



Place attachment in a foreign settlement

Ceren Boğaç*

Eastern Mediterranean University, Department of Architecture, Salamis Yolu, Gazimağusa, North Cyprus, Via Mersin 10, Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines issues arising from the involuntary relocation of Turkish Cypriot refugees from the southern to the northern portion of the island of Cyprus. After the ceasefire in 1974, participants in this study were relocated into homes originally built and occupied by Greek Cypriots. Using data obtained from questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and drawings, the study analyses their place attachment under the unusual circumstances of their own forced relocation coupled with their occupation of homes abandoned by residents also displaced by war and interethnic hostility. The study compares the place attachment of refugees to their children, who were born and brought up in the new community. The results of this study suggest that participants' future expectations shaped their attachment to their new homes and community, whilst their degree of attachment to their previous environments also played an important role in the attachment process. Younger generations, on the other hand, were more attached to their current environment than older generations; however they did not wish to be identified with their current environment.

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1. Introduction

The island of Cyprus, once a unified independent state, is currently divided into two parts according to the ethnicity of its inhabitants. Thus, the Republic of Cyprus, populated exclusively by Greek Cypriots, is located to the south of the island, and the country of Northern Cyprus, populated predominantly by Turkish Cypriots is located, to the north of the island. The division of the island is the result of the war of 1974. The internal conflicts, which started in the late 1950s, triggered the process of the fragmentation of settlements, street by street, neighborhood by neighborhood, and, in some instances, house by house, between the two ethnically and culturally diverse populations on the island. Many towns or villages in which both groups had resided became home to one group or the other, depending upon which group was in the majority there. A series of events took place in 1963, which led to the 1974 conflict, and the Turkish army's¹ subsequent intervention resulted in the division of the island into the Greek South and the Turkish North (Fig. 1).

Since 20th July 1974, when the buffer zone (green line) was established, 65,000 people are estimated to have migrated from the south to the north (Necati, 1984, pp. 39–42), leaving behind all their

property, homes and most of their valuables and belonging. Most of them were given homes and properties in the north, which had been abandoned by the Greek Cypriots who had themselves migrated to the South of the island. The housing assigned to the refugees in the North was totally foreign to the new residents, and little was known about the whereabouts of former residents who had been forced to move to the South of the island.

Today, 34 years after the war, there is no longer any conflict between the cultural groups, mainly because each group lives within the borders of its own territory. It is possible that if the political problems surrounding the future of Cyprus are resolved, things may improve for both groups. When each cultural group chooses to remain in their respective territories, this does not appear to cause any particular problems for either group. The present research asks if it is really that easy: Has any consideration been given to the psychological effect on these groups and their subsequent generations? Are there “open wounds” that continue to fester even after all this time, with little or no acknowledgement from the relevant authorities on either side? Furthermore, the research asks whether the process of place attachment to the new home is complicated by knowledge that the home belongs to and carries memories of the previous residents.

Research has shown that involuntary relocations can have dramatic psychological effects on people. Initially those members of the population who had to undergo the process of relocation experienced very difficult times when faced with leaving their homes. The present research suggests that in addition to facing an

* Tel.: +90 5428553490.

E-mail address: ceren.bogac@emu.edu.tr

¹ Turkey is one of the guarantor countries of the Republic of Cyprus, as well as Greece and the United Kingdom.

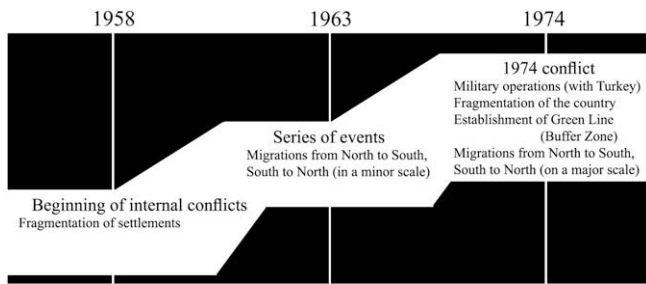


Fig. 1. Time line showing the events between 1958 and 1974.

uncertain future and the physical foreignness of their new settlement, the refugees encountered attachment problems with respect to their new environment. In the psychological literature, the effects of involuntary relocation on disruption in place attachment have been highlighted. For example, Brown and Perkins (1992), said: "After the development of secure place attachments, the loss of normal attachments creates a stressful period of disruption followed by a post-disruption phase of coping with lost attachments and creating new ones." (Brown & Perkins, 1992, p. 279). Considerable evidence suggests that relocation and moving causes a disruption of place attachments (Anthony, 1984; Fried, 1963; Matter & Matter, 1988). In this paper, the focus is on the psychological experience of losing one place and the process of attachment to a new place, when the new home had been involuntarily abandoned by the former residents.

The research site, which is used as a case study, is a housing district located in Aşağı Maraş (Kato Varosha), Gazimağusa

(Famagusta) city. The district was originally built by a culturally distinct people, the Greek Cypriots, former settlers of the region before 1974. Today, it hosts Turkish-Cypriot refugees from Paphos, a town located in Southern Cyprus (Fig. 2). The main question is to what degree the current occupants feel attached to the houses and surrounding locale which have been allocated to them, following the loss of their former homes and, therefore, their attachments in the south. The primary focus of the paper is on place attachment to physically foreign settlements and the effects of involuntary relocation on this process. A secondary focus is a comparison between the degree of place attachment of the refugees, who continue to carry memories of their lost attachments, with that of their children, who were born in Aşağı Maraş after the 1974 intervention and who have no-direct relationship with Paphos town. Although Aşağı Maraş accommodated Turkish settlers from several communities, this research includes only refugees from the town of Paphos and their children.

2. Literature review

In contemporary literature, researchers have predominately conceptualized place bonding within environmental psychology as 'place attachment' (Altman & Low, 1992; Giuliani, 1991; Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001); and 'place identity' (Giuliani & Feldman, 1993; Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Hernández, Hidalgo, Salazar-Laplace, and Hess (2007) claim that several authors consider 'place attachment' and 'place identity' to be the same concept and either use both terms synonymously (e.g. Brown & Werner, 1985) or operationalize attachment in terms of identity (Stedman, 2002). Hernández et al. (2007) suggested that



Fig. 2. Geographic map of the site.

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