

Urban Colonialism and Buffer Zones: Gray Spaces in Hebron and Nicosia

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This paper examines the effects of creating buffer zones in cities controlled by contemporary colonial regimes by comparing two such zones in Hebron, Palestine, and Nicosia, Cyprus. We argue that buffer zones in occupied and colonized cities constitute markers of “gray spaces” where law is suspended under (putatively) temporary colonial sovereignty. Their formation formalizes a process of ‘darkening’ these uncontrolled unplanned spaces, turning temporary into indefinite and even permanent. As such, buffer zones are significant tools in simultaneously formalizing spatial demarcation while creating informal spaces, causing the emergence of layered ethnic urban citizenship. We suggest that in both Hebron and Nicosia, this spatial process has deepened both colonial controls, and the nature of ethnic conflict. We propose referring to those colonized cities not as exceptions, but rather as windows into the planning influence of military and security logics in shaping urban landscapes and the formation of gray spaces.

Keywords: Buffer zones, Urban colonialism, Gray space, Planning, Militarization, Hebron, Nicosia.

Hebron and Northern Nicosia (Northern Lefkosa) are contemporary examples of colonized cities, occupied and subjected to settler-colonialist rule, where urban space has been de facto divided between conflicted groups. The division of space involved the creation of buffer zones designed to stabilize, regulate and pacify relations between the occupied population and the occupying powers. Officially designated as temporary, urban division is enforced by military power to contain violent incidents between different ethnic groups, or to spatially restrict populations opposed to colonialist projects of settlement and appropriation. In some cases, the temporary becomes permanent, and urban space is redesigned according to the ethnic, religious and economic character of the different parts of the city.

Typically, a Buffer Zone is formed between the populations, designed to prevent rival populations from crossing from one side to the other, refugees from returning, or violent attacks from resuming. This paper compares two prominent cases of cities

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divided by buffer zones: Hebron, the occupied Palestinian West Bank, and Nicosia, Cyprus, partially occupied by the TRNC¹.

Buffer zones in these cities are vital for understanding the emergence of what was termed elsewhere as “gray spaces” (Yiftachel, 2009; Tzfidia and Yiftachel, 2012). Gray spaces include shifting assemblages of entities – populations, buildings, lands, and economic transactions – which are neither fully incorporated into the officially planned urban community, nor completely excluded. They are not planned, registered or formally recognized but also not criminalized or destroyed. While officially they are referred to as temporary, buffer zones remain in place for decades, if not generations. Buffer zones produce new sociopolitical relations in the divided city often leading to the ‘darkening’ of disempowered populations, involving attempts to economically and physically exclude them, and at the same time to the “laundering” of empowered populations, which thereby enhance their legal and economic status even further. Most of the gray space and its inhabitants thus exist in a limbo of “permanent temporariness”, which in turn produces development patterns and long-term social hierarchies between different urban groups (Tzfidia & Yiftachel 2012). Buffer zones in both Nicosia and Hebron were created against the background of violent conflicts, which involved colonization efforts by the powerful groups and resistance by the occupied populations. Military forces and international bodies created them in order to temporarily separate civilian populations and control their location, thereby mitigating the violent aspect of the local resistance to the newly arrived settlers. After the division, the buffer zones developed a planning dynamic which differs from either section of the divided city. The trilateral interactions between economy (market forces), society (ethnic tension) and state (formal civilian and military planning) often involve struggles in gray space. In addition, these zones are subject to international conventions and to the decisions of military forces, both of which restrict their development in terms of mobility, proximity to inhabited areas or the granting of construction permits. Thus, buffer zones are constantly subjected to attempts of formalizing the gray space dominated by powerful groups of settlers supported by the state apparatus, and simultaneously attempts by the original inhabitants excluded or expelled from that space to reclaim the territory currently under military control.

Field visits were held on both sides of the Buffer zones in each of the cities. During those visits interviews were held with local and international personnel, representatives of NGO’s, academics, residents and military and police officials. In total 12 formal interviews were held in Nicosia and 10 interviews in Hebron. Some of our interviewees chose to remain anonymous.

Our choice of Nicosia and Hebron is motivated by the multiple similarities between the cities and their buffer zones. Hebron is the largest city in the occupied West Bank, while Nicosia is the largest in Cyprus. While the process of creating the buffer zones was different, in both cities, these zones have now existed for decades with a marked impact on their cities. The emptied buffer zones also exist in

both cities at their historic centers, with critical repercussions for their CBDs and economy (BeTselem, 2007; Azulay and Ophir, 2008; Schneider and Susser, 2003). Historically, both cities were subject to Ottoman and then British imperial rule which left similar legacies on their legal and land ownership systems. Their military occupation also occurred in similar years (1967 in Hebron and 1974 in Nicosia), meaning that their influence can now be measured after a significant periods.

Important differences also exist between the two cities. First, the manner in which the buffer zone was created— while in Nicosia it was planned and implemented as such, following the Turkish invasion and urban division; in Hebron it occurred three decades after the Israeli occupation, as a partially unintended consequence of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement to divide the city. During the early 2000s, the conditions for Palestinians in the area under Israeli control became unbearable. The H2 area, in which all Jewish colonial enclaves exist, became literally empty of Palestinians, thereby transforming itself to a buffer zone between the main Jewish towns of Kiryat Arba-Ramat Mamre (immediately east of Hebron) and the main Palestinian area in H1.

Second, the political geography of sovereignty is different in the two cases. In Nicosia two states (Greece and Turkey) were highly instrumental in the events leading to the Turkish invasion, and subsequent urban division. The 'Green Line' that divides the city was actually created a decade prior to the Turkish invasion. At present, two state entities exercise sovereignty in 'their' ethnocentric parts of the city (one internationally recognized – Cyprus, controls the southern part; while the other internationally unrecognized – the TRNC, controls the northern side). In Hebron, on the other hand, ultimate sovereignty on both sides is exercised by the Israeli occupying power: it fully controls the buffer zone in the Eastern H2 area (Figure 1), while the Palestinian Authority (a temporary state-in-the-making entity) exercises only limited control on the H1 area at the western part of the city. Although officially the PA has security and civil control over H1, in practice Israel has maintained tight control over the parameters of the cities, with repeated military operations deep inside the Palestinian urban area.

We claim that in both cases the occupying state establishes its control through the use of bottom-up informal development and the 'top-down' suspension of the law. This move follows the colonial logic of controlling the population and its space and is supported by an ethnic logic which dovetails with formal mechanisms, producing a hierarchy of citizenships and creeping apartheid, or in the case of Hebron – *de facto* apartheid. In this case, the selective application and suspension of the law turns it into a stratifying factor and an instrument of control over marginalized, occupied population, while promoting populations whose material and ideological interests are in line with those of the state. The spaces discussed in this paper are used as an axis of inter-ethnic struggle in conditions of selective legality and law enforcement: lax and vague when applied to the dominant population, but strict and oppressive towards the dominated one (Koren, 2007).



Figure 1: Hebron 2016. An Israeli military patrol at the Shuhada Street adjacent to the buffer zone – a view from H2. (photos courtesy of Ronny Rozenberg)

THE TURKISH OCCUPATION OF NICOSIA

The 1950's were marked as the decade for pressure for Enosis (Union of Cyprus with Greece, demanded by most Greeks) or Taksim (Partition, as demanded by most Turks). The differing goals caused constant ethnic tensions. The first division between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots took place in 1956 with roadblocks and barricades, including Ledra Street and two years after the first separate municipality of Nicosia/Lefkosia had been proclaimed. Additional events such as the Bloody Christmas (Kanli Noel) in Nicosia, have led to the first division of the city, ten years before the de facto division of the island. Operation Attila – the occupation of North Cyprus by Turkey – began in 1974 when Turkish troops landed on the island. This was followed by several months of fighting which alternated with attempts at peace talks between the Turkish and the Greek Cypriot armed forces. After the fighting ceased, the Turkish army did not leave the island, and in 1975 the Turks unilaterally declared the establishment of the so-called Turkish Federated State of Cyprus. This declaration was supposed to be a step towards the creation of a federal state covering the entire island, but the initiative was rejected by Cyprus, the UN General Assembly and the international community. In 1983, the Turkish entity declared independence and adopted the name TRNC. Apart for Turkey, no country or international organization has recognized this entity's sovereignty. Moreover, although the Turkish state is a de facto sovereign entity, it is administered in a way that is more reminiscent of a Turkish province than of a fully independent state: its anthem, currency and official language are all Turkish. TRNC currently controls 36% of the island (North). On the other hand, the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), which

controls 63,7% of the island (South), also shares at least its language and anthem with Greece, and upon joining the European Union and serving as its president, it has also become formally politically attached to it (Bryant, 2006).



Figure 2: Nicosia and the Buffer Zone cutting through its centre.

According to the 2011² population census, Greek Cypriot population of the island is roughly 840,000, some 200,000 of whom live in the capital Nicosia. According to the 2006 census, the northern part of the island, occupied by the TRNC, is populated by a total of 250,000 people, some 80,000 of whom live in North Nicosia/north *Lefkoşa*. However, the census has been judged as not accurate, while other estimations argue³ that the population in the TRNC is around 300,000 or around 500,000. Nevertheless, according to the 2006 census, 178,031 were TRNC citizens, 70,525 were citizens of Turkey, and 8,088 were from other countries. Moreover, the broader region of Nicosia hosts around 325,000 inhabitants in the south, while around 85,000 inhabit the northern part. Nicosia hosts around 25,000 inhabitants on both sides (6% of the region) (Figure 2).

The historical roots of the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus lie in the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty between Turkey, Greece, the UK, Italy and France, which settled the fate of Asia Minor following the Ottoman Empire's collapse in World War I and the evacuation of French and Greek Cypriot troops from Anatolia following the Turkish War of Independence. The population exchange between Turkey and Greece is considered one of the unusual provisions of the Lausanne Treaty, and

while the national Turkish narrative uses this euphemism for displacement, Greek Cypriots tend to remember these events as the “Asia Minor Disaster”, or simply the Catastrophe. It is impossible to ignore the Palestinian parallel of the Naqba, the 1948 catastrophe of the Palestinians in parallel to the establishment of the state of Israel.

In a step highly reminiscent of the mutual ethnic cleansing of the early 1920s, following the Turkish invasion, mentioned as invasion and intervention according to both official narratives, some 200,000 Greek Cypriots escaped or were violently deported from the northern to the southern part of the island, while an estimated 60,000 Turkish Cypriots were displaced in the opposite direction. In addition, tens of thousands of Turks emigrated from the mainland to Northern Cyprus (Bryant, 2006). Many refugees fled to the cities in search of shelter and employment, mostly to Nicosia. The entire island has remained divided to this day by a narrow strip of no-man’s land by a continuous fence and secured from the east to the west. This strip is known as the buffer zone, the Attila Line or the Green Line. It is not an internationally recognized border, and it is policed, patrolled and controlled by a dedicated UN force⁴ - UNFICYP. From 1974 to 2003, the border between the two parts of Cyprus remained completely sealed. In addition to the UN force, the Turkish Cypriot and the Greek Cypriot armies secured the crossings in order to prevent civilian movement in either direction. Only foreigners carrying the appropriate documents were allowed to cross the border but this movement was fairly limited (Demetriou, 2003).

Constantinou (2008) examines the Turkish occupation and Cyprus’s postcolonial structure within the framework of Agambenian states of exceptions. He argues that the very existence of Cyprus as a state of exceptions involves multiple particular exceptions, the most prominent of which is the buffer zone. Moreover, this zone has gained spatial significance and should more appropriately be termed a space of exception – a space where government and military authorities are expanded, and where a unique regime is applied to a 180 km-long strip – some 3% of the island’s total land area – with the divided capital in the center. The UN force which governs and polices this area is in charge not only of security, but also of planning and construction in the urban section of the Buffer Zone which is home to a total of 8,000 people.

THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF HEBRON

Under the protocols of the Oslo Accords, Hebron was partitioned into two zones. The first, known as H1, encompassing 80% of the city, is home to 170,000 Palestinians and is internally controlled by the Palestinian Authority. Jews are officially prohibited from entering. The second, H2, which is under Israeli control, occupies the remaining 20 % of the area. It encloses the holy sites in the center

and stretches out to the eastern edge of the city. About 600 - 700 Jews live in H2, in small, fortified, urban enclaves. The H2 area was also home to 20-25,000 Palestinians when the Hebron agreement was signed in 1997, although today only a few hundred remain (See Figure 3).

In Hebron the Jewish settlers – who make up less than one per cent of the total population – exert a disproportionate influence, enabled by a massive Israeli military presence, and represent a different type of demographic dynamics than that which exists elsewhere in the West Bank or in mixed Arab-Jewish cities within Israel proper.

According to the Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron, signed by the state of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1997⁵, a Buffer zone will be formed between H1 and H2 in order to prevent future clashes between the two sides. Nowadays, the geography of the buffer zone has shifted significantly from the original agreement, to cover nearly the entire H2 area. This followed a process of increasing military and settler control over the Palestinians, initiated in the city soon after the signing of the agreement. During the second Palestinian intifada (2000-2004), the restrictions and control imposed by Israel, as well as the violence towards the city's Palestinians became unbearable, causing the vast majority to flee to the Palestinian H1 area of the city.

Yiftachel (2000, 2006, 2009) describes a process of “creeping apartheid”, whereby different population groups are granted unequal “packages” of rights based on ethnic and geographic distinctions. He describes how this process has exacerbated since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 and particularly since the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000. Israel has created a new geopolitical reality by massive expansion of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, demarcating and enclosing Palestinian enclaves, imposing severe restrictions on the Palestinians' freedom of movement, demolishing thousands of houses and erecting the Separation Wall. This process has produced a hierarchy of separate and unequal citizenships layered by Israeli laws, policies and practices on the ground. Yiftachel terms this process “creeping apartheid” because it develops and establishes itself largely without any formal statements or definite policies. Thus, while the Jewish settlers of Hebron and its Palestinian inhabitants are often separated by only a few meters across the buffer zones, and sometimes no more than a single wall, a huge gap yawns between them in all areas of life – infrastructures, services, accessibility, citizenship and equality before the law – a result of their assignment to completely different legal systems; that of the colonizer and that of the colonized.

Most areas under direct Israeli control in the West Bank are rural. Hebron is the exception to this rule since it is the only Palestinian city (outside Al-Quds/East Jerusalem) inhabited by Jewish settlers. This relates to the special place of Hebron in ancient and recent Jewish history, and particularly the bloody anti-Jewish riots in 1929, in which 67 Jews were murdered and the entire community, counting few hundreds, was evicted from this holy city. This recent history has caused all

Israeli governments since 1968—from Left and Right alike—to protect the small urban settler community, situated in the heart of the largest and the highly nationalist Palestinian city.

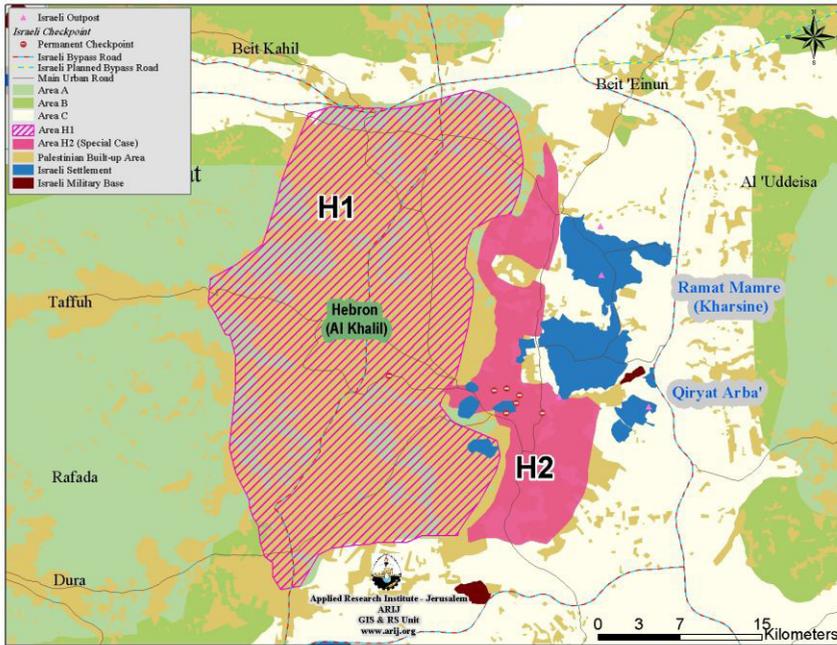


Figure 3: H1 & H2 Zones in Hebron including the neighbouring settlements⁶.

Following the occupation of the West Bank in the 1967 war, Israeli military captured Hebron. Military control was considerably tightened in the city following Palestinian protests after a Jewish settler, Baruch Goldstein, massacred 29 Muslim worshippers in Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi (Tomb of the Patriarchs) in 1994. The result initiated a massive displacement of Palestinian inhabitants from central Hebron (BeTselem, 2007). This imposition of the colonial logic on the city led to its division and the creation of an internationally recognized Buffer Zone between the area under Palestinian control (H1) and that under Israeli control (H2), where only few Palestinians remained. Israeli colonial rule, illegal according to international law, subjects the Palestinians to a legal system which denied their full urban citizenship and put in doubt their ownership of lands and homes, thereby sanctioning and completing the territorial takeover. All of this is done within a framework of a separate military legal system, with the use of putatively temporary military warrants, land expropriations, and de-facto confiscations and expropriation of space for “security needs”.

The evacuation and displacement of Palestinian populations for Jewish settlement and security purposes results in severe damage to Palestinian urban space.

Graham (2006) describes the destruction of Palestinian urban space in the West Bank and the disruption of the fabric of life by the Israeli military since 2000. The levels of violence and the force used by the two parties are asymmetric: the Israeli army's intentions and actions suggest that Palestinian space as such has been added to its target list, in addition to resistance fighters. This shift in emphasis is articulated in such violent acts such as the destruction of buildings, infrastructures and roads, even in the centers of Palestinian cities. House demolitions, roadblocks and closures, curfews, "surprise checkpoints" and the seizure of homes and buildings for "security" purposes have all become daily tools in the deliberate destruction of Palestinian space.

Hebron in particular has experienced extensive destruction as a result of Jewish settlement (BeTselem, 2007). The fact that it is the only city in the West Bank where the military presence has been maintained continuously has prevented reconstruction and the restoration of the urban fabric. The Jewish settlement in Hebron is located at the heart of the largest city in the occupied West Bank and is part of a broader process of Israeli Jewish settlement of the occupied Palestinian territory since 1967. This settlement calls for a discussion which links the urban processes of the right to the city with aspects of colonialism, sovereignty, detention and resistance extensively addressed by the contemporary post- and neocolonial literature.

BUFFER ZONES IN HEBRON AND NICOSIA: OCCUPATION, MANAGEMENT AND CREEPING COLONIALISM

The Buffer Zone in Hebron achieved a different purpose from the one for which it was initiated: from a tool meant to separate Israelis and Palestinians in order to *prevent* violence between the two communities, it became a tool which *enabled* the security forces to exercise violence against the Palestinian population serving broad spatial-colonial purposes.

Gazit (2009) describes Hebron's ground agents—various security forces, government representatives, and Jewish settlers – in the context of fragmented sovereignty in order to sketch the power relations operating in the area and particularly near the buffer zones. He argues that the rotation of the units deployed in the city, the latitude given in interpreting the commands given to soldiers on the ground, the (deliberate) vagueness of the orders and guidelines they receive, the variety of responsibility areas of the various agents and the gap between the political decision makers and the soldiers who are invested with extensive authorities, all produce discontinuity in the way Israel exercises its sovereignty in the West Bank and in Hebron's urban space in particular. As a result of this discontinuity different agents may choose to exercise their authority on the city's Palestinian inhabitants in different ways, sometimes even on the same street. This discontinuity is manifested in three political-spatial spheres: marking the limits of sovereignty on the ground,

reciprocity between spatial-security and violent practices and the role played by the military borderline or Buffer Zone in constructing the discontinuous sovereignty.

The main differences between the Israeli occupation of Hebron and the Turkish occupation of Nicosia were revealed when we examined the occupied cities in terms of spatial practices, in terms of various aspects of urban planning. These practices are far harsher in contemporary Hebron, entailing a thick web of checkpoints, direct military control of the inhabitants' freedom of movement (curfews, closures, checkpoints), military penetration into civilian space (patrols, house searches, deployment of military posts in civilian areas), as well as the seizure of civilian areas for military purposes (BeTselem, 2007; Weizman, 2007; Gazit, 2009).

In Nicosia, the presence of the Buffer Zone and the lack of integration between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot populations affected the spatial structure of the city center as well as its other sections. The Buffer Zone had a centrifugal effect on the city's development, pushing projects far from its center and leading to excessive development along its margins, which intensified as the city expanded (Demetriou, 2003). The comparative study of both buffer zones suggests that other urban socio-spatial policies play significant roles in the development and transformation of the divided cities, apart from colonial, military policies. For instance, the UN Master Plan in Nicosia, the current gentrification and value of land, are of high importance and provide an understanding of what happens in the city, which is a "battlefield" of multiple interests and everyday dynamics. The accelerated expansion in the city's outlying areas led to a growing tendency of differentiating its two parts and actually creating two separate cities with a Buffer Zone between them. This trend, combined with the accelerated growth at the edges of the city and unregulated planning created a variety of planning challenges in the center of Nicosia, as well as its margins. Apart for limited, small-scale successes in the framework of the city's masterplan, it remained divided. The greatest challenge now facing the planners of Nicosia is developing the areas immediately on both sides of the buffer zone. This area, once teeming with life and commercial activity, has completely lost its vitality and became poor and undeveloped, populated mainly by labor migrants. Those developments are entangled with additional broader processes such as the recent capitalist crisis, the EU enlargement or the real-estate market interest which affects the city's image, of which we will not be able to refer within the scope of this paper.

Communities on both sides of the Buffer Zone in Cyprus apparently accept it as an international borderline; Turkish Cypriots efforts to expand into the Cypriot side have been blocked, while the Greek Cypriots seem unwilling to reunify the island (Demetriou, 2003). Nevertheless, it cannot be said that the colonial move has been completed successfully in Nicosia. Without international legal approval and political recognition, Northern Cyprus remains illegally and hence temporarily occupied.

In Hebron on the other hand, there is no master or development plan to reunify the city and the Buffer Zone in particular has no outline plan. As interviews with three Civil Administration officers (anonymous, June – August 2013) suggest,

the lack of a detailed outline plan is not accidental but deliberate, as it leaves the management and shaping of the Buffer Zone to the forces on the ground. There is no strategy for managing the buffer zone, only military tactics. Conversely, despite repeated declarations by the Jewish settlers of their aspiration to annex Hebron to the State of Israel, no actual annexation plan has ever been made. The very preference of annexing the Palestinian section rather than reunify the city suggests that in Hebron, colonial aspirations are still alive and the colonial process is still ongoing.

Another decisive difference between the compared cities is that the checkpoints on both sides of the Buffer Zone in Hebron have become guard posts designed to prevent attacks on the fortified enclaves of the Jewish settlements. Conversely, the main crossing on Ledra/Lokmaci Street in Nicosia/Lefkosia and the Ledra palace crossing invite passers-by, from the Greek Cypriot side, or the Turkish Cypriot side with the use of their passport, to cross to the other side and visit, thus encouraging the integration of the two populations.

The comparative examination of Hebron and Nicosia provides important insights into contemporary urban-colonial processes. It allows us to examine the effects of colonialism on the population not only in retrospect, but as it emerges, shapes urban space and creates the conditions that may lead to a postcolonial situation. Its contribution to the study of present-day occupied and colonized cities is the addition of the buffer zones to the list of planning tools and instruments that create the gray space and enable the colonialist project to deepen its hold on urban space.

CONTROL MECHANISMS IN HEBRON'S AND NICOSIA'S BUFFER ZONES

Various principles in modernist planning reinforces it as a control rule: spatial, comprehensive, and predetermined planning with clearly defined objectives meet the state's needs and promotes its goals (Alphasi, 2006). The statutory validity of plans, including those made by the security apparatus, helps realize the government's control over space in light of the security concepts embodied in this control. Accordingly, planning as a means of control and an exercise of power is key to understanding planning developments in buffer zones, particularly in the city of Hebron which is subject to direct military control. Whenever military forces inhabit urban space on a long-term basis, or invade it with no intention of leaving, the road is paved to accumulation by dispossession – the privatization or nationalization of assets in the occupied space.

To better understand the planning development of the Buffer Zone in Hebron and Nicosia, we need to characterize the actors responsible for its daily management and for maintaining security and order. Multiple agencies operate in Hebron and the division of responsibilities among them is complex and ill-defined. The list of organizations responsible for security alone in the Buffer Zone includes the IDF;

Israel Border Police (IBP); IBP Tomb of the Patriarchs (a dedicated unit); Israel Police; Palestinian Civil Police Force; the Security and Rescue Department of Kiryat Arba (a Jewish settlement on the outskirts of Hebron); the Jewish Settlement's private security company; and the Israeli Civil Administration and the Temporary International Peace force in Hebron⁷ (TIPH) established under the Oslo Accords which patrols the city. The list of organizations in charge of the routine administration of the Buffer Zone includes international, state and private entities, as well as human rights organizations. This multiplicity of actors and their vague responsibilities allow considerable latitude in the gray spacing of Hebron. Without precise definition of responsibility areas and procedures, the authorities of the various actors in charge and the spheres of activity enjoy flexibility in operating and interpreting the law on the ground.

Legally speaking, the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank are highly similar (Harvard University, 2007). But this similarity is superficial and misleading since the regimes involved are highly dissimilar: the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus has been established as an independent state, as opposed to Palestine, which despite several independence declarations and partial recognition by the UN, hardly functions independently. Another significant difference is the harsh conduct of the Israeli military in the West Bank and Hebron and the more subtle Turkish military in Northern Cyprus and Northern Nicosia in particular.

The deployment of international forces along the Buffer Zone represents another significant difference. TIPH and the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNIFICYP) serve essentially contradictory aims. From the interviews conducted alongside with field surveys, it seems that in Nicosia, both sides feel that the Buffer Zone is fairly managed by UNIFICYP and that their rights are protected. In Hebron, on the other hand, the Palestinians living in the Buffer Zone feel that their rights are violated and that they are harassed and attacked by the settlers who enjoy the protection of the Israeli army. These violations occur under the supervision of a supposedly neutral European observer, and hence they feel betrayed by the TIPH. The Jewish settlers, on the other hand, feel that the supposedly neutral European actor is nothing but an obstacle which prevents them from taking over additional sections of the city. Indeed, an interview with Noam Arnon, spokesperson of the Jewish Settlement in Hebron (June 2013) indicates that TIPH is perceived as another human rights organization which lacks legitimacy due to its anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist political bias.

In spatial planning terms, the buffer zones had a similar effect on the two cities, particularly in terms of the balance between market and municipal forces. The creation of both buffer zones dealt a serious blow to the municipalities, paving the way to their "occupation" by market forces. This is indicated by the extent of suburbanization in the Greek Cypriot side of Nicosia and by the number of new malls built

in the Palestinian side of Hebron (H1) ever since the creation of their respective buffer zones.

Significant structural differences exist between the cities, particularly due to the different regimes in their non-occupied sections – democracy in Greek controlled Nicosia and military government in most of the West Bank. Consequently, the effects of the Buffer Zone in Hebron are more severe, as it is the focus of ongoing conflicts, while the international forces are seen by both rival communities as biased. In Nicosia, on the other hand, the status quo is non-violent and international forces play a role that is recognized as positive by both sides.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper illustrated that rather than providing a neutral tool for conflict resolution, both buffer zones turned into partially informal 'gray spaces' which function as a supportive infrastructure for the colonial regimes. At the same time, the zones reinforced the formalization of colonial relations in urban space. This combined effect has deepened the colonial conflict and has perpetuated its presence in the urban landscape, as evident in the expanded control of security forces, reduced accessibility to services, and intensified segregation. At present, the buffer zones function as urban frontiers from which the colonial order filters into the rest of the city, affecting space and ethnic relations locally and regionally. This process runs counter to the original (stated) purpose of mitigating the conflict and laying the groundwork for reconciliation and peace. The gap between the stated objective and actual processes on the ground leads to the emergence of unplanned and unregulated gray spaces, characterized above all by attempts to reinforce the colonial order.

However, the comparison also reveals differences in the intensity of the above processes. The Nicosia Buffer Zone, due to its relative lack of violence, turned the urban frontier into a periphery - the city's backyard. Quite the opposite occurred in Hebron, where the Buffer Zone became an active frontier, and remained in the center of local and international politics. These circumstances spawned a process of 'gray spacing', and later 'darkening', with severe consequences to both Palestinians and to the intensification of the conflict.

In both Nicosia and Hebron, buffer zones were developed as ostensibly temporary but have transformed into long-term and structural spaces, which reshape the urban fabric and effects future planning of the urban space. In time, it appears that contrary to planners' expectations, buffer zones intensify the conflict by perpetuating colonial segregation imposed by a foreign and powerful military and settling power. Under the guise of "planning" or "security", these zones introduce colonialist dimensions to urban planning and administration and lead to abandonment which in turn only deepens the separation between the two communities. In this sense, buffer zones are effective in reducing the friction between hostile populations in the

short and mid-term. This allows the latent planning and administrative violence to take hold, creating manageable cities, at least from the colonial point of view.

Buffer zones are essentially gray spaces since their planning is informal and temporary in substance. The space in this area is shaped by a constant asymmetric power struggle, which prevents the attainment of an optimal and stable status quo. As such, the buffer zones demonstrate the effects of the interface between power, law, regulation and space, in shaping social relations. As we have seen, the creation of an 'exceptionalized' area such as the buffer zone immediately suspends the application of the law and urban plans and redesigns them according to a "gray" logic of indefinite temporariness, vagueness and potential displaceability and illegality or the colonized community.

The paper elaborated on the gray space phenomenon in the under-studied context of occupation, ethnic exclusion and top-down spatial "graying". We demonstrated that buffer zones in occupied cities serve as colonial frontiers which solidify colonial practices in urban space – both de-jure and de-facto: de-jure, because the point of departure for colonial expansion in urban space is the creation of separate legal systems for the occupier and occupied following the establishment of the buffer zone; de-facto, because this situation is enabled by an array of documentation, supervision and surveillance tools applied by military forces to both the population and the space they control.

The Buffer Zone in Hebron is a 'darkened' gray space, emptied and neutralized by spatial powers. The Hebron space is affected by constant manifest and latent struggles between asymmetric forces which have created a veritable, abandoned, ghost city. This involved the suspension of the law in this particular area, resulting in its subjection to military and settler control and the denial of significant protection and rights to its Palestinian population.

However, the 'darkening' of the Palestinian 'gray' area does not necessarily spell the end of the urban-colonial project in Hebron. The settlers' avowed desire to annex the entire city indicates that they are interested in 'graying' all of Hebron, which will allow them to use the same spatial practices previously used to take over its historical center. Annexing Hebron and extending Israeli law to it will enable imposing a planning, construction and security policy that will hasten Jewish expansion, the takeover of other parts of the city through a variety of spatial practices which will deepen the creeping urban apartheid process.

Any thought of future courses of action in restoring and renewing the buffer zones requires a spatial, and not only a sociological approach to the population of the divided cities. While the Buffer Zone in Nicosia suffers from neglect, it has remained almost intact. The Buffer Zone in Hebron, on the other hand, has been allowed to deteriorate by the Israeli military in the process of evacuating and sealing it. It would thus require significant restoration in order to renew its glorious past as the CBD of a city which exists since biblical times.

In Hebron, as in Nicosia, the buffer zones' reduced levels of daily violence and clashes between the two communities, with massive deployment of security forces, near total ethnic segregation, and a massive use of surveillance measures preventing further escalation. In this sense, the buffer zones have provided the communities a degree of certainty, creating manageable cities, at least from the colonial point of view. Having said that, our paper shows that the price of this manageability is the perpetuation of the urban rupture and the constant fueling of the broader ethnic conflict.

NOTES

1. Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.
2. http://www.cystat.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/populationcondition_22main_en/populationcondition_22main_en?OpenForm&sub=2&sel=2
3. <https://www.prio.org/Global/upload/Cyprus/Publications/Is%20the%20Turkish%20Cypriot%20Population%20Shrinking.pdf>
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