Urbanizing Nature, Modernizing Nations: Water Infrastructure and Conflict in Colonial and Postcolonial Cyprus

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Abstract (300 words):

Modernity’s Promethean Project to modernize cities and societies, has often been described as none other than the effort to conquer and tame nature, with the Modern Hero icon best encapsulated by the Ayn-Randian middle-aged, white, male technocrat, the heroic modernist architect. Following this modernist aspiration, water infrastructure in particular, is assigned technopolitical properties like nation- and peacebuilding. However, with the increasing interest in sustainable practices in various industries and academia dealing with the urban and global environment, the relationship between architecture and nature still begs for critical investigation.

This paper proposes a historiographical analysis of water infrastructure as an alternative way of reading the recent history of the built and natural environments. For this purpose, I focus on the case of Cyprus, a Mediterranean island between East and West packed with a colonial past, a violent conflict which resulted in partition, and a lack of natural resources, with water as the most vital and scarce. Specifically, I will focus on examples from the two periods of most heightened construction of infrastructure works, like the Greater Nicosia Water Supply Scheme conceived in the 1950s funded by the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, and the intensive dam construction activity during the post-independence period of 1960-1974 funded mainly by the UNDP, the World Bank and
the USAID. I am particularly interested in how these projects, often embodying conflicting modernizing visions contributed, or even themselves produced conflict, within the highly contested landscape of Cyprus during this turbulent period from the late 1940s till 1974. Through this, I aspire to add to the growing scholarship which examines the cross-cultural histories of modern architecture and urbanism within wider geopolitical and ideological contexts, visions of modernization and of the urbanization of nature which led to the radical reconstruction of modern postcolonial landscapes in the global south.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Stavroula Michael has a BA in Architecture from the University of Brighton (UK) followed by an International Relations masters at the Yerevan State Linguistic University (Armenia). After this Stavroula worked at an environmental non-governmental organization in Cyprus. Currently, she is in the process of obtaining a PhD in History and Theory of Architecture at the University of Cyprus. While at the University of Cyprus, she has worked as a Teaching and Research Assistant and Special Teaching Personnel, teaching Architectural History and Theory to third-year students. She has also worked as a researcher at the Promitheas Research Institute and the Mesarch Lab, a research laboratory focusing on the history and theory of Modern Architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean.