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TECHNICAL SCHOOLS FOR INTER-COMMUNAL CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN MID 20TH CENTURY CYPRUS

Reformist architectural interventions in mid-20th century Cyprus were intricately tied to a turbulent political landscape shaped by tensions between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities of the Island, which were in turn exacerbated by external influences by Greece, Turkey, Britain, and larger Cold War politics. In this intense climate, new educational institutions for technical training began to be established, and these were charged with nurturing ethnic reconciliation as much as they were expected to provide the foundations for the Island's socioeconomic reform.

This paper focuses on the first technical schools on the Island, which were built during the transition from British colonialism to independence, and examines the complex entanglement of architecture and education with socioeconomic reform and ethnic conflict. Three schools were built in the 1950s by the British, and one was designed in 1968, soon after Cyprus's independence: but all were established as 'bi-communal schools,' in stark contrast to previous 'communal' schools, whose students were divided along ethnic lines, and with a clear task to cultivate a sense of national identity. The paper examines the design, and subsequent reception of these schools to highlight the role of educational institutions in larger anti-colonial struggles, decolonization processes, geopolitical conflicts and nation-building.

KEYWORDS:

Modernism, politics, education, Cyprus, architecture, colonialism

Mid-20th century Cyprus was intricately tied to the turbulent political landscape resulting from competing political aspirations between the two main communities of the island (82% of the population were Greek-Cypriots and 18% Turkish-Cypriots); the British colonial power's pursuit to maintain a dynamic presence in the Middle East; the intervention of Greece and Turkey into the Island's internal politics; and other foreign influences shaped by Cold War politics. An important locus of cultivating competing political aspirations was the communal schools that existed on the island. This began with British policies implemented from the start of colonialism. Partly because of a quasi-philhellenic attitude of the British [who, as M. Given describes, had to deal with 'the highly unsettling fact (to the British at least) that the majority of the "natives" were in fact the heirs of the same classical tradition which underlay much of British education and defined British notions of "civilization"]'; and partly because of a policy of maintaining 'equal distances' between the two communities, the British allowed the Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot

communities to administer their own schools, use their own language, select their teachers, develop their own curriculum, and also built their own schools.² This 'remarkable autonomy'³ enjoyed by Greek- and Turkish-Cypriots in the field of education did not succeed in appeasing the local population as much as the colonial government may have hoped. As Greek-Cypriots adopted educational models from Greece, and reciprocally, Turkish-Cypriots adopted models from Turkey, these communal schools lead to young students' 'socio-psychological identification with Greek or Turkish nationalism,' which proved to have great repercussions.⁴

Towards the end of colonialism, the British advanced reforms to manage the increasing challenges to their power, and these reforms also extended to their educational strategies. This line of educational reforms was continued also *after* the departure of the British, when the Cyprus Republic was established in 1960. In the postcolonial era, reforms served goals of nation-building, in the midst of inter-communal disputes and Cold War influences. Both *during* the end of colonialism and

right *after* it, reforms that targeted educational institutions reshaped both the educational and the physical conditions of schools. This paper focuses on school buildings and related social visions during that period of transition from colonialism to the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus. It focuses on two types of schools which were bi-communal, and which emerged in stark contrast to the typical, ethnically separated schools that had dominated the educational system. The first type is secondary schools for technical training that materialized in the 1950s; the second type was the Higher Technical Institute for post-secondary technical education that was created a few years after independence, in 1968. Both types of new schools advanced a new mode bi-communal coexistence and reconciliation, to foster a sense of shared national pride, as much as they aimed to provide the foundations for the island's socioeconomic reform.

By examining the design, political priorities, and subsequent reception of these schools just before and just after independence, the following analysis uncovers important nuances in the design of vocational schools, within the larger context of colonial as well as postcolonial architecture, and within the peculiar political and architectural circumstances of post-independence Cyprus. Ultimately, the paper highlights the complex connections between educational institutions and anti-colonial struggles, decolonization processes, geopolitical conflicts and nation-building.

Colonial era technical schools: Seeking an alternative nationalism

The colonial government established the technical schools for vocational training as part of a five-year development programme that began in 1955, the same year when the Greek-Cypriot anti-colonial struggle began. Technical training seemed important not only because this tool for transition to modernity was practically 'nonexistent' up to that point, but also because it seemed as a vehicle for curbing the local population's insurrection.

As Lord Balniel argued in the British Parliament in December 1955, a few months after the outbreak of the anti-colonial struggle, technical education was important not only for its 'intrinsic value' but also because it 'enables us to put education on a national basis instead of a racial basis [authors' emphasis].¹⁵ In other words, the establishment of

technical schools was directly linked to political expediencies. Technical schools were to respond to emerging needs for cultivating the technical skills of the local population, and simultaneously, they would counterbalance the ethnic separatism of communal schools. The governor of Cyprus himself expressed his concern with the educational system to date arguing that Greek-Cypriot communal schools were indoctrinating young people and hatching rebels, leading them to join the guerrilla-struggle of the Greek-Cypriot organization, EOKA.⁶ Contrary to these communal schools, bi-communal schools had the potential to reshape the local youth. This bi-communal character was a perfect fit for the new genre of technical schools, because 'at the moment neither of the racial groups could possibly afford the expense of technical education.'⁷ It was precisely this logic that led to the planning of technical schools for all major cities of Cyprus. Ultimately three of them materialized: the technical schools of Nicosia, Limassol (Figure 1) and Lefka.

At the time when the technical schools were being constructed, the British interrupted the operation of around 450 Greek-Cypriot schools, because of alleged involvement in the anti-colonial struggle.⁸ Images of Greek-Cypriot community schools with military blockades, roadblocks, or anti-British graffiti were quite common. Similarly common were Greek-Cypriot student street protests in favor of unification with Greece. Communal schools had become a hub for anti-colonial struggle and the British government was searching for alternatives.



Fig. 1: Bird's-eye view of the Limassol Technical School in the late 1950s; Press and Information Office – PIO – Photographic Archive Nicosia, Cyprus

The political expedencies that led to the first technical schools for vocational training also influenced strategies for their architectural design. Even though communal schools had typically been designed by local architects or by the colonial government's Public Works Department (PWD), the educational buildings for the new type of technical training were all assigned to private British architectural firms.⁹ This significant break from standard practice it bypassed local Greek- or Turkish-Cypriot designers and the problems that would emerge if one or the other community was favored for the design of a bi-communal school. Further, the turn to private sector bypassed all other (British or local) architects connected to the colonial bureaucracy. Even the PWD, which had up to that point undertaken the design of most public buildings, was now characterized by colonial officials as 'unable to undertake any of this work.'¹⁰ Perhaps the reason was that the PWD already had to coordinate many projects at that time; but the removal of PWD from the picture was also an opportunity to bypass the standardized practices of a government bureaucracy locked in a particular design culture that was not necessarily in tune with the emerging reforms. Even architects within PWD, which was increasingly stuffed by young professionals, had by that time begun to set aside government design manuals and experimented with new references and standards set by international trends.¹¹ The government itself was also in search of new ideas, as it soon assigned the design of more public institutions to private British firms.

The colonial preoccupation with appearing impartial towards the two main ethnic groups also extended to the aesthetic preferences of the building. All three technical schools avoided references to past history or local vernaculars that would remind of identities and conflict. For example, contrary to many Greek communal schools that had gravitated Greek revival to allude to a 'greekness' in the island's roots,¹² the new technical schools favored a modernist aesthetic. The only references to the locale, in the case of the technical schools, were related to the materiality of building elements (such as the sea-pebble veneers on some exterior walls, or the use of local limestone.¹³ This aversion to historical references and aspirations to universalism may perhaps explain why the request of the Nicosia School's designers to exhibit antique sculptures in the building's open spaces was rejected.¹⁴

The modernist aesthetic also served to demonstrate a break from the formal language of the British Colonial architecture, which, from the 1920s onward, had been searching for a 'Cypriot' character, that, as Given described, consisted of 'a *mélange* of Byzantine, Medieval, Ottoman and colonial stylistic traits.' This historicist mix had been seen as a means to override the nationalist uses of stylistic revivalism;¹⁵ but by the 1950s when local uprising emerged, the British started abandoning this search for a Cypriot motif, as though the colonial government wished to put aside colonial policies that had that fueled the local pride. A modernist aesthetic appeared to better highlight the colonial power's interest in modernization and presage the Island's industrial development.

All three technical school buildings were organized around discrete volumes that formed atriums or large courtyard spaces. These open common spaces were seen as a means to enhance students' socialization and improve their 'behavior, courtesy and discipline.'¹⁶ Echoing colonial self-constructions as 'civilizing' agents, a report by the Inspectors of the Education Department diagnosed students as 'rather rough and noisy in manner and speech' and put emphasis on the quality of facilities, as a way to cultivate better behavior, and also to make these schools more attractive than community schools. Laboratories, which would constitute the core of technical education, were equipped with the state-of-the-art machinery, comparable to that of the contemporary western schools, as government officials boasted.¹⁷ The buildings also exhibited other contemporary novelties such as shading systems – for example *brise-soleils* in the schools of Lefka and Limassol. All these aspired to introduce students to a new way of life.

For all its extravagance, however, the building program did not take into account the limited economic means of the students. This forced the colonial government to make modifications after construction, so as to be able to provide room and board to students who could not otherwise afford their enrollment.

Schools without students

The purpose of technical schools as instruments and symbols of a new life, (or even as spaces of control for the Greek-Cypriot youth) became quickly understood. A strong campaign against technical

schools eventually developed,¹⁸ resulting in attacks against the schools. One such attack occurred in Nicosia when the school was under construction, leading to the barbed-wire enclosure of the construction site and the installation of police guards.¹⁹ Similarly, the Limassol school was bombed in 1957; and this led to the conversion of some building space into an outpost for armed police.²⁰ Such acts were far from unusual, and Greek-Cypriots students saw them as their contribution to the anti-colonial struggle.²¹ Their strongest resistance was expressed in the form of student boycotts. A typical example is the Technical School Limassol, which had a capacity of 900 students, but it received only 12 Greek students in its first year of operation in 1956, only 14 in 1957 (losing 8 of them during the school year for political reasons), and only 5 in 1958.

The low student attendance, the conversion of classrooms into dorms, and the policing of buildings, had certainly not been anticipated, either by the colonial government or the architects, and this proved that the rulers of the island were no longer able to control, as they had been accustomed, the colony and its structures; nor were they able to succeed in their reforms which came too late and under the pressure of local uprising.

Postcolonial establishment of the Higher Technical Institute – Designing again for both communities

After the British left Cyprus, the constitution of the new independent state that was established in 1960 demanded that education be provided separately to the two communities,²² a policy which resulted to all three of the above technical schools being ethnically divided and filled with students!²³ In the postcolonial atmosphere of the 1960s, the population accepted and used the infrastructure of the colonial technical schools, while undoing, however, the policies that had created these infrastructures – that is, the policies favoring the coexistence of the two communities under the same educational roof and the construction of a common national consciousness.

Even then however, the experiment in connecting bi-communal schools with technical education did not come to an end. It was repeated in another case: the Higher Technical Institute (HTI) created in 1968. (Figure 2) The political climate was again



Fig. 2: View of the exterior and the main entrance of the Higher Technical Institute after its implementation: Press and Information Office – PIO – Photographic Archive Nicosia, Cyprus

charged due to the Cyprus Republic's decision to join the Non-aligned Movement, a decision which caused the unease of the West, given the delicate balances in the region of the Middle East, in the context of Cold War bipolarities.²⁴ The situation was further exacerbated by the uneasy coexistence of the two communities in Cyprus, which had clashed violently in 1963, resulting in the withdrawal of the Turkish-Cypriots from the State government, in 1964. It was under these conditions that three five-year development programs were developed between 1962-1976, with the goal to develop the country's economy, redesign its infrastructures and form modern citizens. These programs were to facilitate the participation of both communities, but this goal fell apart when the Turkish-Cypriots withdrew from the government in 1963.²⁵ The establishment of HTI was thus part of efforts to find new ways for easing inter-communal disputes, and this is why the Government excluded this technical college from the larger policy of ethnically separated education. The shaping of HTI as a bi-communal school was certainly palatable to the West not only because it responded to its professed desire for an improvement of the relationships of the two communities, but also for many reasons that will be explained below.

The establishment of a western and English-speaking educational institution had initially been advanced by the United States as part of an economic aid program that would maintain American influence on the Island 'at a high level'

so as 'to counter the communist threat' among other things.²⁶ In his 1962 meeting with the Cyprus Republic President Makarios, John F. Kennedy even discussed the possibility of an American University in Cyprus, to offer, according to the Cyprus Ambassador in the USA 'a useful western influence into Cyprus.'²⁷ A Western institution was a crucial counterbalance in a country that professed sympathies to the non-Aligned Movement, and where a large wave of young Cypriots studying in countries of the Eastern Block at the time.²⁸ By 1963, plans for a Polytechnic began to form as part of an American Aid program for the Island during a period that the Soviet Union had also expressed willingness to offer financial support to Cyprus.²⁹ These plans were interrupted after the inter-communal tensions of 1963; but this idea materialized in another form in 1965, as a "Higher Technical Institute." The focus remained on technical education because this was considered more 'vital to the expanding economy of Cyprus'³⁰ but the institution would now be funded jointly by the Special United Nations Development Fund and the Republic of Cyprus.³¹ British and American officials saluted the engagement of the UN for this project, and so did Turkey.³² The United Nations had already been involved in several modernization and peace building projects in Cyprus, almost since the inception of the Republic. In the case of HTI, the design and construction happened through the cooperation of UN expert architects with the local "Technical Works Department" of the Ministry of Education.

Much like in the case of the technical schools discussed earlier, modernism seemed to offer a means of expressing the new educational vision being advanced. HTI adopted the modernist principle of the grid, and spaces were organized around semi covered circulation areas and a central atrium, which again dominated the design as a place of socialization among students of both communities. The design also provided for a row of monumental double height mushroom columns for the building's main entrance, highlighting the importance of the new institute in the State's educational system. Again, there were no architectural elements that might refer to the island's history and competing national identities, except from an abstract allusion to the local climate. Notably, the same modernist aesthetic was by now adopted by the government in all its public buildings.³³ The modernization of the state, the

industrial development and the decolonization that were attempted at the time, demanded a clear break from the colonial past (if not from the colonial technical schools) and once again, modernism seemed to offer the best expression of this new beginning.

HTI operation

HTI was inaugurated in 1971,³⁴ although the institute had begun to operate two years earlier, being temporarily housed in the Technical School of Nicosia, (which ironically, revived the initial intentions of that colonial building).³⁵ As far as student response, the roles were reversed in the case of HTI. In the colonial era, the problems had been caused by Greek-Cypriots wanting to change the political status quo; conversely, in the post-colonial era, the problems were created by the Turkish-Cypriots protesting their limited participation in the institution. They wished to 'sabotage' the government's project, after their community's departure from the central Government.

The participation of Turkish-Cypriot students was at a low 5% and this was not unrelated to the Turkish Government's policy to offer Turkish-Cypriots scholarships for studies in Turkey.³⁶ The low participation of Turkish-Cypriots in the institution was highlighted in a UN Secretary General report, in 1973,³⁷ a year before the 1974 war, which divided the two communities so dramatically.

Conclusion

The technical schools built by the British during the onset of anti-colonial struggle, created a shift in the colonial architecture in Cyprus both in terms of form and in terms of program. The emphasis on bi-communal coexistence, the provision of state-of-the-art facilities, the involvement of foreign expert architects, and the embrace of a modernist aesthetic claimed a break with the past and projected an aura of reform in hopes to manage conflict, promote ethnic reconciliation, and ultimately sustain the colonial power. Conversely, the modernizing gestures of the subsequent independent Republic of Cyprus tried to nurture the unification of the two communities as a way to maintain the new state. These political experiments that accompanied the formal and

social reforms, along with the slow implementation of development policies, and the explosive political climate of the time, brought the result that, even the new type of institutional buildings, that promised to be free from baggage of the past, would once again become an arena of political conflict.

Endnotes

- 1 Michael Given, "Star of the Parthenon, Cypriot Mélange: Education and Representation in Colonial Cyprus," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 7/1 (1997), 60.
- 2 Anastasia Leriou, "The Hellenisation of Cyprus: Tracing its Beginnings" (part of the 04 EP 81 post-doctoral research project, Department of Archaeology, University of Athens, 2009), 13. http://www.mom.fr/sites/mom.fr/files/img/Ressources_numeriques_et_outils/Documents_numerises/Colloques_texte_integral/Patrimoines_culturels_en_Mediterranee_orientale/1er_atelier/Leriou_ed-2.pdf.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Notably, the cultivation of national consciousness though communal schools was tied to the political views and aspirations of Greece and Turkey. See Katia Hatzidimitriou, *Ιστορία της Κύπρου [History of Cyprus]*, (Nicosia: I.G. Kasoulides, 2005), 316.
- 5 UK Parliament, *Hansard*, (December 5, 1955), p. 70 (Lord Balniel). <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1955/dec/05/cyprus>.
- 6 Matthew Lange, *Educations in Ethnic Violence, Identity, Educational Bubbles and Resource Mobilization*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 100.
- 7 Hansard (December 5, 1955), 70.
- 8 "No decision yet on schools policy," *Cyprus Mail*, June 12, 1956.
- 9 Messrs Tripe and Wakeham designed the technical school in Nicosia; Orman and Partners designed the technical schools of Limassol and Lefka. Both firms established offices in 1950s in Nicosia. The office in Cyprus of Tripe & Wakeham also did work in the Middle-East and Africa. See Tripe & Wakeham to the Colonial Secretary, 4 December 1956, State Archives, E1/651, p. 115; W.H.Ramsay for Administrative Secretary to Director of Education, 7 December 1955, State Archives, E1/651, 48a; and Costas Georghiou, *British Colonial Architecture in Cyprus*, (Nicosia: En Tipis, 2013), 278.
- 10 W.H.Ramsay to Director of Education, 7 December 1955.
- 11 The new recruits in PWD in the 1940s from the 1950s started to put aside old governmental design manuals like the "Black Book", and turned instead to reference like the '*Architect's Journal*' and '*L'Architecture d' Aujourd' hui*'. See Kenneth Schaar and Michael Given and Giorgos Theocharous, *Under the clock: colonial architecture and history in Cyprus, 1878-1960*, (Nicosia: Bank of Cyprus, 1995), 100-101.
- 12 For an analysis of these topics see Given, "Star of the Parthenon," 66-69.
- 13 The use of limestone in Cyprus was widespread at that time and was used extensively by local architects of the island. See Stefanos Fereos and Petros Phokaides, "Architecture in Cyprus between the 1930s and 1970s," *Docomomo* 35, (2006), 15-19.
- 14 In D.W. Aitken to Director of Antiquities, 10 July 1957, State Archives, E1/651, 169, this desire is recorded with the following statements: '...Technical Institute...will form one of the most important buildings undertaken by Government...We feel that it will be extremely good for the history of Cyprus to be commemorated in some way in these buildings. A certain sum of money has been set aside for sculpture, etc., and we feel that a proportion of this money would be well spent in purchasing from your department selected pieces of sculpture which would be placed in the various courtyards and also, in certain cases, built into some of the panel walls.'
- 15 In this game of architecture and political expediencies the Turkish-Cypriots were less involved since their minority status made them less of a target to colonialists, and were not as eager to change the status quo of the island. As Given argues, 'The architectural battle between imperialism and nationalism concerned the British and the Greek Cypriots alone. It began in 1920, with the construction of the first Greek Cypriot school in the Greek revival style.' See Given, "Star of the Parthenon," 66, 69-73; and

- Michael Given, "Architectural Styles and ethnic identity in medieval to modern Cyprus," in Joanne Clarke (eds.), *Archeological perspectives on the transmission and transformation of culture in the Eastern Mediterranean*, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2005), 207-213.
- 16 Report by the Inspectors of the Education Department, Cyprus on The Limassol Secondary Technical School, State Archives, E1/662, 98.
 - 17 Technical Education in Cyprus and Organization of the Secondary technical School Limassol, State Archives, E1/661.
 - 18 Report by the Inspectors of the Education Department, 110.
 - 19 Director of Education to Administrative Secretary, Confidential, 11 July 1956, State Archives, E1/651, 75.
 - 20 Headmaster, Secondary Technical School Limassol to Director of Education, 27 February 1957, State Archives, E1/661, 22.
 - 21 According to the British government, between August 1954 and January, 1956, high school students had participated in 149 acts of violence, and this resulted in 4 student executions, 32 flogging sentences to, 51 imprisonments, 42 temporary custodies, and 576 fines. See Lange, *Educations in Ethnic Violence*, 109.
 - 22 Panayiotis Persianis, "The Greek-Cypriot Educational policy in Cyprus as an Expression of Conflict at the Political, Cultural, and Socio-economic Levels," *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook*, 10/11, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 1994), 90.
 - 23 In the 1959-1960 school year, during which the technical schools began to operate on a communal basis, the Technical School of Nicosia, for instance, accepted 365 students; in the following year it accepted 405; and in the next 500, which lead to space shortage and thoughts about extending building facilities. See Nicosia Technical School Budget for the year 1961, 23 February 1961, State Archives, E1/942, 102-103.
 - 24 There were several recorded pressures on Cyprus to side with either one sphere of influence almost since independent. E.g., U.S. Department of State, *Office of the Historian*, (December 13-15, 1961), doc. 253. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v16/d253>.
 - 25 Panayiota Pyla and Petros Phokaides, "Ambivalent Politics and modernist debates in postcolonial Cyprus," *The Journal of Architecture*, 16/ 6 (2011), 885-913.
 - 26 U.S. Department of State, *Office of the Historian* (July 13, 1962), doc. 262 (William H. Brubeck). <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v16/d262>.
 - 27 U.S. Department of State, *Office of the Historian*, (June 6, 1962), doc. 260. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v16/d260>.
 - 28 According to the Office for Educational and Vocational Guidance, Eastern countries were in the first choice of Cypriot students after Greece and UK. See "Cypriot Students abroad," *Teleftaia Ora*, December 13, 1968.
 - 29 The History of the creation of the Higher Technical Institute in Cyprus under the Ministry of Labour, Note of the Council of Ministers, Confidential, State Archives, H.T.I. 1.1.4, 77/68, 18.
 - 30 Ibid.
 - 31 Higher Technical Institute, Cyprus, Terminal Report, State Archives, H.T.I.1.1.2/7.
 - 32 For US praise see the argument about 'Western countries and international lending organizations to contribute more actively toward building up a dominant Western presence on the island.' *Office of the Historian* (July 13, 1962), doc. 262; and U.S. Department of State, *Office of the Historian*, (September 3, 1962), doc. 263. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v16/d263>. For the Turkish position see The History of the creation of the Higher Technical Institute, 17.
 - 33 Pyla and Phokaides, "Ambivalent Politics," 885-913.
 - 34 "Inauguration of H.T.I.," *Xaravgi*, May 20, 1971.
 - 35 Highlights of the Annual Report of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance for 1969, 18 April 1970, Press and Information Office, Cyprus.
 - 36 Higher Technical Institute, Cyprus, Terminal Report.
 - 37 "Waldheim is pleased to note significant progress towards normality," *Xaravgi*, June 5, 1973.

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