

Infrastructures of Partition, Infrastructures of Juncture: Separation Barriers and Intercommunal Contact in Belfast and Nicosia*

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Abstract

Through an analysis of Belfast, Northern Ireland and Nicosia, Cyprus, this article considers how separation barriers catalyze social mixing and cooperation in ethnonationally divided cities. Due to their highly visible and symbolic nature as well as their physical location at the interface between communities, I argue that the barrier is a critical infrastructural element whose management and symbolic interpretation can motivate intercommunal cooperation – just as it can incite conflict. This article analyzes four socio-material interventions designed to ameliorate spatial and social divide: 1) the regeneration or aestheticization of barriers; 2) the negotiation of border openings; 3) the use of the border as a catalyst for intergroup activities; and 4) the creation of shared spaces at the boundary line. I discuss the possibilities and limitations of these practices both as confidence-building measures and as activities that foster social mixing. The article concludes by querying if barrier projects may inadvertently funnel funding away from more localized, single-community peacebuilding activities.

Keywords: barrier, reconciliation, social mixing, Belfast, Nicosia

Introduction

This article focuses the discussion of infrastructure and diversity on a city “type” defined by a staggering lack of diversity: the ethnonationally partitioned city. I examine Belfast, Northern Ireland and Nicosia, Cyprus, two cities similarly characterized by legacies of violent intercommunal conflict and enduring socio-spatial segregation.

To varying degrees, social mixing occurs in the partitioned city just as it does anywhere else. However, divided cities like Belfast and Nicosia are structured, experienced, and understood above all in terms of *separation*. Residents are grouped according to ethnonationalist identity, and this classification regulates all aspects of daily life: work, leisure, relationships, schooling, shopping, and so on. Moreover, this strong identification with a collective ingroup (whether it be along religious, ethnic, or national lines), and its totalizing impact on day-to-day life is experienced through its opposition to an outgroup. This article considers what infrastructures might best facilitate encounter and diversity-building in cities beset by social division.

Indeed, a distinct infrastructural setup underscores and perpetuates ethnic segregation – a

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complex concoction of the separation and doubling of infrastructure on one hand, and its negotiated sharing on the other. Division begets its own infrastructure as well: walls, barriers, fortifications, watchtowers, checkpoints, surveillance mechanisms – all of which are designed to maintain security and order, but which also create landscapes of fear and anxiety. The management of these systems often requires cooperation between otherwise disobliging communities. Electrical fields, water supply lines, roads, telephone networks, and other infrastructural systems do not neatly adhere to political boundaries and cooperation on these issues is often comparatively easy, as they are seen as technocratic as opposed to political matters (Kliot and Mansfield 1999; Bollens 2000; Calame and Charlesworth 2012). A pressing issue with Nicosia's sewage system, for instance, could only be solved through cross-communal partnership. Thus, four years after the city had been physically and politically split into two municipalities, the city's two mayors gathered Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot engineers and planners together to collectively solve the problem. Lellos Demetriades, the mayor of the Greek Cypriot community, writes of the significance of this endeavor in light of prevailing social attitudes:

All of this took place just three years after 1974 when the country was in enormous turmoil, when all the traumas were fresh, emotions were running high, there were the dead, the missing, the refugees and it was not considered the cleverest idea in those times to even meet with Turkish Cypriots, let alone discuss something with them like sewerage. But somehow both myself and Mr. Akıncı [the mayor of the Turkish Cypriot community] had a feeling that whatever was taking place, it was equally important that we should do something about our town. This town had Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots who were entitled to some kind of reasonable life and we had to do something about it, if we could (Demetriades 1998).

Infrastructural collaboration is often lauded as a positive means or instance of rapprochement; indeed, it typically has beneficial ramifications for those involved as they learn to interact and

cooperate with one another. The political sensitivities surrounding partnership means, however, that successes are rarely publicized and, more often than not, are downplayed or kept secret. Thus, such instances of joint effort have little impact on the broader climate of group relations. For a technical project to have a lasting impact as a confidence building measures, it has to involve a wide population base, not only politicians or the technical elite (Steinberg 2004, 281).

This article argues that, in partitioned cities, one infrastructural element in particular influences social mixing and confidence building across a broad population swath, and paradoxically, it is also that which most conspicuously divides communities: the separation barrier. Although (or perhaps because) they undoubtedly perpetuate division and mistrust, separation barriers play a vital role in stimulating intergroup interaction and ultimately building positive peace. Surrounding barriers is a social material constellation of actors, policies, legalities, and social practices; interventions therein, I argue, can facilitate diversity building by shaping freer mobility patterns, deterritorializing ethnically controlled space, and stimulating intergroup contact. All of these interventions can help transform protracted conflict both before and after political resolution.

This article proceeds as follows: after briefly introducing the case studies, I first consider the materiality and genesis of barrier infrastructure and the role it plays in conflict escalation. Then, in making the argument for the barrier's importance in creating social juncture, I examine four types of "barrier interventions": the mollescence of border infrastructure, the opening of checkpoints, the use of walls to encourage intercommunal activities, and the creation of shared spaces at borderlines.¹ I argue that barriers serve

¹ The following arguments stem from fieldwork conducted in Belfast and Nicosia in intermittent, recurrent periods between 2005 and 2015. Fieldwork in Belfast was conducted in: April – August 2005; September 2007; December 2010 – June 2011; and August – September 2013. Fieldwork in Nicosia was con-



Figure 1. 1978 Political cartoon depicting Lellos Demetriades and Mustafa Akıncı cooperating on Nicosia's sewage project. Source: Author's photograph of cartoon displayed in the Leventis Municipal Museum of Nicosia, 2016

as a material catalyst through which the people, policies, mindsets, attitudes, and regulations that uphold division can be challenged and contested. However, their convenience as a material peacebuilding tool and their highly symbolic value means that peacebuilders – both local and international – risk focusing their efforts too strongly on these walls; this can be to the detriment of other issues, less symbolic, less tangible, and perhaps only located in one community rather than both.

ducted in December 2011; September – November 2013; and May – August 2015. Information was gathered through expert interviews held with community workers, civil-society employees, architects, planners, councillors, politicians, academics and other professionals working either in the field of urban development or that of peacebuilding. In addition, I also conducted architectural, spatial, and site analysis of the barriers in question, analyzing not only the physical makeup of the barriers, but also observing behaviour around the peace lines and the Buffer Zone for days at a time, at multiple times of day, and at various times of year. Other observations and arguments stem from participatory observation in “barrier activities” and in the case of Nicosia, at the Home for Cooperation.

The Case Studies: Belfast and Nicosia

Although Belfast and Nicosia similarly faced periods of protracted conflict that led to internal partitioning, the political situation, pattern of segregation, and type of separation barriers used all differ emphatically between the two cities. While a more comparative analysis of these differences is a worthwhile project, my analysis here focuses on similarities that I have observed in the two capitals. In that sense, including a discussion of two cities in this article is meant to counteract any overgeneralization and to highlight related experiences. That is not to say I am making universalizing claims, and the experience of other divided cities might be wholly different still. Among the many differences between the two cases, particularly significant is that the Northern Irish conflict has reached a political agreement, while a solution to the Cyprus problem remains elusive. Yet, both societies are following related interventions in helping populations move closer. Analysing the two cities in comparison emphasizes the myriad of ways in which barriers function and that many of the interventions made by peacebuilders in promot-

ing the social-psychological transformation of conflict is similar regardless of the state of political settlement.²

Belfast was founded by English and Scottish settlers who arrived in Ireland in the early 1600s as part of the Ulster plantation. The native Catholic population largely stayed away from the city, continuing to make their living in the rural hinterland – until the 19th century, Catholics accounted for less than five percent of the city's population (Boal 2006, 72). During the 1800s, significant numbers of Catholic families moved to Belfast, seeking work in the city's growing linen and rope industries. Urban historian Frederick Boal suggests that these early settlements were already segregated (Ibid., 73). Relations between the two groups were contentious from the start. Violent clashes occurred periodically, usually in relation to rebellions and uprisings against the colonial regime (1601, 1641, 1798, 1848, 1919–1921) and the expansion of the Republican movement (Ibid.). Each outburst caused further division and the tightening of communal enclaves, thereby escalating segregation rates via a “ratchet effect” (Smith and Chambers 1991).

Sectarian infighting escalated in August of 1969 in response to a Catholic civil rights march. A week of riots in Belfast culminated in the burning of Catholic residences and businesses and the displacement of thousands of families (Mac Goill et al. 2010). This massive innercity migration pushed Catholics and Protestants into firmly knit enclaves and the British army erected the first “peace wall” (also called “peace line”) to prevent further violence. The barriers were designed as protection measures against inter-communal violence, vandalism, and projectiles and, unlike Nicosia's Buffer Zone, were not (initially) intended to curtail movement or separate

communities. From 1969 until today, segregation rates have continued to rise and walls have continued to be erected throughout the city to separate Protestant and Catholic neighbourhoods. In 2012 (the date of the last survey), ninety-nine different barriers could be found in the greater Belfast area (Belfast Interface Project 2012, 13). The Department of Justice manages the majority (58), while others are owned by housing authorities, other government departments, as well as private owners (Ibid., 12).³ Almost all barriers, however, are erected at the request of residents.

Belfast is segregated in a patchwork pattern. The peace lines encase areas of varying size and layout: some encircle just a few homes, whereas others, such as the Cupar Street Wall, extend for kilometres. Some parts of the city, such as West Belfast, are bifurcated, whereas other districts, such as North Belfast, are a jumble of buttressing enclaves. The walls are made of various materials including fencing, barbed wire, corrugated steel, and brick. The peace lines are the most enduring physical manifestation of “the Troubles,” as the army posts, watchtowers, and paramilitary murals have been almost completely dismantled. In fact, since the passing of the Belfast Agreement (1998), the number of peace walls in the city has continued to rise, a fact that indicates the continued unrest between the communities despite the conflict's official “resolution.” According to a 2012 survey, 75% of residents living near peace lines reported that the walls made communities feel safer and 69% believed that they were necessary to prevent violence (Byrne et. al. 2012, 13). Moreover, from 2012 to 2015, the number of people surveyed who preferred that the peace walls remain in place rose from 22% to 30% and the number of people who preferred the peace walls remain “for now, but come down sometime in the future” decreased from 44% to 35%

² Here I am referencing the work of Kreisberg, Lederach (and others), who argue for a long-term approach to handling intractable conflicts. They use the term “conflict transformation” to designate a process by which the underlying beliefs, values, attitudes, and emotions that support a state of conflict can be transformed into beliefs, attitudes, etc. supportive of a state of peace. (See Kreisberg, 1989; Lederach, 1997)

³ During the conflict, the Northern Ireland Office was responsible for their management and maintenance; this job has been redirected by the Department of Justice following devolution (Belfast Interface Project 2012, p. 12).



Figure 2. Bisected neighbourhood, North Belfast. Source: Author, 2013



Figure 3. Enclaved neighbourhood, East Belfast. Source: Author, 2011

(Byrne et. al. 2015, 26).⁴ In 2013, when the Office of the Prime Minister and Deputy First Minister issued a target that all peace lines should be removed by 2023 (Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister 2013), the news was met with a serious backlash from anxious residents.

Unlike Belfast, Nicosia's population was historically mixed. Although degrees of social separation did exist, the island's Christian and Muslim communities (as well as the Armenians

social antagonism (Bryant 2004). Following a "divide and conquer" strategy, the British advanced ethnonationalist identities for "Greeks" and "Turks," which became deeply problematic once the Greek Cypriot struggle for *enosis* (political union with Greece) threatened the Turkish Cypriot community and drove a political and social wedge between the two groups.

Intermittent fighting began in 1955 and lasted five years until the independence of the island



Figure 4. Buffer Zone demarcation, Nicosia. Source: Author, 2015

and Maronites) lived relatively interspersed and cooperated in matters of business, commerce, and administration (Association for Historical Dialogue and Research, accessed 2016). Communities shared social settings and enjoyed similar social practices. It was only under British colonial rule that social difference came to mean

and the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960. Three years later a breakdown of the constitution caused fighting to resume and Nicosia's Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities began to segregate, barricading themselves behind makeshift barriers of barrels, sandbags, furniture, barbed wire, and other found material. At the height of the conflict in 1963, Peter Young, the major general of the British peacekeeping force in Cyprus, officially split the city in half.

⁴ The two questions regarding safety from 2012 were not part of the 2015 survey.



Figure 5. Buffer Zone demarcation, North Nicosia. Source: Author, 2015



Figure 6. Buffer Zone demarcation, South Nicosia. Source: Author, 2015

For the following eleven years, the city was bifurcated by what was known as the Green Line – so named after the line of the map that Young drew to carve up the city. This demarcation took on a new political meaning following the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus. The United Nations Security Council then created a demilitarized buffer zone across the island, which in Nicosia ran roughly along the old Green Line. Today, the Buffer Zone splits Nicosia into two capitals of two political entities completely segregated along ethnic lines. Lefkosia, the Greek Cypriot southern half, is the capital of the Republic of Cyprus, a full EU member state. The northern half, Lefkoşa, is the capital of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, a political territory unrecognized by any state other than Turkey.

Across the island, the Buffer Zone varies in size and shape: some sections are less than a meter wide, others are multiple kilometres. Some segments are physically barricaded; some appear open apart from patrol vehicles; many, unfortunately, remain studded with landmines. From 1974 to 2003, no movement was allowed across the Buffer Zone. Since 2003, however, seven checkpoints have opened, three of which are located within the capital. The lack of human activity in the Buffer Zone has given rise to multiple exceptional landscapes (Solder et al., n.d.). In rural areas, new ecosystems have been created; in Nicosia's urban centre, the buildings, which once formed the most dynamic market in the city, have fallen into disrepair, creating a ruinous (now near-mythical) terrain that no one is allowed to enter.

The Materiality of Separation Barriers

Separation barriers are constructed out of numerous sorts of materials and are designed and laid out in innumerable configurations; they vary in size, shape, and the degree of permeability. Barrier form is often determined by security needs, but it can also reflect more mundane matters, such as the locally available materials. Symbolic issues also play a role. Yiannis Papadakis, for instance, argues that Nicosia's Buffer Zone

demarcations reflect the two sides' divergent conflict narratives and political aspirations (see figures 5 and 6). In the north, where the government initially strove for the permanent separation of the island, the Buffer Zone walls are made of solid concrete. In the south, where the division was seen as a temporary, illegal action, the government constructed the barricade out of barrels, fences, and other materials that could be removed easily following a political solution and the reunification of the island (Papadakis 2006).

Both sides of Nicosia's barricades are decorated with flags, banners, and graffiti. Checkpoints in the south are painted the blue and white of the Greek flag, whereas the fences in the north are studded with Turkish military symbols every ten feet. The peace lines in Belfast are similarly decorated, with territorial markers such as flags, murals, and curbstone paintings that also expand "inward" to cover all streets in a particular neighborhood. Such symbols play a fundamental role in prolonging and escalating identity conflicts (Kaufman 2001): they strengthen ingroup identification and chauvinism, while simultaneously provoking and threatening outsiders. By claiming ownership over place and discouraging trespassing, these symbolic displays turn space into *territory* and should thus, I argue, be considered an integral part of separation infrastructure.

Material barrier infrastructure is complemented by human, intangible – or even invisible – components. Barriers may be patrolled, or the former presence of patrollers may create internalized social controls that inhibit or prohibit cross-border movement. Free movement can be obstructed by laws and regulations; even if laws that once forbade movement are relaxed, regulatory practices such as searches or permit-issuing may discourage residents from attempting to cross borders. In Nicosia, for instance, the annoyance that comes from having police officers check purchases and shopping bags is enough on its own to discourage people from crossing. Even casual social practices and social norms can deter or stigmatize passage across boundaries.



Figure 7. Gable end mural adjacent to peace line, Cluan Place, East Belfast. Source: Author, 2011



Figure 8. Territory marking, Nicosia. Source: Author, 2015



Figure 9. Peace line reinforcements, South Belfast. Source: Author, 2011



Figure 10. Cafe adjacent to the Buffer Zone, Nicosia. Source: Author, 2015

Barrier infrastructure evolves over time and its diachronic/archaeological study can illuminate changes in security concerns and political situations. Many peace lines in Belfast clearly evince multiple refortifications: Concrete structures are topped with metal paneling, which are then crowned by chain link fencing. This layering is indicative of residents requesting further fortifications in response to increased interface violence and, in particular, the throwing of projectiles. By extension, one could read the gaping holes and crumbling frame of Nicosia's Buffer Zone as an indication of waning security concerns. However, arguably, it may also speak to the psychological internalization of the barrier. Whereas for years after 1974, residents feared to even enter neighbourhoods close to the Buffer Zone, the number of bars, cafes, and souvlaki restaurants that have opened literally on the barrels and sandbags of the Green Line indicates a diminishing sense of concern and an acceptance of the border's presence in daily life. While some enterprises cheekily capitalize on their Buffer Zone location – the Berlin Wall No. 2 Souvlaki bar for instance – repeat observations and discussions with bar owners and customers indicate a resigned acceptance of the barrier as part of the landscape – as nothing exceptional, but merely a surface to put to use.

Barriers and Social Conflict

Barriers in Belfast and Nicosia – as in most partitioned cities – are built in response to security concerns, either to ensure physical safety or to protect communal cohesion. Segregation walls are often – although not always – designed as temporary solutions that then become permanent over time (Calame and Charlesworth 2009). As Brand (2009, 37) argues, partitions have a certain “degree of agency and momentum” and once erected, various social, political, and technological knock-on effects follow that escalate not only social *division*, but social *conflict* as well.

For one, partitioning can worsen material disputes. Physical partitioning decreases property values, spreads blight, and generates economic

deprivation on both sides of the divide (Calame and Charlesworth 2009, 231). However, distinct material inequalities can develop between the two groups that stem either from structural arrangements, the location of service provisions in the city, access to employment and education, and connections to wider transport systems, among other factors. For example, urban segregation has disproportionately impacted the unemployed youth in Belfast's Catholic community, as there happen to be more employment opportunities in Protestant areas (O'Hearn 2000; Shirlow and Shuttleworth 1999). The economic disparity between the two sides of Nicosia is severely pronounced. The southern half of the city's EU member status means that the municipality benefits from EU structural and investment funds and from wide, varied trading options. The northern half of the city, on the other hand, can only legally trade with Turkey and is economically isolated from the rest of the world (Görgülü 2014). This inequality is starkly visible in the built environment. Lefkosia has modern infrastructure, refurbished housing, flagship development projects, and a thriving daytime and nighttime economy. Lefkoşa's architecture is crumbling, the streets are in disrepair, and the street furniture in the parks (benches, trashcans) are hand-me-downs from Ankara. Such horizontal inequalities exacerbate resentment between groups and can stagnate political negotiations – or even incite violence – when parties insist on restorative material distribution or new structural arrangements to rewrite balances (Østby 2008).

Segregation that curtails access to public resources can also problematically aggravate feelings of social exclusion and anger toward the state. To contain violence during the Troubles, not only were walls built between Catholics and Protestants, but larger spatial and infrastructural designs – namely roads and highway networks – severed the more violent housing estates from the rest of the city. In the “post-conflict” city, this has meant that the neighbourhoods that suffered the most from the conflict remain largely cut-off from the central business district and the city's

economic core, leaving these neighbourhoods poorer and higher on the social deprivation list than they were before the start of the conflict (Murtagh and Keaveney 2006). This forced exclusion continues to have repercussions in the form of dissident paramilitary activity and resurgent violence against the state (Ibid.).

In addition to strengthening the material dimensions of conflict, physical barriers also greatly aggravate its psychological dimensions. In ethnic conflicts, where concerns about identity are among the key claims at stake, the salience of zero-sum, oppositional identities emphatically protracts conflict (Ashmore, Jussim, and Wilder 2001). Physical separation only strengthens the essentialisation and polarization of difference (Silberman et. al. 2012). The longer groups remain separated, the more they grow fearful of one another and of social interaction. Increased fear furthers the cycle of social division, but most problematically, can spark security crises that lead to violent outbursts. Identity conflicts spatialize into territorial conflicts at multiple geographic scales. The defense of one's space becomes the defense of one's identity, and likewise, any attack on one's territory is seen as an attack on one's identity (Jarman 1998; Murtagh 2002; Shirlow and Murtagh 2006). Psychological division is incredibly difficult to overcome and can remain for generations after physical partitions are removed (Volkan 2001).

On occasion, barrier infrastructures themselves provoke violent reactions and outbursts. The clear material demarcation of a division makes its transgression all the more visible and provocative. Groups can feel justified or entitled to protect their territory and themselves from trespassers who have not respected a "clear" delineation. Indeed, in Cyprus, the first death after twenty years of non-violence occurred in 1996, when a group of Greek Cypriot protestors unlawfully entered the Buffer Zone, and one man, Tassos Issac, got caught in the barrier's barbed wire and was beaten to death by the Turkish Grey Wolves. In addition, in Belfast where Molotov cocktails, stones, and other small projec-

tiles are often thrown over the peace lines, the infrastructure paradoxically provides anonymity and defense for violence actions. Moreover, the physical expression of the interface turns the border into a taunting challenge. An interviewed community worker claimed that the peace lines are clear and visible targets, and that the higher they are built, the more determined youths become to transgress their defenses with projectiles (West Belfast Community Worker, interview with author, April 12, 2011).

Barriers and Social Juncture

In order to build social cohesion, psychological barriers need to be addressed and overcome; zero-sum attitudes, goal, and identifications must give way (at least partially) to shared visions for the future (Kreisberg et. al. 1997; Lederach 1997; Broome 2004). These obstacles are made even more difficult in that they lie in an intangible realm of attitudes, beliefs, and emotions. It is hard for people to discuss and negotiate – let alone understand or self-articulate – abstract concepts such as faith, trust, and safety. People respond more readily, and strongly, to the material, the physical, and the symbolic, and therefore, peacebuilding must work through these tangible realms (Ross 2007). I argue that in the partitioned city, the separation barrier itself serves as a material catalyst for policies and interventions that can encourage social convening and dialogue. Other conflict artifacts may also be mobilized for similar purposes, yet barriers have a particularly fundamental impact.

First and foremost, barriers are shared between the two sides and, as a common element, communities have a mutual interest in their management and regulation. Given that they cause physical blight and economic devastation, as well as attract violence and crime, if safety can be assured, then both sides have a motivation to work together for their removal (North Belfast Program Office, interview with author, October 10, 2013). In Belfast, the issue of the peace lines has provided an impetus for open (although usually thirdparty-led) discussions among resi-

dents living at interfaces, many of which have proactively demonstrated shared concerns and other commonalities on both sides of the divide (Ibid.). Moreover, their policing, administration, and management have brought members of interface communities into sustained contact and cooperation. Community activists, many of which are former political prisoners, work collectively to deter interface violence and deter “recreational rioting” (for one example, see: Hall 2003). Interface management has come to have significant government and civil society support, with numerous policies, programmes, and dedicated organizations (both local and international) supporting group exchange and cooperation on this issue.⁵ Border management in Cyprus is a highly contentious issue that necessitates constant cooperation and negotiation regarding all aspects of border management, from access to demining to legal disputes, forces people into dialogue and communication.

Partitions are also instrumental in reconnecting communities for the very reason that they are located at the territorial junction of those communities; therefore, they become the safest and most convenient meeting area if parties want to begin interacting. While residents may view interface areas with trepidation, given their proximity to home territory, these areas are still considered safer than the middle of an outgroup’s territory. Even if people do not feel physically unsafe when entering an outgroup’s territory, other emotions such as anxiety or sadness could pose prohibitive psychological obstacles. After the border opening, many displaced Cypriots chose not to return home because it was too emotionally straining (Bryant 2011). Interface areas therefore constitute the most “neutral,”

non-threatening space, particularly when under third-party supervision.

In Cyprus, as well as other politically divided societies, “neutral” spaces are also crucial not only due to safety or psychological issues, but also from a legal perspective. When the border was closed, the Buffer Zone was the only space legally available to both communities. Early bicomunal activities, such as the aforementioned Master Plan or social events and peace-building workshops hosted by the UN and the Fulbright organization, had to be held in the Buffer Zone at the UN’s Ledra Palace headquarters. In the 1980s and 1990s, these events laid the foundation for a bicomunal civil society on the island (Wolleh 2002). Today’s ever-growing and influential bicomunal movement would have been impossible without this initial meeting space. Although Cypriots may now move across the island freely, certain immigrant groups are still prohibited from crossing. Others refuse to cross for political reasons: many Greek Cypriots consider showing their passport to cross to the north to be an act of political recognition for a territory they consider illegitimate and “occupied.” During fieldwork, I met many Greek Cypriots interested in bicomunal contact, dialogue, and socialization, who nevertheless remained adamant about not crossing, but would happily socialize with Turkish Cypriots in the Buffer Zone. Thus, even after the opening of the checkpoints, this “no man’s land” thus remains the most inclusive area on the island.

Neutral spaces other than interface areas do exist. Economic diversification, in particular, can create zones of limited neutrality. The restaurants, cafes, and shops in Belfast’s commercial centre are generally considered “a-territorial” – although many critique that the shops’ and eateries’ price point makes the district inaccessible to the city’s working-class populations more impacted by the conflict (Neill 1993; Bairner 2003; Neill 2007). In the past two years, the southern half of Nicosia’s walled city has likewise become more open despite the fact that it is legally “Greek Cypriot.” The cafes along *Ledra* and

⁵ For instance, the Belfast Interface Project, Groundwork NI, the City Council’s Good Relations Unit. International funding for barrier activities comes from the International Fund for Ireland, the EU’s PEACE program, and other private organizations. The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister has launched a policy commitment to see that the walls are removed by 2023.



Figure 11. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon visits the European Union funded renovation measures of the Lokmaci Crossing, 2008⁶

Onasagorou, the two streets right off the main checkpoint, are filled with customers from both communities – sitting separately, but nevertheless equally welcome to enjoy this part of the city. In addition, in both Northern Ireland and Cyprus, groups often meet out of town or out of country for intercommunal workshops and activities.

However, barriers tend to attract much more activity than other sites, as their high-profile nature lends any endeavour a heightened symbolic value. Politicians looking to increase the impact of a redressive action tend to hold press conferences or symbolic meetings at the border. The current leaders of the two Cypriot communities, Mustafa Akıncı and Nicos Anastasiades, are often seen shaking hands in the Buffer Zone or

crossing the border to have coffee together in an effort to drum up popular support for the peace process. Visiting dignitaries often make site visits, announcements, and speeches directly at border zones. Barrier activities also appeal to international funders likewise concerned with good press and symbolic outcomes. Even private companies have sponsored peacebuilding activities across borderlines to gain attention for their brands. During the 2014 World Cup, for instance, Carlsberg sponsored their Border Football campaign in Nicosia, Belfast, and Kosovo, using, “what divides people – borders, walls, and fences – to bring them closer.”⁷ In short, barriers are highly appealing sites for parties hoping to increase the impact of a redressive action or a confidence-building measure. Their high visibility and emotional charge means that their management has a broader symbolic impact than other types of infrastructure: dismantling a wall is likely to have a stronger ripple effect than, for instance, the project connecting underground sewage lines. As will be argued below, the symbolic successes of barrier interventions and the attention they gather may ultimately have a negative impact, detracting funding and attention away from other, equally pressing issues.

“Softening” the Border

As conflict societies transition to peace, urban managers struggle to provide opportunities for social mixing and reconciliation while still meeting security needs. Physical alterations designed to “soften” barrier infrastructure are common first-stage arbitrations. This could mean weakening securitization measures, removing offensive symbols, or regenerating surrounding blight. For instance, the Lefkosia municipality used money from the EU and USAID to repair building facades along the Buffer Zone. Lacking the funds to fully

⁶ Source: Eskinder Debebe, United Nations. https://www.flickr.com/photos/un_photo/5473938615/in/photolist-9kHndV-9kHneZ-9kLqyU Licensed under Creative Commons: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/legalcode>, accessed June 21, 2016.

⁷ This quote is taken from the website of the advertising company, Duval Guillaume. The advertisement is also viewable at the same page. See: Duval Guillaume, Border Football, <http://www.duvalguillaume.com/news/2014/carlsberg-border-football>, accessed April 6, 2016.



Figure 12. "Aestheticized" barrier, North Belfast. Curbstone painting reflects the obduracy of territorial practices. Source: Author, 2013



Figure 13. Facade repair on Ermou Street, adjacent to the Buffer Zone. Source: Author, 2015

restore the buildings, the façade repair was an emergency measure to prevent building collapse. At the same time, these superficial changes are intended to improve the look and feel of the neighbourhood in order to encourage the regeneration of neighbouring streets (Nicosia Municipal Worker, personal communication with author, August 2015). The Belfast city council as well as the Northern Ireland and British government have sponsored multiple projects designed to remove antagonistic symbols and divisive imagery from barrier areas, often nestling these programmes under environmental concerns. Within neighbourhoods, community groups have replaced divisive structures with more aesthetically pleasing versions, changing concrete walls to smaller brick borders with decorative openings and shrubbery.

Given the reluctance with which people approach interface areas, these blighted areas tend to spread outward. A barrier can easily create blocks of dereliction and emptiness, turning the no-go zone into a wider area of multiple blocks. Physically improving or beautifying barriers can limit the spread of dereliction, which in turn curtails the level of repair necessary should the barriers eventually be removed. Nevertheless, a barrier is still a barrier, and aestheticizing its infrastructure will not necessarily encourage movement. Moreover, the aestheticization of a barrier can serve to normalize the partition, enabling the acceptance of a status quo and making it so that parties are less inclined to push for the removal of the barrier.

Opening of Checkpoints

Creating a more permeable border through the opening of passageways and checkpoints is a far riskier, yet potentially more beneficial, measure. Opening a checkpoint requires a certain level of security and political will, and has the potential to serve as an effective confidence-building measure that can ameliorate relationships both before and after resolution.

In the past decade, many peace walls in Belfast have been refitted with gates that remain

open during certain times of the day. This change required careful negotiation between community members. The impact of these openings on patterns of movement has yet to be fully determined. Fieldwork indicates that the number of people using these openings remains small; the majority of residents see no need to travel from one area to the next, or prefer to use their usual paths to third locations in the city, even if it means a longer commute. (Gates open to car traffic see a relatively high amount of use in comparison to pedestrian passages.) However, there are certainly many for whom these openings are helpful, including the aforementioned community workers who work across the divide to manage relations between youth in both communities. Even if use remains limited, the negotiation process essential to the creation of checkpoints is advantageous, as it stimulates dialogue about group fears and presents an opportunity for acknowledgment, exchange, and collaboration.

The opening of checkpoints has had a major impact on the Cyprus peace process and is arguably one of the foremost confidence-building measures linking popular experience with elite-led political negotiations. The Cyprus peace process is a classic example of conflict resolution in which all negotiations and decision making have traditionally occurred at the track-one level amongst political elites. Initially, civil society and grassroots movements were entirely absent from track-one negotiations and have only become largely significant within the past decade (Charalambous and Christophorou 2016). This absence has been strongly criticized, because any solution ultimately has to be voted on by the population in a referendum.

The relationship between bordering practices, elite-level negotiations, and popular support for peace has been particularly apparent since the beginning of the past round of negotiations in May 2015. At this time, Mustafa Akıncı, who was the mayor of Lefkoşa during the bicomunal cooperation on the city's sewage plan, was elected as the new leader of the Turkish Cypriot community. Akıncı ran on a pro-reunification plat-



Figure 14. Gates in peace line, Duncairn Gardens, Belfast. Source: Author, 2013

form and since his time in office, has done much to push the negotiations forward. One of his first acts in office was to abolish the symbolic “entry visa” for the TRNC. Unable to issue an actual stamp in passports, upon entry the TRNC would traditionally stamp a white slip of paper, which would then be pressed into a passport. For members of the Greek Cypriot community, who did not recognize the legality of the TRNC, this was a deliberate provocation. As previously mentioned, even following the opening of the border, many Greek Cypriots still refuse to cross for this reason. Akinci only abolished the visa policy, he did not do away with checking passports; it therefore remains unclear if his action was enough to convince reluctant Greek Cypriots to cross.⁸ Nevertheless, it was a powerful symbolic gesture that lent credence to Akinci’s asserted commitment

⁸ At the time of publication, no statistical data on this issue had yet been published.

to finding a solution. The Greek Cypriot community overwhelmingly viewed this change as a positive gesture and the action created feelings of trust and goodwill between the Greek Cypriot community and the Turkish Cypriot leadership, ushering in what has been one of the most optimistic periods in Cyprus in the past decades.⁹ Following this gesture, which set the stage for negotiations, one of the first confidence-building

⁹ I arrived in Cyprus for my third round of field work on May 15, 2015, the day this change was instituted. At midnight, when the policy officially went into effect, Greek Cypriots organized a celebratory crossing into the north. In the following months, this change was a frequent topic of conversation. In both interviews and casual conversations, expressions of hope and goodwill, usually with direct reference to the visa issue, were articulated constantly by academics, UN employees, civil society workers, ambassadors, friends, and casual acquaintances – even shop owners and service employees. Local media picked up on this shift in attitude, and ran headlines announcing optimism for the peace process.



Figure 15. Bicommunal mural project, 2003, Madrid Street. Source: Author, 2011

measures presented to the public was the opening of four new checkpoints across the island.

Intergroup Contact

Peacebuilding organizations frequently use barriers as the location or material catalyst for cross-communal social events aimed at building trust or promoting reconciliation. These events can be open, but typically they target groups particularly inimical to mixing (e.g., youth, women). Types of activity vary, but often include some form of cultural or social expression, such as sports, theatre, or dance. The thinking behind such events reflects the larger peacebuilding community's engagement with social psychology, in particular Gordon Allport's contact hypothesis (Steinberg 2013). Allport hypothesizes that quality contact between groups is the most effective method for improving conflictual group relations (Allport 1954). Contact is intended to decrease fear and anxiety about the other, and personal inter-

action is meant to combat negative stereotypes involved in conflict, e.g., outgroup inferiority and outgroup threat, as well as outgroup essentialism more generally.

Psychological pressures can be a stronger deterrent to intergroup contact than spatial constraints. Thus, as demonstrated by the previous examples, the weakening of barrier infrastructure and the opening of checkpoints does not necessarily facilitate quality contact. Residents may traverse boundaries more frequently, and the benefit of such movement should not be understated. Territorial traversal, however, is not always commensurate with social mixing. Orchestrated encounters are typically required in order to coordinate significant contact. Scripted activities take place in controlled environments, often coordinated and supervised by a third party intervener. As previously argued, such activities often occur at interface areas due to their mid-point location and symbolic value. Often the

infrastructure itself becomes a focus, serving as a material point of departure that encourages groups to reflect, interpret, and respond to division. Such events can be discussion-based or may involve altering the infrastructure in some way, for instance through mural painting or performative re-interpretation.

Almost all of those who participate in such cross-communal events, even people who are highly anxious about partaking, report positive experiences (see, for instance: Hewstone, Hughes, and Cairns 2008; Hewstone et. al., 2014).¹⁰ At one such event in Nicosia, a bicommunal dance party, I observed groups of teenagers laughing and exclaiming about the various things they found they had in common. Many of the younger Cypriots that I interviewed (usually age 15-20) recalled in amazement how wary they had been about people from the other side until they actually met someone. However, as the activities usually depend on outside funding and coordination, they tend to be one-off occurrences. While these singular meetings may reduce individually-held stereotypes, the lack of sustained quality contact prevents participants from developing strong intergroup relationships or overcoming ingroup stigmatization when it comes to outgroup socialization. Interviewees in Belfast and Cyprus frequently reported that after such events, they would return to their own communities with no real means to further new friendships, and the positive repercussions of the experience eventually languished.¹¹ One

problem here stems from funding constraints that prevent sustainable initiatives. Even repeat activities typically only last through one to two funding cycles, meaning that many programmes fizzle before they gain enough steam to be thoroughly effective (Bicommunal NGO Worker, Nicosia, interview with author, July 2015).

Permanent Shared Space

For this reason, in the past decade, peacebuilding practitioners in both cities have worked to build stable spaces at interface areas to house activities that facilitate sustained contact between communities. Cyprus' Association for Historical Dialogue and Research, a non-profit housed in Nicosia's UN offices, spent years campaigning to create a bicommunal space within the Buffer Zone. The group first had to convince UNICYP to allow a stable structure in the area. Until that point, the peacekeeping mission, which itself only receives a remit every six months, did not allow any permanent infrastructure to be erected in the "temporary" buffer zone. The only building that existed was the UN's headquarters at the Ledra Palace Hotel. The one NGO that received permission to "set up shop" on the hotel grounds had to be housed in a temporary corrugated steel shed so that it could be easily removed. However, the AHDR specifically wanted to create a space that would combat the temporary nature of cross-communal meetings. It took two years for them to receive the necessary permissions, and another two years to secure funds for the project, eventually receiving them from the European Economic Area grants and the Norway grants (Home for Cooperation Board Member, interview with author, October 20, 2013). For their new endeavour, which they called the Home for Cooperation, they chose a site across from the Ledra Palace Hotel, a building owned by an Armenian family who had been forced to abandon it during the war.

The venue provides office space for numerous NGOs, public space for events and conferences, and a cafe. The Home's architecture is exceptional in its reversal of prioritization between

¹⁰ Allport's contact hypothesis has inspired decades of research and debate. For one overview, see: (Pettigrew and Tropp 2011). The nuances of if, how, and why contact works in reducing prejudice are outside the scope of this essay. Here, I merely emphasize the positive response I witnessed of participants at these events, while acknowledging the limitations both of my insight into their feelings and emotions, as well as my knowledge of the outcomes of these events.

¹¹ In Belfast, I did not interview any participants in these events. This problem was explained to me by various community workers and program officers. Similarly, employed people in Nicosia repeated the same problem, which was also reaffirmed statements made by the interviewed participants themselves.



Figure 16. The Home for Cooperation across from the United Nations headquarters at the Ledra Palace Crossing. Source: Author, 2013

securitization and approachability, particularly when considered in dialogue with the heavily militarized Ledra Palace across the street. Rather than sandbags and barbed wire, guests are meant to feel secure by the building's glass walls, wide veranda, potted plants, and outdoor seating.¹² These architectural "comfort" elements have been added to since the centre first opened in an effort to subvert negative associations that many still have of the area (Home Café Employee, Interview with Author, May 26, 2015).

The Home for Cooperation has been very successful since its inception. During the first few years, the home developed an educational programme to bring people in for discussion-based events. However, after two years, workers were complaining that they only saw the same people again and again at their events. For that reason, staff members have been trying to transform the Home's identity, from a venue exclusively devoted to bicomunal events to a venue that happens to be located in the Buffer Zone, even re-terming the space as a "community centre" (Home for Cooperation Employee, interview with author, June 8, 2015). They have begun offering workshops on everything from composting to creative writing to breastfeeding. During fieldwork in the summer of 2015, the most well-attended events were a salsa night and a break-dancing party, both of which brought in many people who had never been to the Home

for Cooperation before, and had no interest in attending a bicomunal event *per se*, but were attending out of interest in salsa or break dancing respectively. Many had had no prior contact with individuals from the other side and casual conversations with the participants indicated that most found the experience overwhelmingly positive; the latter event ended with groups of teenagers begging the organizers to make the dance-offs a monthly event.

In Belfast, community development organizations as well as aspiring individuals have created shared spaces designed to serve the economic and commercial needs of interface neighbourhoods. One of the city's most successful initiatives is the Stewartstown Road Regeneration Project. This centre is located at the interface of the Catholic Lenadoon and the Protestant Suffolk districts in West Belfast, which during the Troubles was one of the most violent areas in the city. The two areas are separated by multiple security barriers. In the 1990s a city-wide initiative called the Belfast Interface Project helped form a joint-community group from representatives of both neighbourhoods, the Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Steering Group. The cessation of a government-funded employment scheme in the area and the failure of a local shopping centre provided motivation to find alternative means of employment and economic opportunity (Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group 2015). In single-community and cross-community meetings that lasted multiple years and in spite of years of sectarian and paramilitary intimidation, a regeneration company managed by both communities was eventually formed to create a commercial corridor along

¹² I am grateful to Rosaleen Hickey for first drawing this observation to my attention. Rosaleen Hickey, "Shared Space in Belfast/Nicosia: Security versus aesthetics," Conference Presentation. Critical Legal Studies. Queen's University Belfast, September 6, 2013.



Figure 17. Beats 4 Unity Break dancing festival, Home for Cooperation. Source: Author, 2015

the interface road. Now with multiple shops, a community centre, office space, and a day care, the interface has been transformed into a shared space serving both communities. Those involved in the area's regeneration stress the importance of economic need to ensuring the project's success – even saying that the vocabulary of “good relations” was intentionally avoided. However, if communities were to be sold on the initiative through the use of economic language, outside funders such as the International Fund for Ireland and Atlantic Philanthropies were surely pitched a peacebuilding project – this is indicated by the language they use in their own publications, which clearly refers to the project as one related to peace and reconciliation (International Fund for Ireland 2016; Atlantic Philanthropies 2016).

Just like the Home for Cooperation, not only the location, but the architectural design of the building as well is integral to its success. However, in its initial layout with two entrances, and twin

office spaces for both communities, the design of the Stewartstown Road Centre is based more on principles of equal duplication as opposed to singular shared space. These design decisions are nevertheless appropriate and well-designed for the physical location of the building (there would be no way to have only one door for instance) and for the addressing local concerns and anxieties about safety and security (Brand 2009; see also: Donovan 2013).

Limitations

All of the strategies discussed in this article – softening border infrastructure, opening checkpoints, creating mobility, organizing cross-communal activities, and building shared spaces – are beneficial in the arduous process of transforming protracted conflict. However, like all peacebuilding programmes they face limitations. Here again, I would argue, many of these limitations have to do with a strict relationship to border infrastructure. Specifically, there is an overemphasis on

barrier activity and cross-communal activity. This overemphasis can detrimentally detract from funding for programmes aimed at empowering or building confidence *within* a given community. Research increasingly indicates that cross-communal activities reach their full potential only after single-identity community building and social cohesion work have taken place, or in combination with such programs (Church, Visser, and Johnson 2002). Recent fieldwork in both cities confirms these theoretical positions. During interviews, community leaders in Belfast lamented that they are frequently forced to conduct bicommunal activities at interface barriers. In their views, what is needed more urgently are confidence-building measures within communities, particularly the Protestant community, which tends to be more insecure (Shankill Community Workers, group interview with author, April 14, 2011). Likewise, the success of activities in the Ledra Palace crossing has discouraged third parties from funding single-community work in other parts of Nicosia. One interviewee recounted that his proposal to host activities at two locations within the Old Town of Lefkoşa and Lefkosia was rejected; he was told instead to hold it at the Home for Cooperation, which would be easier for the bureaucrats and politicians processing his application. As he stated, although he is a fan of the Home, it gets very little foot traffic compared to either of the downtown cores, and he felt that holding his event there would significantly curtail its impact (Artist, interview with author, July 28, 2013). Buffer Zone activity has also significantly diverted funding for peacebuilding measures in other cities and villages on the island. This is especially problematic because these areas receive the least benefit from reunification, and as a result it is likely that residents would vote against any referendum supporting peace.¹³ Thus, barriers can inadvertently create an institutional pathway that precludes money and support from reaching other geographic

areas. Peacebuilding measures will be less successful if they remain dependent on barrier infrastructures; instead, they have to be paired with confidence-building measures in other areas.

Conclusion

The transformation of conflict is a protracted process that can last multiple generations. Identity conflicts, such as those in Belfast and Cyprus, are especially difficult to transform; socio-segregation has led to the hardening of oppositional identities and “us” vs. “them” attitudes. Although it has been a common field of inquiry and practice for the past few decades, the idea that peace builders should aim at promoting social mixing and reconciliation is still relatively new compared to the traditional approach that only focused on top-level negotiations. Specific solutions remain elusive, and the determination of best practices is a slow, arduous process that involves many different interventions on the social, spatial, symbolic, and psychological levels.

As I have argued, many of these interventions are mediated through barrier infrastructure itself, so that barriers become a filter through which the activities of peacebuilding take place. Barriers go up in an instant, and they can take generations to remove. The types of interventions detailed here occur at a particular moment in the conflict cycle, one independent from resolution. This period demands a careful policy shift between security and integration.

Belfast and Nicosia face particular problems that arise when the mixing of diverse identity groups is impeded by physical, social, and psychological obstacles – perhaps none more severe than a history and recurrent threat of violence. However, extreme as they may be as case studies, the analysis of these cities indicates lessons for fostering social mixing across groups in which intergroup fear or anxiety may play a deterrent role. Groups often avoid mixing, not because they feel physical threatened, but also because they feel economically threatened, or even just anxious about possible misunderstandings, miscommunications, or other social misfires. Con-

¹³ In interviews, members of the UNDP-ACT acknowledged this problem and discussed proposals and programs currently underway to address it.

tact and communication can be restored or cultivated through tangible and material infrastructures of concern to both communities. In partitioned cities, the dividing interface is obvious; in other cities, we may have to look more closely and analytically at the barriers that might be used to bring together divided populations.

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