A Narrative of Modern Built Space in Cyprus: Abdullah Onar's Critical Practice

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Abstract

The article is aimed at presenting a perspective towards Turkish Cypriot architect Abdullah Onar's design activity and specifically his own house. Both his built and unbuilt projects can be seen as remarkable specimens for the critical approaches towards modern architecture, where he is assumed to build a modern life for his clients. The main argument of the text is constituted on the idea that with the postcolonial era, modern architecture was questioned and adapted to the local conditions in Onar's practice by making the place-identity visible. The key question contemplated on covers how it sometimes became a tool for reflecting the current context and part of the struggle to make architectural profession visible in the Turkish community; and by this means, had a possible undertone of becoming a contemporary nation. At this very point, the study tries to understand the role of his own house in the historical narrative of modern built space on the island. The Onar house, which was executed between 1962-63, is one of the experimental examples in which Onar's characteristic architectural elements were formulated holistically, to serve as a model for later works. Seen on the historical threshold of the period, the house is critically analyzed via the concept of place-identity, possible connotations it uncovers as the representation of the self and the dichotomy between the local and the modern. The formal architectural elements and spaces that comprise an extension of the cultural past are featured in the architect's own house in such a way that they are critiqued and redefined in a contemporary context, making the building a notable example of his critical practice.

INTRODUCTION

Movements in western architecture and art in the early twentieth century that embraced the ideas of novelty and breaking ties with the past are generally classified as "modernist"; and the concept of the "modern" is broadly understood to describe the rejection of tradition to give shape to the present and the new (Henket, 2002; Heynen, 1999). During the post-World War II years, there was still a partial adherence to basic principles of modernism in the international architectural arena; however, a critical, questioning attitude aimed at rethinking the "modern" in architectural culture and seeking solutions to the current needs of the period was also very much in evidence. In this atmosphere, new approaches tended to revolve around concepts such as identity and relationships with place (Goldhagen, 2000).

In Cyprus, it is commonly argued that the orientation towards modern architecture is closely related to the colonial experience (Pyla & Phokaides, 2009). The approaches specific to Post-World War II modernism, continued to develop after the colonial period. It has therefore been asserted that modern architecture was an expression of both modernization and decolonization during the post-colonial period (Pyla & Phokaides, 2009). As existing studies show, this attitude is more strikingly embodied in public buildings, especially in government structures.

This study presents a partial view of the prolific architectural production (comprising over 600 projects) of the pioneering Turkish Cypriot architect, Abdullah Onar[1](1929-2019), including both his built and unbuilt projects, in the context of the impasse that modern architecture has confronted in Cyprus since the 1950s. It begins with a look at the burgeoning of modern architecture in the island, and continues with several of his works which were designed during the 1960s and 1970s, when his production was particularly prolific; and then focuses on his own family home, a project which he designed and completed in the early years of his career; and where, for the first time, one encounters in their entirety many of the characteristic elements that would become a *sine qua non* in his later projects. The text adopts a critical methodology, where the house - the case study - is critically analyzed via the concept of place-identity, possible connotations it uncovers as the representation of the self and the dichotomy between the local and the modern.

The primary source material on Onar's works is found in his personal archive, in interviews with his daughter Anber Onar and his wife Aysan Onar, and in the memoirs of Turkish Cypriot architects of the period or interviews conducted with them. Secondary sources include the few research articles and books that survey the period from a retrospective point of view. The lack of scholarly studies in the north of the island examining the architecture of the 1960-74 period in Cyprus, and the fact that scholars in the south dealing with this period focus primarily on analyzing architectural examples within the Greek Cypriot context, has

[1] Before the surname law adopted in 1974, his name was Abdullah Mulla Ali.

made it necessary to foreground the primary sources. The dozen registered Turkish Cypriot architects in those years did not have their own printed and visual media where they could express themselves, so their views and other traces of the period have also had to be gleaned from these sources for this study: the archival documents are evaluated critically, and perspectives on some aspects of the architectural atmosphere of the period are underpinned by quotations gathered from witnesses.

This was a period which saw modern architecture being re-evaluated in the international arena, the return home of Cypriot architects who had received their education in Europe and Türkiye, the establishment of Cyprus as an independent republic in 1960, and soon afterwards, the growing conflict between the island's two different ethnic groups, which culminated in Greek and Turkish military interventions and a war in 1974 that would lead to the present geographical and political division of the island into northern and southern areas. Such an environment presents a dynamic, yet fragmented, heterogeneous and difficult architectural historiography.

This fragmented aspect necessitates the scrutiny of multiple perspectives and individual experiences. At this very position, the questions and accordingly the main problem, can be described as follows: How can one read Onar's approach to modern architecture, which was believed as a connotation of the newly established state and a contemporary nation? Is it possible to see a solid response of this possible act, particularly in his own house, in a medium where he was relatively more comfortable and unlimited in terms of design? What is the contribution of Onar's own house to the historical narrative of modern built space on the island?

MODERN ARCHITECTURE ON THE ISLAND

In the last years of the British colonial period (1878-1960), especially in the years after the World War II, the capital city of Nicosia started to grow rapidly, and residential areas were formed outside the city walls (Oktay, 2007). Cyprus was declared a Crown Colony in 1925; and as Given (2005) argues, architectural styles were used as a political and ideological instrument from the 1920s to the 1950s. The British colonial administration preferred not to include the traces of Ancient Greek revivalism in the buildings they constructed, since this symbolized the Greek Cypriots' desire to unite with Greece (Given, 2005); and as a result, using the forms of modern architecture, which did not seem to have the potential to create a tie with the past, became an approach that the colonial administration could support.[2] Pyla and Phokaides (2009) similarly underline that the experience of modern architecture on the island was a process that went along with the colonial period, and they draw attention to the complexity of this adventure noting that another factor nurturing this atmosphere was that it was during this period that Greek Cypriot architects who had been educated in Europe in the 1930s

[2] In fact, the first sign of this situation was the Greek uprising in 1931. The ideals of the Greek Cypriots to unite with Greece ("Enosis ") began to take shape; and the nationalist paramilitary association EOKA was established in 1955 to fight against the British colonial rule. In response, the Turkish community demanded partition ("Taksim") as an alternative to potentially being subservient to Greek Cypriot rule; and they established their resistance organisation, TMT, in 1958.

returned to the island and initiated their architectural practices. Through the work of these young architects, who had graduated from international education programs and adopted a new line, the creation of examples of modern architecture in Cyprus gained momentum (Pyla & Phokaides, 2009).

Costas Georghiou (2013) notes that during the interwar period, local architectural elements and the symbols of the United Kingdom were used together, in order to earn the trust of the Cypriot people and to manifest the authority of the colonial administration. The characteristic features used by the Public Works Department included the use of local elements like yellow sandstone and arched arcades, along with a modern approach such as the clear display of the structure, the use of unadorned surfaces and the accentuation of the stairwell (Georghiou, 2013).

Kiessel and Tozan (2011) formally analyze the façades of the houses in Cyprus from the 1930-50 period; and describe the presence of expressive horizontal bands, accentuated by rounded corners and window or roof finishes, as a "Mendelsohnian" approach. While local sandstone accompanied these elements during the colonial period, it was superseded by reinforced concrete and white plain walls after the 1960s; bold overhangs, pilotis, brise-soleils, iron railings, portholes, sundeck-like terrace roofs became essential parts of the "Cypriot Moderne" (Kiessel & Tozan, 2011).

With the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus as effectively a federal republic in 1960, the island gained its independence, and a different socio-political and economic process began. It has been argued that the idea of "Cypriotness," which began to develop from the 1950s onwards, sought its counterpart in architecture with this new era (Bryant, 2004 cited in Gürdallı & Koldaş, 2015). Despite independence from the British administration, architects maintained their modernist attitudes after decolonization. During this political and social phase, similar forms were used, but the representation of architecture changed: the vocabulary of modern architecture now became a symbol of new national consciousness, progress and an independent Cyprus, and took on new meanings within the changing circumstances, especially in public buildings.

However, as a result of the bi-communal conflict that arose on the island in 1963, a fragmented environment emerged during the early post-colonial years:[3] the architectural movements that would represent the independent state were interrupted at this stage of turmoil (Gürdallı & Koldaş, 2015),[4] and the post-colonial context at some point turned into a process of continual disagreement between the two communities.[5] The conditions of the Turkish Cypriot community – particularly the fact that their economy had come to a standstill – led to the reduction of architectural activities to a limited level, especially where the construction of public buildings was concerned; and

[3] The Turkish community on the island migrated to safe areas in 1964 due to the events of 1963 and lived in enclaves in the designated areas until 1967. The blockade was lifted in 1967, but they lived in isolation until 1974. The Turkish Cypriots established their own administration under the title of the "General Committee". After Turkey's military intervention in 1974, the committee took the name of the "Autonomous Cyprus Turkish Administration Assembly." The "Turkish Federated State of Cyprus" was established in 1975 and the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" was proclaimed on 15 November 1983 (Güven, 2005).

[4] The international competition for the government complex, which took place in the Greek part in 1968-73, is an important example of the progress on the Greek side of this dual structure. Pyla and Phokaides (2011) state that the Greek part prioritized nation building in the post-colonial period; and they draw attention to the representation of post-independence. At this point, it is important to emphasize that the expression "Republic of Cyprus" in that text is used in reference to the activities and developments in the Greek part. Turkish Cypriots withdrew from the government in 1964. The development plans foreseen for the period 1962-76 were also left to the administration of the Greek community, and the office of the Turkish Vice President was removed from the list of services to be moved to the new building. None of the Turkish Cypriot architects participated in the competition (Pyla & Phokaides, 2011).

[5] The dual structure dates back to 1963. The first physical division of Nicosia was in 1956 during the colonial period. Turkish Cypriots created a separate municipal council in 1958, and in the constitution of 1960, the issue of whether these municipalities would be separate or single was left unclear (Papadakis, 2006). The British colonial period in Cyprus officially ended with the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960. Regarding the complexity and rupture in this period, Tozan (2009), in her work, has gone so far as to make the politicized suggestion that the post-1974 period should be considered as the "post-colonial period" for the Turkish community in Northern Cyprus.

architects began to emphasize functionality in these buildings (Gürdallı & Koldaş, 2015).

In the 1950s, modern building materials were available on the island; but after 1963, due to the severe embargo which was imposed on the Turkish Cypriot community until 1967, and which was continued slightly more leniently until 1974, there were serious problems finding construction materials; and even transportation and communication possibilities became problematic (Feridun & Feridun, 2013). Hakkı Atun, one of the first architects in the Turkish Cypriot community, recalls that they were subjected to completely isolation after 1963; this created a vicious circle in terms of learning about and obtaining construction materials (Author, personal communication, July 28, 2016). However, Atun (2016) also notes the existence of two large companies – Yüksel Ahmet Raşit and Osman Mısırlızade – which supplied construction materials for the northern part of the island, and adds that they tried to work out different methods of resolving material shortages.

Atun (2016) says that in the 1960s, [*sic*][6] the return to the island of Turkish Cypriot architects who had been educated abroad led to a new period in which architectural production could be carried out without the need for Greek Cypriot architects;[7] and he characterizes this phenomenon of the first architects taking their place and make their contribution in the construction industry in Cyprus as a revolution to its core (Onar, 2022). When the architect Ayer Kaşif describes the scene they encountered as they arrived on the island, he says that the first thing was to introduce their profession (Author, personal communication, July 13, 2017). Thus the role of the handful of actively practicing Turkish Cypriot architects was particularly significant, as it led to the recognition and visibility of professional architectural practice in the eyes of the public.

Despite this, however, very little has been written about Turkish Cypriot architects and architecture during this period. When talking about the 1960s, Atun notes that the idea of copying local yellow stone structures built during the colonial period did not attract Turkish Cypriot architects, who were more inclined towards adopting a modernist attitude. They also compared themselves with their Greek Cypriot contemporaries, and wanted to prove that they were at the same level (Author, personal communication, July 28, 2016). Some of those who returned to Cyprus began to open their architectural offices in the capital, Nicosia, but most of the others, especially those who returned during 1957-59, tended to continue their careers in state institutions because of the difficult circumstances created by the bi-communal tensions during those years (Feridun & Feridun, 2013). One example is the first Turkish Cypriot architect to register, Ahmet Vural Behaeddin, who designed a few houses for the people who played principal roles in the political life of the island after the colonial period. One of Ayer Kaşif's projects, the first that he completed, soon after his

[6] To be precise, this return of foreign-educated Turkish Cypriot architects began in the mid-1950s. Ahmet Behaeddin was the first to return; İzzet Ezel Reşat and Abdullah Onar returned to Cyprus in 1957; Hakkı Atun and Ayer Kaşif arrived a couple of years later.

[7] According to the records of the TRNC Chamber of Architects, the first architects who completed their education and returned to the island can be listed as follows: Ahmet Vural Behaeddin (İTÜ), İzzet Ezel Reşat (Sheffield, 1957), Abdullah Onar (Durham, 1956), Ayer Kaşif (İTÜ, 1959), Ahmed Behzat Aziz-Beyli (İTÜ, 1960), Hakkı Atun (İTÜ, 1959).

537

return to the island, was a dormitory structure (1959-60), which referred to the "new" in terms of both its form and function.[8] Kaşif describes the project as "everything, including its geometry, the elevations, everything…. It is an example of modern architecture in its totality" (Author, personal communication, February 27, 2018). Kaşif links the modernist overtones in the productions of that period with the education he and his colleagues received; he believes that modern architecture was a part of the identity of the newly established state, and of the consciousness and the desire to be a contemporary country (Author, personal communication, July 13, 2017). Ironically, he also stresses that the approach of modern architecture was not dictated by the state, but was under the initiative of the architects (Author, personal communication, July 13, 2017).

Among these Turkish Cypriot architects educated abroad, the most prolific was Abdullah Onar, who followed his own modernist vision seen in numerous types, encompassing every class of society, and throughout the island.

ABDULLAH ONAR'S ARCHITECTURAL VISION: THE BUILT AND THE UNBUILT

Onar graduated from the Department of Architecture at Durham University in 1956. Before his return, he worked as a full-time architect at the City Architects Department. On his return to Cyprus, during the first months of 1957, he worked for a short time at Colakides & Economou Architects in order to obtain experience in his own country (Onar, 2021); he then set up his own architectural practice in Nicosia.[9]

When Anber Onar mapped his projects on their locations, she observed that within only twenty years, more than ninety of his buildings were constructed in the Köşklüçiftlik neighborhood in Nicosia alone (Author, personal communication, July 07, 2021). This makes it clear that Onar is the architect who practically built and formed this newly developing neighborhood, which continues to be an important and prestigious residential area even today (Figure 1).[10] While projects for houses are the predominant ones in his portfolio, he produced numerous different types of projects: restaurant, assembly hall and theater, cinema, mixed use buildings, garage, factory, hotel, motel, mosque, bank, printing house, casino, passage, gas turbines and office buildings. Even the projects which have not been realized can be recognized as quite radical and challenging in today's context. Onar constructed projects throughout the island but they are mainly concentrated in the capital city, Nicosia. According to archival records, his first project dates back to 1956 and then there is a break between the years 1963-67 due to inter-ethnic conflicts. Remarkably, his architectural office was producing projects at its peak between the years 1968-1974, when there was still an impasse on the island.

[8] The building, which is now the Democracy Secondary School, was converted into a school right after its construction, and the library was turned into a cafeteria.

[9] His office continued to be active until 1996. His registration number was 26 in the Cyprus Chamber of Architects; and 3 in the TRNC Chamber of Architects.

[10] See the mapping via a QR code in Onar, 2022, p.134.

A Modern Portfolio

Onar envisioned a modern life combined with local cultural practices for users in both urban center and rural sites. One example is the Yücel Hafızoğlu House (1973-79) in Ağırdağ, a village located on the skirts of the Beşparmak Mountains (Figure 2). Conforming to a sloping terrain, the entrance façade in the north is located on the upper level of the plot, and almost the whole building rises on reinforced concrete columns above the garden. This experimental approach adds a lightness to the structure in every aspect, as it is liberated from the land, especially by the V-shaped columns, which have a solid expressiveness to exhibit the potential and capacity of the reinforced concrete material. The building's plain prismatic form and the expressionist response to its topography overlap with the modernist lines, but it also incorporates details peculiar to the climatic conditions of the area.

539

Figure 2. Abdullah Onar, Yücel Hafızoğlu house, Ağırdağ, 1973-79 (photo by Anber Onar)

Describing his architectural approach as "simple," Onar also indicated that he attached great importance to functionality and economy (Terlik & Kara, 2005); and as her daughter Anber Onar (Author, personal communication, July 07, 2021) mentions, he wanted to ensure this in a quality way with a proper budget, while elevating his clients to a new lifestyle. An example of this understanding materialized can be seen in the form of his apartment projects. As one of the first architects to build apartments, Onar offered a form of collective living which was unusual for the Cypriots back then. His very first apartment design was for the Evkaf apartments (1957) in Famagusta (Figure 3). This block, consisting of a ground-floor commercial level and three residence levels, follows a substantially rational formula. This design offers its users a functional but also a novel and unfamiliar scheme in a context where inward-oriented single-family houses were common.[11]

[11] For the emergence of apartment buildings and its discussion in the island, see Sioulas & Pyla, 2019.

Bu resimde, Mağusa'da yapılacak apartmanların maketini görüyorsunuz.

In order to enable people to own their houses with a reasonable budget and to contribute to more healthier growth of the city, Onar developed a new vision: the idea of "build-and sell" real-estate development (*yapsatçılık*), in 1968. The entrepreneurship involved purchasing plots within walking distance of the walled city of Nicosia and constructing modern, high-quality, affordable housing on them (Onar, 2021). This pioneering adventure starts with the first stage of the Temel Apartments in Nicosia (1968), a high-rise building which, in addition to its functional scheme, has a façade articulation in which it breaks the solidity of the mass and accentuates the rhythmic projections or recessed movements (Figure 4).

Onar also designed his own office block (1973) as an attached building within the historic fabric in the centre of the capital city, Nicosia. At a time, when architectural offices were set up in modified areas of residences or shops located on the ground level, Onar designed an architectural office as such from scratch for the first time (Onar, 2021). As well as being the first designed architectural office, it is also the first multi-storey office building to be constructed by a Turkish Cypriot architect (Yücel Besim, 2016). This pioneering initiative can be seen to have brought an entirely new perspective to the public eye, giving permanency to the role and place of the architectural profession. The building, which was built on a narrow plot, included a warehouse and a shop on the ground floor, and offices on the upper floors. On the

first level, there is a balcony hidden behind the linear elements, mostly because of climatic concerns, but with an implicit reference to the traditional buildings next to it (Figure 5).

Onar's other designs also took into account the geographical and climatic conditions of the island, included elements peculiar to place, and minimized any sense of alienation or feeling of the uncanny in terms of space. Thus, large-sized openings, or sometimes band windows on the surfaces, elements with high plastic effects displaying the potential of the contemporary materials, reinforced concrete, brise-soleils, and recessed and projected movements of the mass, were indispensable in his designs.

541

Visualities of an Unsettled Time

Onar sketched out several architectural projects that were not materialized for various reasons, but which were also a part of his practice. While his original approach is felt in those designs, some of them offer a more ambitious formal language. For instance, the hotel project for H. Çağlayan in Nicosia in 1961 (Figure 6) and a mixed-use complex (Figure 7) epitomizes the typical features of a modernist look.
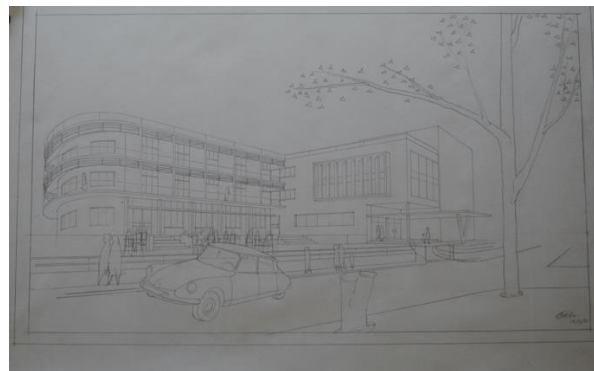
Perhaps the most interesting project in Onar's portfolio is his first - unbuilt - proposal for Sinde mosque (1971) (Figure 8). Onar's proposal shows a surprising innovative and assertive approach to the building, an approach reminiscent of that used in the Ankara Kocatepe Mosque project designed by Vedat Dalokay, with its abstract/modernist minarets and a shell roof structure.

Besides the public buildings, there are unrealized single family house projects in his archive and some of them were spectacular in terms of their plastic effects. The Kenan Atakol House (1973) was designed with an approach intended to keep functionality in the forefront, while embracing horizontal movements that were harmonious with the topography, and reminiscent of Wrightian forms (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Abdullah Onar, Kenan Atakol house, Ağırdağ, 1973, AOPA

Another residential project in Ağırdağ (1974) was also designed in accordance with the topography, embedding some of the functions within (Figure 10); demonstrating a highly plastic effect with a horizontal emphasis, the building welcomes its users with a stimulating entrance arrangement, which also serves as a parking space. These approaches make it clear that Onar's intention was to create a new, modern and speculative landscape, not only in the capital but in rural areas as well.
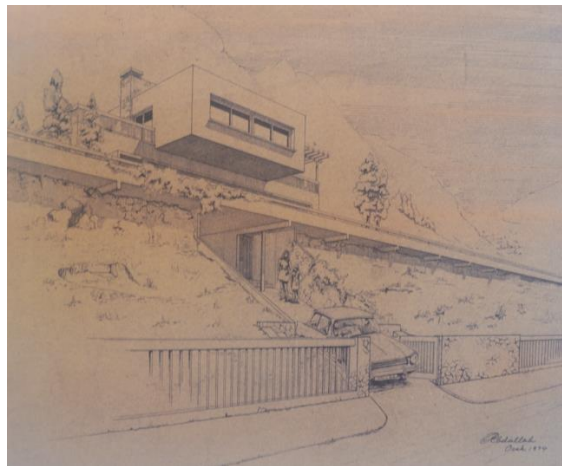

Figure 10. Abdullah Onar, a house project, Ağırdağ, 1974, AOPA

Architectural images and visualizations are understood to engage "deep cultural, disciplinary and institutional strata and be loaded, etymologically, politically and operationally" (Kulper, 2020). In this sense, the existence and prominence of all these features in projects designed by Onar that did not or could not be built during the times of turmoil in Cyprus, may be considered his response to the very chaotic atmosphere of those times. As an architect who had the aspiration to build the representation of the ideals of freedom and independence through – and together with – the architectural profession, Onar continued to portray the new life by building on paper during this period, without moving away from these ideals; despite ruptures in the socio-political context, post-colonial architecture continued in this sense, uninterrupted, in his drawings and envisaged projects.

During the chaotic period between 1963-67 in particular, Onar occupied himself with different but related jobs, on the peripheries of

architecture. Lecturing on perspective drawing lessons was one of them (Onar, 2021). His interest in painting was embodied in panoramic drawings, in which he portrayed and so documented moments from life within the walled city (Figure 11). These depictions are "subjective," in the sense that architect tended or chose to incorporate the local and the modern in the same scene. The framed images lead the eye to the Saray Hotel, one of the most spectacular modernist buildings of the period, and one can recognize, in the architect's choice of this view, an implicit expression of his meticulous attitude towards the local, the historical past and the modern.

Figure 11. Abdullah Onar, two drawings from the walled city of Nicosia, 1967, AOPA

The architect's own residence is one of the projects that display this sensibility, and where the representation of decolonization can be read in relation to his efforts to make the architectural profession visible in the Turkish community.

THE ONAR HOUSE: THE SELF, THE MODERN AND A CRITICAL PRACTICE

In the context of the architecture of Cyprus, it has been argued that the houses in the city were shaped and transformed due to both new lifestyles and local elements, and that semi-open transitional spaces maintained their existence as the main spatial component dominating the layout (Pulhan & Numan, 2005); this attitude has been defined as "critical production," with reference to the examples in the south (Fereos & Phokaides, 2006). As Liane Lefaivre (2003) points out, Lewis Mumford turns "critical regionalism" into a concept which, rather than just defining the challenge, includes reconciliation with the global. According to Mumford, the architect must take into account the connection between the building and its topography, the landscape, and the specific region in which it is located (Mumford, 1956). This definition differs clearly from historicism, which describes merely copying or recalling historical forms or elements. Rather, it presents a more complex rhetoric that falls within the confines of a definition situated between local and universal qualities. Stuart Hall described the emphasis on this kind of locality as an inevitable aspect of modernity, and as a natural reaction of people when they are subjected to

globalization (Hall, 1993). In the context of Cyprus, it can be seen as a response to and a move beyond the modernism encountered in the colonial period, towards opening up to the world with a new identity in the post-colonial period.

Thus, the orientation towards the local, which is seen as a natural reaction to the universal and its inevitable continuity, has been defined as "a critique of modernism, a reaction to modernism's own doctrinal extremism" or as "a series of creative responses to local conditions" (Heynen, 2002; Torre, 2002). This coexistence arose because an "anxiety knew no national or local boundaries and affected the discourse of modernism as a whole" (Goldhagen & Legault, 2000). Following this line of thought, Marjorie Pryse (2009) emphasizes the need for the traditional at the core of modernism: "The traditional comes into being only as it is rebelled against." In Onar's works, this situation can also be perceived as a dialectical relationship, where the synthesis that emerges from the tension between two different ends, or the oscillation between them, actually reveals a "critical production".

Although the changing political and economic conditions on the island of Cyprus in the post-colonial period created the need to build a new society, it is not unexpected that efforts were made to preserve place-identity and to include references and familiar forms. However it is difficult to read an atmosphere in which post-colonial ideals could not proceed uninterruptedly, since the bi-communal conflict in Cyprus began immediately after the colonial years, and implicitly even before that point. In the north of the island, the notion of nation-building finds its counterparts in architecture mostly in the post-1974 period. Yet, without denying the early post-colonial context, how should one read the architect's own house, which was built in 1962?

Onar foregrounded geography and climatic conditions as the most important factors shaping his design (Onar, 2022), and so his own house has a dual structure that includes elements specific to its place, as well as references to modern architecture. Post-World War II modernism, which includes the processes of re-evaluating modernism, crystallized through the use of brise-soleil, exposed concrete, fragmented volumes and sculptural overhangings on the island (Pyla & Phokaides, 2009); the Onar house was built with these process and conceptions in mind.

Two different entrances were designed, which give the two-storey house a transformative use and the potential to accommodate two different families while ensuring them their privacy (Figure 12).
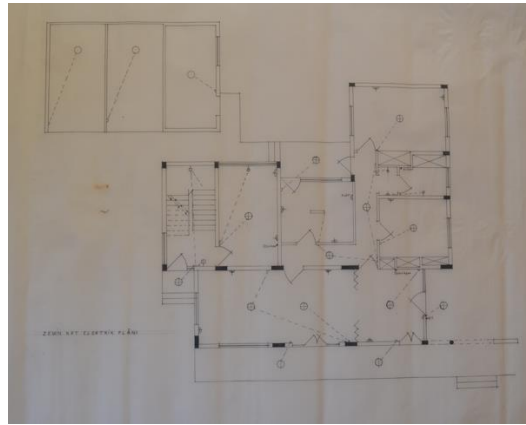
545

Figure 12. Onar house, ground floor plan, AOPA

546

It is stated that in the functional organization of residences built during this period on the island, there was a distinct grouping and linking of areas designated as private and public, in order to encourage practical relations (Fereos & Phokaides, 2006). Onar's design for his house follows this kind of pragmatic formation, with the spaces inside– unlike the scheme of a traditional house – being divided into separate and well-defined functional groups.

The reinforced concrete system is reflected on the façade by creating frames or accentuating some floors; protruding volumes or surfaces in relation to sun shading elements reinforce the horizontal emphasis and help to define the semi-open areas. These features used by Onar are precursors of the ways in which he creates a dynamic effect on unadorned surfaces in his later structures. The proportions of solid and void, and the articulation of the façade, accordingly make the structure lighter and break up the solidity of the mass. The asymmetrical balance is supported by the vertical emphasis of the stairwell in one direction, and the horizontal accent of the ceiling of the ground floor culminating in sun shading elements in the other direction.

Interlocking concrete structural elements, which both provide shading and define the entrance, modulate this entrance space (Figure 13). Wooden details on the entrance door welcome the users with a semi-transparent surface. Indeed, transparency is a prominent component of modern architecture and a symbol of progress; and the increasing level of transparent surfaces, especially in Onar's housing designs, cannot be interpreted as an arbitrary decision *per se*: these transparent surfaces are the elements that express the departure of the house from the traditional and signify the architect's commitment to the modern.

Figure 13. Onar house (photo by Anber Onar)

Within the house, the entrance part is connected to the living space using a flexible folding element. In addition, the corridor related to the entrance divides the functional layout, and organizes the interior in line with the distinction between private and public. In particular, the kitchen has been freed from the isolated and disconnected position with the living space that it had in the traditional house, and has been positioned with a view to its functions and relations in connection with the living space.

A similar plan solution is repeated on the upper level, where a striking detail is the suspended ceiling in the living area, which takes the form of a wooden grid hanging about 40 cm below the actual ceiling (Figure 14). With a total design approach, as Anber Onar states, this element was designed to feature the lighting elements, add rhythm to the space, and enliven the ceiling and the living area visually (Author, personal communication, September 26, 2021).

Figure 14. Onar house interior, AOPA

[12] It is known that Onar was drawn to the work important architects of the period such as Le Corbusier (Author, personal communication with Anber Onar, July 07, 2021). In addition to all this modern look, the only nationalist element that drew attention was the flagpole at the residence.

The natural lighting and the user-outdoor relations, which are the priorities on both levels, are completed with semi-open spaces and large transparent surfaces. The architect's wife, Aysan Onar, summarizes this feature as producing the maximum use of natural heat and light with minimum energy, and creating livable spaces with the light pouring in (Author, personal communication, August 23, 2022). The form of the openings in the upper level evoke the Le Corbusier effect:[12] the

horizontal band windows running along the façade not only contribute to the façade composition, but also allow the interior to be in uninterrupted contact with the exterior. These windows are accompanied by a single long, integrated bookshelf that continues along the parapet as an extension of the wooden joinery inside.

All the furniture in the house was purchased from the UK-based company G-Plan (Onar, 2022). It is possible to see the traces of mid-century design and its iconic lines in G-plan's handmade sofas and armchairs; and Aysan Onar emphasizes that they paid particular attention to the furniture to ensure that it was modern and attuned to the aesthetics and materials of the house (Author, personal communication, August 23, 2022). In the context of the Republican era in Turkey, Gürel (2009) interprets the reception of modern furniture as being linked with gaining a western identity, and suggests that modern furniture also acted to mark a civic position associated with the young republic and its progressive ideals; in Gürel's (2009) argument, items of modern furniture are said to be "objects of a distinguished social status and of cultural development." From this Turkish perspective, the modern interior of the Onar House might be read as pointing to the "civic position" undertaken by the architects of the period; and one might claim that using the forms of modern architecture means to embrace the new era and the development of the country, and that the use of modern furniture displays a distinguished social position and cultural progress, especially when it was preferred by one of the first architects of the community. In fact, however, Cyprus had already been under British rule for over eighty years by this point, and both its Greek and Turkish Cypriot populations had internalized and were quite at ease with their western identities. In addition, unlike many of his contemporaries, whose focus was on building for state purposes or for political elites, Onar worked both on public buildings and to provide housing and raise the standard of living at every level of society. It thus seems clear that the architectural principles and furnishings he employed in the Onar House simply reflected his personal vision and aesthetic, and that this transformation in the domestic interior completes the modern dwelling typology, which for him symbolized a contemporary way of living.

Furthermore, while the motivation for creating a modern space is connected to ideas of spatial economy and functionality, the design of this house also suggests that the architect envisioned a "reform in taste".[13] The modern domestic interior, especially where it is encountered on the public side of the Onar House, seems to reflect this intention: living and dining spaces serve to communicate the inhabitants' image of self to outsiders. The furniture one installs and the way one arranges it are also ultimately expressions of one's image of oneself, and together they carry messages about the self that one wants to convey (Cooper, 2014); and this becomes especially clear in one of

[13] Gürel (2009) has put forward this expression not specifically for the architects in Cyprus, but for the architects who promote modern designs in general.

the image of the interior of the house which Onar selected to show in a video he filmed (Figure 15).

Along the same lines, Clare Cooper (2014) argues that in general, a house has two crucial and unlike components, the exterior (the public aspect) and the interior (its intimate aspect); through these components, a house reflects both how the individual sees him/herself or the self as viewed from within, and the self that the individual chooses to exhibit to others. In short, both the modern exterior of the house and the modern interior have symbolic meanings that express the owner's "sense of personal uniqueness" (Cooper, 2014). One can continue to read this "sense of personal uniqueness" in other parts of the Onar House, such as the exterior: here, a large terrace, which unites with the private entrance on the lower level, turns into a platform where the living area opens to the outside, establishing a direct communication with the street, and also enabling passers-by to perceive the garden and the semi-open threshold. This type of connection between private and public space, which is found on the public face of the house, on the garden and street facade, might be thought of as reflecting a Cypriot architectural identity, in the sense that it suggests what has been described as the "garden façade" logic of the traditional houses of Cyprus (Pulhan & Numan, 2006). Onar, however, has structured the garden façade quite differently from how it would usually be in the traditional Cypriot house – disconnected from the street by an interface – by placing it in a position facing outward, in a move that both questions and modernizes the logic of the facade in traditional Cypriot house architecture.

Similarly, the use of semi-open spaces in Onar's designs might be thought of as a cultural extension of the approach to porches adopted in the Ottoman period, which had emerged earlier in the form of arcades on the facades of Latin houses. Onar generally created these areas with the columns separated from the facade of the building, and/or with protrusions from the upper mass. In his own residence, the upper floor partially extends forward, in a way that transforms the lower terrace into a semi-open area in line with the cultural and climatic characteristics of its specific location (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Onar house, AOPA

This threshold was frequently in use: it was a place where the family spent a lot of time and guests were hosted, especially in the long summer days and nights, in close relationship with the house, as Aysan Onar mentions (Author, personal communication, August 28, 2022). This transitional area is a sort of modern equivalent of the thresholds in traditional houses that are called *sündürme* in Turkish (and *iliakos* in Greek). The *sündürme* is the area between indoor and outdoor spaces (Pulhan & Numan, 2005:170), and it shapes both climatic conditions and spatial experiences in traditional houses. As such, it is not only a transitional space; it also serves as the heart of the layout (Sioulas & Pyla, 2019). A primary characteristic of modern architectural practice in Cyprus is that "reinterprets the vernacular architectural solutions of in-between spaces to control climatic conditions" (Fereos & Phokaides, 2006); and this can clearly be seen in Onar's critical practice here: as in-between spaces, the terrace and the entrance space united with it do not appear in their traditional form, but rather, have been reevaluated according to new demands within the framework of climatic conditions and the cultural ethos.

In-between spaces in Cypriot houses reflect an architectural approach similar to that found in other Mediterranean houses: they establish a connection with the cultural past and creates spaces associated with a sense of both place and identity (Pulhan & Numan, 2005). In spatial terms, place-identity can be understood in terms of the relation between an individual's self-identity and his or her conception of the environment in which he/she lives in (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1983): it is "an interpretation of self that uses environmental meanings to symbolize or situate identity", and this kind of situating establishes not only an emotional tie, but also common values (Cuba & Hummon, 1993). In the Onar House, the emphasis on place identity is immediately apparent; and common roots and shared values are not ignored, but instead, adapted to actual realities with a critical approach. The elements he uses are themselves codes meaningful to the culture and to individuals who have shared similar values and a common past.

The house thus both presents and enables this communication, and brings his conception of place-identity to the fore.

CONCLUSION

Postcolonial experiences are described by Clammer (2008) as those experienced by the colonized in the process of "reconstructing their cultures, identities and senses of self-worth; recovering their own histories, languages, mythologies, rituals, art and philosophies." The architectural practice examined in this study can also be considered as a part of this effort. However, the complexity of the post-colonial era on the island also makes it difficult to read the buildings solely within the framework of this definition. Between the colonial and postcolonial periods in Cyprus, there is a shift in the understanding of architectural modernism: during the colonial period, the architectural vocabulary of the "modern" was used as an instrument to express the message of not belonging to a particular nation, while for some architects in the post-colonial era the same language took the form of an expression of a new independent identity and visibility in the world.

In this context, Abdullah Onar's life and work are exceptions, in a number of ways. His work was not limited to serving the needs of the state or particular elites, but was constantly in demand at every level of society; and his architectural practice flourished despite prevailing political and economic conditions, reaching its peak level of production during 1968-74. External and environmental factors contributing to this extraordinary momentum may include, between the lines, social progress and modernization in the post-colonial era; the increasing need for housing due to demographic changes; and the appeal of his architectural approach, which combined a modernist aesthetic with local references, and in part reflected the natural response of a population exposed to globalization.

Onar approached his architectural practice with a reconciliatory and critical attitude, especially in his projects for houses. His own house is a significant example of modern architecture being adapted to the context as a representation of the self while preserving place-identity. For the architects at the time, professional representation and visibility were on the agenda, and they saw it "as a mission" to include representational efforts that pointed to social progress and the growth of an independent state.[14] Onar's own residence, while bearing traces of representation, does not have an explicit political agenda, and he focuses instead on the lived experience of its interior, in-between, and exterior spaces. But even so, the architect's own residence, implicitly, represents the decolonization and being a modern nation in relation to his efforts to make the architectural profession visible in the Turkish community; and to his aspirations to build the new way of living, which situates between the local and the modern.

This architectural attitude can no doubt be related to local experiences that were sometimes disconnected and sometimes parallel

[14] Kaşif emphasizes that the architects of the period considered it their mission to represent the new state.
(Author, personal communication, July 13, 2017)

to each other, in a context where the two communities in Cyprus were trying to re-establish their cultures and identities. At the same time, however, it reflects the "sense of personal uniqueness" of its architect and owner, Abdullah Onar, who did not simply conform or limit himself to the local politics of the state, but consistently pursued his own vision – of an international architectural modernism adapted to Cyprus, and which would enable lived space to be in harmony with its environment, on a human scale, economical and accessible to all; and to create and raise the standard of a modern way of life.

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553

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Resume

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