



BOOK REVIEW

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Reading Borders: Review of Anna Casaglia's *Nicosia Beyond Partition*

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*Nicosia Beyond Partition:
Complex Geographies of the Divided City*

Anna Casaglia

194 pages

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Nicosia Beyond Partition is a book about power and the politics of divided urban regions, and more specifically about the famously divided Cyprus city of Nicosia, which Greece and Turkey partitioned in August 1974. The introductory section is followed by two well balanced sections focusing first on *living in a divided city* and then more analytically on *power and the politics of space of divided cities*. The text is organised towards a balanced argument that takes stock of those three parts. For scholars of borderland studies the first section will be a solid review of the literature which provides a framework for the study of Nicosia. The current dominant literatures suggest that giving methodological primacy to those living in the borderlands and their perspectives provides new insights. In this sense, this book is at the forefront of the research in the broader area of border studies that sets its interest on understanding borders from the multilevel and complex perspectives of 'the borderscapes, from the viewpoint of agents.' Indeed, the ultimate focus is people; it is '*the interconnection of diverse agents at different scales in the definition of the situation*' (p.9) that is at the core of the book. It is a methodological choice and research strategy that is prominent today in cultural geography. It is an interesting



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approach as it anchors extremely well the section on the politics of space of the divided city, a b-ordered space of inclusion and exclusion where human agency reflects plural-territoriality as well as symbolic, cultural and political orders.

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The city of Nicosia is one of the last formally and physically divided capital cities of Europe. There are other similarly sad examples both in recent history and resulting from an enduring history (Berlin, Belfast) of borders being perceived by Europeans as 'cleavers' as suggested by Francois Mitterrand on the 21st of November 1990 in his closing speech of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Nicosia, indeed, is particularly interesting because it is inside and outside the European Union and Greece, and inside and outside a neighborhood state of the Union as well, Turkey, a state that has been a candidate to the European Union since 1987, and signed a customs agreement with the Union in 1995. But since then, Turkey has lost interest in accession. Indeed, since the late 1990s, these efforts to enhance trade and peace have served their purpose to pacify the famously called Green Line, but are now stalling. Today, Nicosia symbolizes the partitioning of 'two urban areas, two parts of Cyprus and two benchmark "homelands" Greece and Turkey ... [and an] anomalous European border' (p.15). Casaglia's intent is to show that the division also points to divided 'symbols' and 'competing groups and identities, [which in turn] disclose the artificial nature of identities based on place affiliation and [thus point to] the multidimensional nature of border' (p.18). This is where her work is particularly interesting to Cultural Geographers.

The first part of this book organises the literature review in four subsections on (1) cities and segregation, (2) productive and produced spaces, (3) linking space and society, and, concludes with (4) classifications and suggestions. The literature review reminds the reader that cities are spaces of inclusion and exclusion, and that from inclusion, social cohesion and bonds emerge, whereas exclusion, such as ghettos, nourishes deep social divisions such as living outside city walls and concurrent identity formations. The literature also points to the spatiality of certain social phenomena. The *spatial socialization of countries* is then an extension when applied to borderlands and has led to concepts such as territoriality, whereby the borderland become a discursive landscape and a place of choice for social scientists interested in boundary construction/de-construction/re-construction and impacts on human societies and life. Developing a model of divided cities informs the debate by focusing on partitions versus division and thus on partial partitions and in particular the spatial or the social forms and the analysis resulting from in-depth case studies of 'place specific processes [of] social transformations' (p.44).

The second part consists of an in-depth well documented case study, a description and analysis of interviews of the resulting situation of the Nicosia

cross-border urban region. Casaglia's narrative details four areas: Nicosia's (1) scattered development, (2) institutional challenges, (3) costs, and (4) difficult symbolisms and cross-border interactions when straddling a disputed boundary. Casaglia's field work contributes to her argument that '*space influence narratives and enforces identity patterns*' (p.71). The author concludes with Foucault's idea of the 'heterotopias' that bodies exist in spaces, submit to spaces of authority, and can also manifest within spaces of resistance; Casaglia suggests the buffer zone should be re-invested with new meaning. The city is made up of two municipalities along with the United Nations monitoring the region; a triumvirate that institutionalises an ongoing cleavage. These findings, however, do not contribute to stopping trade. Indeed, possibly because of the regional cross-border complexity, the border is also a resource to traders. In conclusion, cross-border interactions, although real and resulting from local civil society organisation and bi-municipal groups, remain difficult and when they take place meet in the buffer zone.

The third section on politics and space focuses on identities, narrative and the recent history of cohabitation when facing rising nationalism: what it is to be Greek, Turkish, Cypriot on occupied Cyprus, and, how 'un/lucky' this is. The last section concerns Nicosia's urban spatiality as one would read a book focusing on the landscapes of the border, the conflict, the institution and the culture. Indeed, like Henri Lefebvre, Casaglia reminds the reader that any urban space should be looked at like a book because its planning and organisation speak to a specific spatial history and specific eras in the history of any city. Also, for Lefebvre the city is a place where much symbolism is at stake: the symbolism of the city itself, but also of society, the state, the world and cosmos. Hence, Casaglia's findings make sense: the symbolism of conflicts, partition, memory and collective memory are making their imprint on the urban space. Cross-border co-habitation is frustrated further by the rise of new nationalisms whereby being Greek Cypriot, Turkish Cypriot and simply Cypriot is difficult and deemed 'unlucky' because of Turkish Cypriots' dependence on Turkey and because of multilevel cleavages weighing on the region. It is not just about Greece and Turkey, but also the European Union and Turkey, and also about the Union and the historical remains of the former Ottoman Empire of the Eastern Mediterranean. This all comes together in this last section of this small and dense text; the cleaved urban space, with Lefebvre in mind, reads like a text and reveals a deeply partitioned urban landscape of profound and institutionalised ethnic conflicts.