



AROUND A
BUFFER ZONE
POOL:
“WE” SOLDIERS,
CHILDREN,
PALM TREES,
AND BEETLES

This photo of the 1949 Ledra Palace Hotel and pool on the island of Cyprus tells a fascinating story about the intersection of tourism, politics, and pests: These are all forces coexisting on the physical landscape and shedding light on *who* is “we” in the question “how will we live together?”

One story told by this image is that of a once glamorous hotel built during the twilight of British colonialism. After the island became independent, the Ledra Palace Hotel and its aesthetics of leisure and luxury set the standards for vigorous national plans to forcefully insert Cyprus on the map of Mediterranean tourism hubs during the 1960s.¹

This photo also tells a story about the current afterlife of the building as the headquarters of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Cyprus. Located within the “buffer zone” that divides the island, the otherwise abandoned Ledra Palace is a venue for international diplomacy and for Greek and Turkish Cypriot peace negotiations. This decaying building is also home to UN soldiers and their families, and the remnants of children’s birthday parties by the pool (red balloons on the right) nearby uniformed soldiers (center) and deserted buildings in the buffer zone right behind (back left in the photo) show the overlaps of everyday social practices with militaristic realities.

There is a third story told by the beheaded palm trees: a story about a tiny, rapidly multiplying, and incredibly resistant beetle called the “red palm weevil,” whose arrival in Cyprus less than a decade ago was underestimated by authorities until it infected most of the island’s palm trees—a quintessential emblem of beachfronts and other landscapes of leisure around Cyprus, which are now threatened with extinction.

The dying palm trees and uncontrollable pests may appear to create a new material aesthetics between architecture and nature, but they also demonstrate how ecological accidents unexpectedly intersect with diligent socioeconomic planning. Meanwhile, the rather unnatural prospect of a complete elimination of a tree species by the beetle challenges the divisions of the natural and unnatural, the human and non-human, to ultimately shed light on new forms of subjectivity. The beetles, as an aspect of denigrated “nature,” or a form of “subnature,” give us clues of how we can rethink who “we” are.²

If the Ledra Palace once encapsulated development dreams and modern glamour, it is now a locus of geopolitical managerialism and the physical hub of UN's insistent efforts to manage "better futures." The fact that the beetles and palms are creating

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a very different landscape within the quasi-desolate hotel is not merely ironic; it underlines how any new attempt to imagine "how we can live together" must come to terms with the conditions we (as well as *others* whom we have neglected) have created so far.

- 1 Panayiota Pyla and Petros Phokaides, "'Dark and Dirty' Histories of Leisure and Architecture: Varosha's Past and Future," *Architectural Theory Review* 24, no. 1, (2020): 27–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13264826.2020.1753282>
- 2 David Gissen, *Subnature: Architecture's Other Environments* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2016).

Ledra Palace Hotel, Cyprus. The pool area surrounded by infested palm trees; a current user (UN soldier) appears in the center back.

EX PAN SIONS



La Biennale di Venezia

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TO

HOW WILL
WE LIVE
TOGETHER?

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CONTENTS

8	<i>Expansions</i> Hashim Sarkis & Ala Tannir
12	Jean-Louis Cohen
15	Alla Vronskaya
18	Keller Easterling
21	Kimberly Dowdell
24	Craig Wilkins
27	Ross Exo Adams
30	Nasser Rabbat
33	Sarah Mineko Ichioka
36	Zahira Asmal
39	Sarah M. Whiting
42	Rodrigo Perez de Arce
45	Ana María Durán Calisto
48	Maria Alejandra Linares Trelles
51	Shirley Surya
54	Hussa Sabah al-Salem al-Sabah
57	Laurent Stalder
60	Didier Maleuvre
63	Beatriz Colomina & Mark Wigley
66	Hamed Khosravi
69	Khaled Malas
72	Lluís Alexandre Casanovas Blanco
76	Marrikka Trotter
79	Eve Blau
82	Lizabeth Cohen
85	Felicity D. Scott
88	Pamela Karimi
91	Garine Boghossian
94	Samia Henni
97	Peter G. Rowe
100	Pippo Ciorra
103	Noah Feldman

106	Esra Akcan
109	Deyan Sudjic
112	Ijlal Muzaffar
115	Catherine Seavitt Nordenson
118	Noura Al Sayeh-Holtrop
121	M. Christine Boyer
124	Mirko Zardini
127	Sarosh Anklesaria
130	Sépake Angiama
133	Merve Bedir
136	Alona Nitzan-Shiftan
139	Rania Matar
142	Gwendolyn Wright
145	Amy Murphy
148	Cynthia Davidson
151	Ala Younis
154	Aaron Betsky
157	Andres Lepik
160	Sarah Deyong
164	Tosin Oshinowo
167	Richard Sommer
170	Folayemi (Fo) Wilson
173	Renan Laru-an
176	Peder Anker
179	Guilherme Wisnik
182	Michael Maltzan
185	Rozana Montiel
188	Limin Hee
191	Mohammad al-Asad
194	Stan Allen
197	Hadas A. Steiner
200	Yona Friedman
202	Rupali Gupte
205	Studio Folder

208	Oliver Wainwright
211	Virginie Picon-Lefebvre
214	Iván de la Nuez
217	Delia Duong Ba Wendel
220	Prajna Desai
223	Todd Reisz
226	Mona Fawaz
230	Marisa Moreira Salles
233	Momoyo Kaijima & Yoshiharu Tsukamoto
236	Lausan Collective
239	V. Mitch McEwen
242	M. Belén Sáez de Ibarra
245	Karim Basbous
248	Paola Antonelli
251	Kurt W. Forster
254	Florencia Rodriguez
257	Panayiota Pyla
260	Sylvia Lavin
264	Theodossis Issaias, FATURA Collaborative
268	Image credits

page 170
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page 173
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of Islamic Art

page 179
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page 182
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of Engineering, Michael
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page 188
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page 191
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page 194
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page 230
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page 233
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Venetianus*, 2019

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