocations', in N. Yulval-Davis, K. Kannabiran and U. Vieten (eds), *The Situated Politics of Belonging* (London: SAGE Publications, 2006).

According to Iris Marion Young, the identity grouping characteristic of social life is, 'an expression of social relations',<sup>62</sup> as 'a group exists only in relation to at least one other group'. Conflict transformation activist and scholar, John Paul Lederach, believes that individual or group 'identity is best understood as relational' and 'under constant definition and redefinition'.<sup>63</sup> Within this context, identity functions as a sense of group protection, because 'identity matters are central to conflict'.<sup>64</sup> The urban environment is characterised by the fact that conflicting social groups coexist within its terrains. David Harvey noted, 'The city is the site where people of all sorts and classes mingle, however reluctantly and agonistically, to produce a common if perpetually changing and transitory life'.<sup>65</sup> This complexity of the urban environment is demonstrated by Henri Lefebvre who argued that, the urban site 'constructs, identifies, and delivers the essence of social relationships: the reciprocal existence and manifestation of differences arising from or resulting in conflicts'.<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusion

Differentiations and divisions according to identity groupings, economic stratification and income exist within all urban landscapes. Gwen Van Eijk wrote about Dutch spatial segregation and indicated that 'neighbourhoods (or geographical areas) become relevant for understanding processes of exclusion and segregation'.<sup>67</sup> 'It is widely agreed upon', she wrote, 'that spatial segregation is a product of social segregation'.<sup>68</sup> In the case of the *sinikismoi*, what is observed is social segregation brought about by the creation of spatial environments. Through its 1974 rehousing policy, the State created a new community and social class, which was reinforced in the spatial narrative of the city, that of the Greek Cypriot refugee and *sinikismoi* resident. These constructed spatial environments, which are a remnant of ethno-national conflict, demonstrate social fragmentation and the ability of urban planning policy to create a social identity; as through the rehousing programme and the criteria with which the displaced gained access to it we see the formation of

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<sup>62</sup> I. M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (London: Princeton University Press, 1990) 43.

<sup>63</sup> J. P. Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003) 55.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Harvey, 'Rebel Cities' 67.

<sup>66</sup> H. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, transl. Donald Robert Bononno (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) 118.

<sup>67</sup> G. Van Eijk, *Unequal networks: Spatial segregation, relationships and inequality in the city. Part of the series Sustainable Urban Areas*, Delft: Delft Centre for Sustainable Urban Areas, 2010) 5.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

the refugee 'label and identity'.<sup>69</sup> The construction of the refugee neighbourhoods and their function as a concretisation of the initial refugee camp also signals the reflection of the refugee 'label and identity' onto the neighbourhoods themselves. Reflecting on this process of identity labelling through the State housing policy in Cyprus, questions are raised around issues of social class and segregation in the now transnational environment of Nicosia.

In concluding, I want to point out that in our times of digital alienation it is important to consider these communal neighbourhoods that were once common to us all before their privatisation. It is by living and collaborating together with my *sinikismoi* neighbours in my creative practice and research that the idea was shaped that if we work collectively we can develop 'the right to the city',<sup>70</sup> the right to 'change and reinvent the city more after our hearts' desire'.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> R. Zetter, 'The Greek-Cypriot Refugees' 310.

<sup>70</sup> D. Harvey, '*Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*', (London: Verso, 2012) 4.

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