

Costas and Mehmet: The enduring friendships of Greek and Turkish Cypriots

Stephanie Elisabeth Jacobs

College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences,
Flinders University, Australia

Abstract

Extended interviews of 72 elderly Greek and Turkish Cypriots (in Cyprus and Australia) from formerly mixed villages of Cyprus yield new insights into their relations prior to the rise of nationalism and conflict in the 1950s and 1960s, and the eventual division of the island in 1974. Deep personal-level relationships between the two groups were described by almost all participants. Unexpected findings were the choice of koumbaroi from the 'other' group, the relatively common occurrence of intermarriages, and the previously unknown prevalence of the practice of cross-religious milk kinship.

Introduction

Cyprus's strategic position in the eastern Mediterranean made it a bridge between three continents; it has had a diverse population of inhabitants and rulers throughout history. Granted independence from Britain in 1960, political and civil tensions in the 1960s and 1970s culminated in the 1974 war (Kelling 1990). Many Greek and Turkish Cypriots were displaced and the island remains divided.

The strongest example of the intercommunal relations that once existed in Cyprus between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, prior to the wars of the 1960s and 1974, was the existence of hundreds of mixed villages on the island (Asmussen 1996).

Whilst several studies have examined the relationships between Greek and Turkish Cypriots who lived in the former mixed villages of Cyprus (Asmussen 1996; Christodoulou 2014; Lytras and Psaltis 2011), this study provides a more wide-ranging and comprehensive quantitative and qualitative investigation into the deep intercommunal and personal-level relations between the two communities.

Friendships

Analysis of Cyprus Census data (Figure 1) shows the decline in villages and towns after 1931. My interviewees were born between 1924 and 1964.

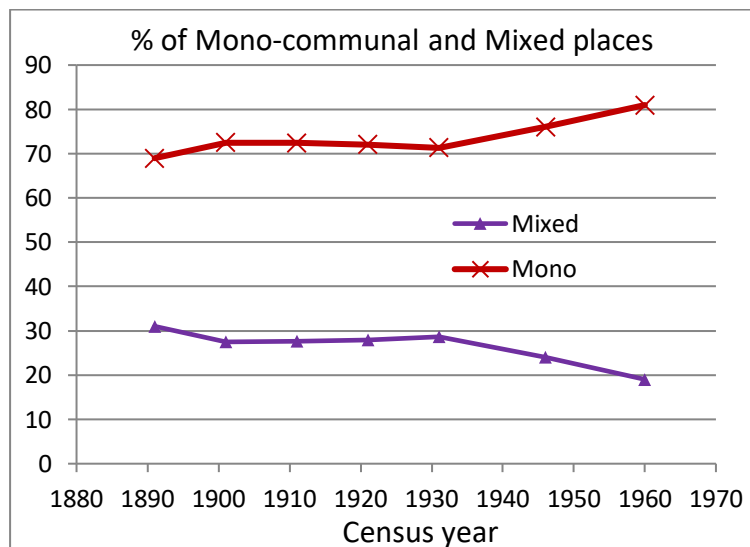


Figure 1. Number of mono-communal and mixed villages and towns in Cyprus

Many of my 72 participants spoke of close bonds with members of the 'other' community. My grandfather Costas (Figure 2), a Greek Cypriot man born in 1925, said, "Next to me there was a Turkish family. They had a young boy like me. We used to live together and grew up together until I was 21 years old, when I left Cyprus. We went everywhere together. We were more than friends – we were brothers."

Costas's best friend was Mehmet Emin. "They loved each other so, so, so, so much!" recalled his widow Feriha, a Turkish Cypriot woman born in 1934. She said that Mehmet Emin had his hair cut and wore a suit (Figure 3) on the day that Costas left for Australia, and that afterwards seriously considered following him to Australia.



Figure 2. Costas



Figure 3. Mehmet Emin

As a child Feriha spoke Greek just as well as she did Turkish. “We used to go to the fields for work, Greek and Turkish girls. While we were working we were singing Greek and Turkish songs all together. All together we were working and singing.”

Interviews were audio-recorded with participants’ permission, but not video-recorded. One visual idiosyncrasy occurred so often that it merits comment: Many interviewees used a gesture where they held their index fingers together and rubbed them back and forth past each other as shown in Figure 4, as they said, “We were like brothers” or “We were like sisters”. It is a deeply evocative gesture.

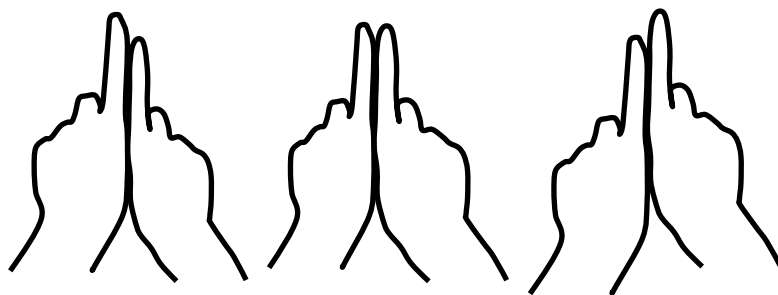


Figure 4. Hand gesture signifying “We were like brothers” or “We were like sisters”

Koumbaroi

The *koumbaro* (male) or *koumbara* (female) has a formal role in the Greek Orthodox wedding ceremony. He or she is the sponsor of the wedding and holds the crowns as the couple undertake the Dance of Isaiah (Sakellis 2018). Other members of the wedding party – groomsmen and bridesmaids – would also be referred to as “*Koumbaro*” and “*Koumbara*”.

A traveller in Crete recorded, “It was far from unusual, before the Greek revolution, for a Mohammedan to stand as godfather to the child of his Christian friend.” (Pashley 1837: 10). In Cyprus, too, there is evidence that friends acted as *koumbaroi*. An early nineteenth century Christian monk complained: “Sometimes the Turks interfered in religious matters... They interfered in the marriages and baptisms of Christians by being *koumbari* and taking their children for baptism.” (Greene 2000: 105-106.).

Lytras and Psaltis (2011) found that 60 percent of Greek and 27 percent of Turkish Cypriots recalled cross-religious *koumbaroi* relationships.

My interviewees’ recollections of *koumbaroi* from the ‘other’ group are shown in Figure 5. Among Greek Cypriots, 70 percent, and among Turkish Cypriots, 89 percent recalled such relationships.

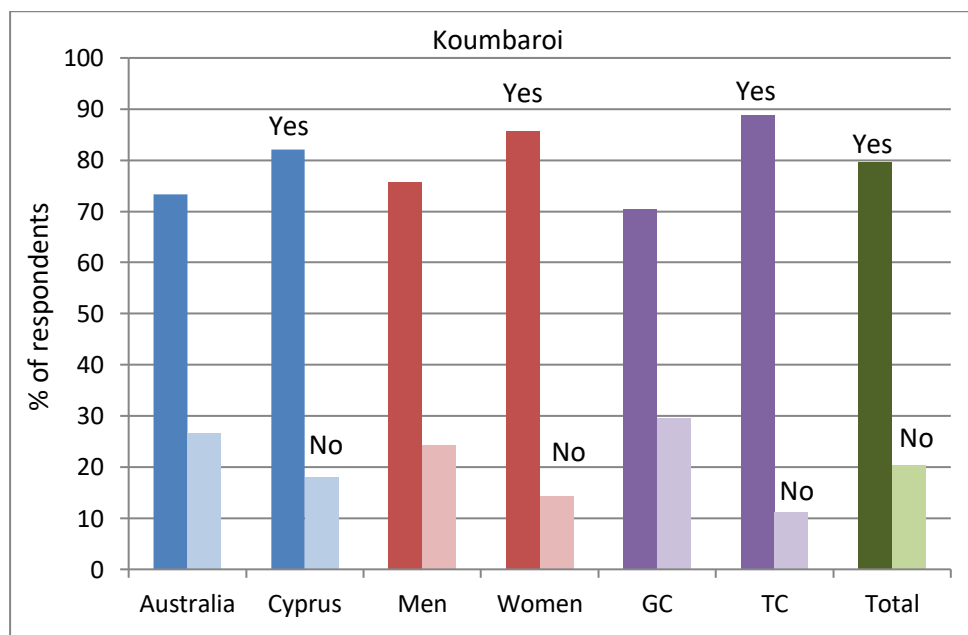


Figure 5. Interviewees’ recollections of *koumbaroi* from the ‘other’ group

The role of the *koumbaroi* providing food for the wedding was raised several times. Paraskivou, a Greek Cypriot woman born in 1936, recalled that her husband had been the *koumbaro* for a Turkish Cypriot friend; “He paid for the party on the Monday”. When I asked Artam, a Turkish Cypriot man born in 1944, about *koumbaroi*, his face lit up: “I was one of three *koumbaroi* for a Greek Cypriot friend’s wedding! ... I bought presents and food for the wedding!”

While Greek Cypriots sometimes chose Turkish Cypriots to be their *koumbaroi*, the role of first *koumbaro* or best man was restricted. Dimos, a Greek Cypriot man born in 1936, said:

Sometimes they would even be our *koumbaroi* ... In fact my sister had a Turkish Cypriot best man. The best man traditionally pays for the wedding. However, strictly speaking the church would not allow Muslim *koumbaroi*, so we had ways of getting around it!

Dimos explained that a Christian man would perform the role as *koumbaroi*, but then sign the name of the Muslim man in the church register. Dimos suggested that this was a not-uncommon tactic used by men who wanted their best friend to be honoured as *koumbaro*, despite the Church's rules.

Intermarriages

Intermarriages between Muslims and Christians have occurred for centuries, in many parts of the world. Prior to 1960, marriages of Greek Orthodox or Maronite Christians in Cyprus were governed by the Canon law of their respective Churches, which required that both the bride and groom be baptised. Islamic marriages were governed by Mohammedan (Sharia) law, which permitted the marriage of a Muslim man to a Christian or Jewish woman (Abdel-Haleem 2004). Any other intermarriage would require one or other party to convert.

In Cyprus "intermarriage has now become rare but it has not always been so ... It is evident that even in religion the barrier between the two communities has not been rigid nor their antagonism complete." (Beckingham 1957: 173). Furthermore, "... the Ottomans permitted Greek women to intermarry with them and both men and women could also convert to Islam." (Sant Cassia 1986: 4).

The opposite directions in which the two religious communities disseminated dowries or bride-gifts made marriage to a Christian woman advantageous to a Muslim man.

The Greek groom was expecting a plot of land and money from his bride. Should he marry a Muslim, they would expect the same from him. However for a Muslim groom the benefits of a[n] intermarriage are obvious. Instead of paying a large sum of money he and his family paid nothing and received a house or property as well as the dowry. Nothing changed for [the] Greek bride since this form of payment corresponded to her tradition. (Asmussen 2010: 84).

The number of intermarriages in Cyprus is unknown. Interestingly, "[t]he files of the Sheri [Sharia] courts in which the Muslim divorces are recorded, do indicate the existence of intermarriages, but not their actual number." (Asmussen 2010: 83).

While previous research has shown that intermarriages occurred, there has been no way to gauge their prevalence and they have been regarded as 'exceptional'. Amongst my 72 interviewees, 48 (67 percent) recalled intermarriages between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, as shown in Figure 6.

Participants recalled Greek Cypriot women converting (or marrying under Islamic law), and Turkish Cypriot men and women converting to Christianity in order to marry, as shown in Table 1.

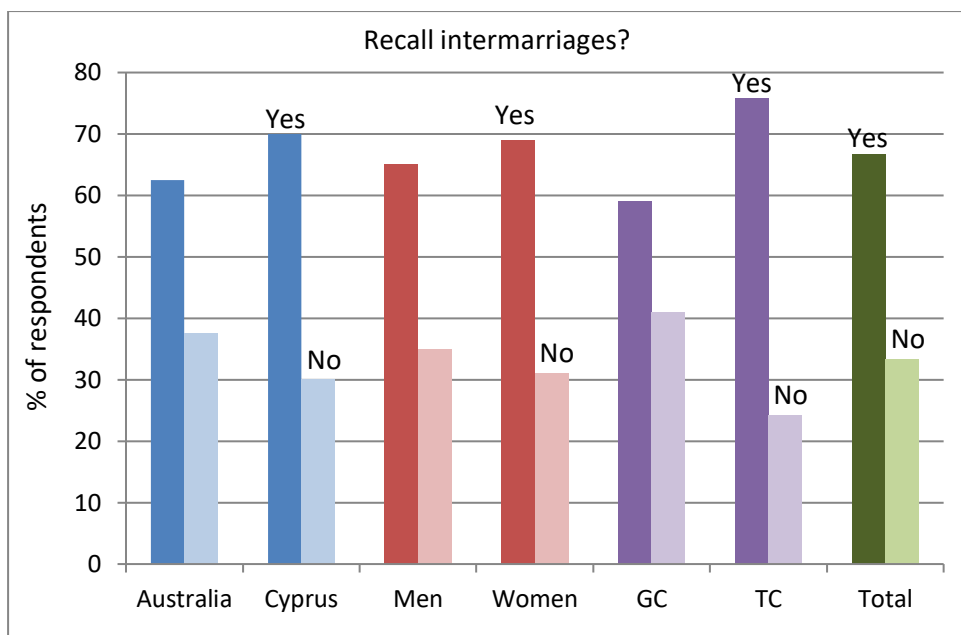


Figure 6. Interviewees recollections of intermarriages

Table 1. Who married whom? This includes numbers of multiple intermarriages recalled by individual interviewees

	Christian converted to Islam	Muslim converted to Christianity	Unmarried / de facto unions	Unsure of conversion	Total
Greek Cypriot woman and Turkish Cypriot man	10	2	1	4	17
Turkish Cypriot woman and Greek Cypriot man		5	3	4	12
Maronite Cypriot woman and Turkish Cypriot man			1		1
Turkish Cypriot woman and Maronite Cypriot man				1	1
Maronite Cypriot woman and Orthodox Christian man				1	1
	Married		Unmarried / de facto unions		
Unsure of GC/TC composition and conversion	19		1		20
Unsure of Maronite Cypriot and TC gender composition	3		0		3
Total					55

Amongst my 72 interviewees, seven (10 percent) described intermarriages within their own families (Table 2); this is the first time that intermarriage in Cyprus has been quantified.

Table 2. Recollection of intermarriages (or couples living in sin) within interviewees' own families

	Greek Cypriots	Turkish Cypriots	Total
Recall intermarriages within their own family	2	5	7

Ramadan, a Turkish Cypriot man born in 1964, said, “Yes, I knew of a few intermarriages ... My [Turkish Cypriot] grandfather married a Greek Cypriot and they had twelve children ... My *yiayia* [grandmother] is Greek Cypriot... There were no problems [with either family].”

Paraskivou, a Greek Cypriot woman born in 1936, said, “My aunt married a Muslim; she became Muslim but three of the children were baptised Orthodox Christian and the other three stayed Muslim.”

Previous work on intermarriages in Cyprus, as well as census and Sharia court records, reveals that during the Ottoman period, intermarriages were not exceptional. My findings suggest that in the small mixed villages of Cyprus, where children played together, went with their friends to the church and to the mosque, learned about and respected each other's religion, attended each other's weddings and funerals and shared each other's feast days, the divide between Christianity and Islam was not insurmountable. There were role models – a grandmother, an aunt, a neighbour – so that young people in love could see a way to their heart's desire.

Cross-religious Milk Kinship

Wet nursing, where a nursing mother feeds another woman's child, is a practice used since ancient times. If an infant's birth mother was unable to breastfeed her child, having died in childbirth or through illness, or if she was unwilling to breastfeed, then a wet nurse would be sought. It was also used to forge alliances between families. It continues to be practiced today in many cultures of the world.

The belief that milk kinship relationships result from wet nursing practices is strongly founded in Islamic (Sharia) Law, which defines three forms of kinship: “... relationship by blood (*nasab*), affinity (*musahara*), and milk (*rida'a*) ... The special term *rida'a* denotes the relationship between a child and a woman, not its own mother, who nursed it.” (Altorki 1980: 233). The Qur'an explains that a woman becomes a milk mother of the child that she has nursed, and that the child becomes a sibling to her biological children; a kinship that prohibits their future marriage (Abdel-Haleem 2004).

There has been no previous study of wet nursing in Cyprus, although it has been mentioned in passing (Bryant 2015, Papadakis 2005). Nine of 32 participants in Australia and 36 of 40 participants in Cyprus – a total of 45 people – were asked whether they recalled women feeding babies from the 'other' group; Turkish Cypriot women breastfeeding Greek Cypriot children, or Greek Cypriot women breastfeeding Turkish Cypriot children. Results are shown in Figure 7.

A strong majority – 72 percent of all respondents asked the question, and even people born in the 1950s and 1960s – recalled milk mothers breastfeeding children of the 'other' group.

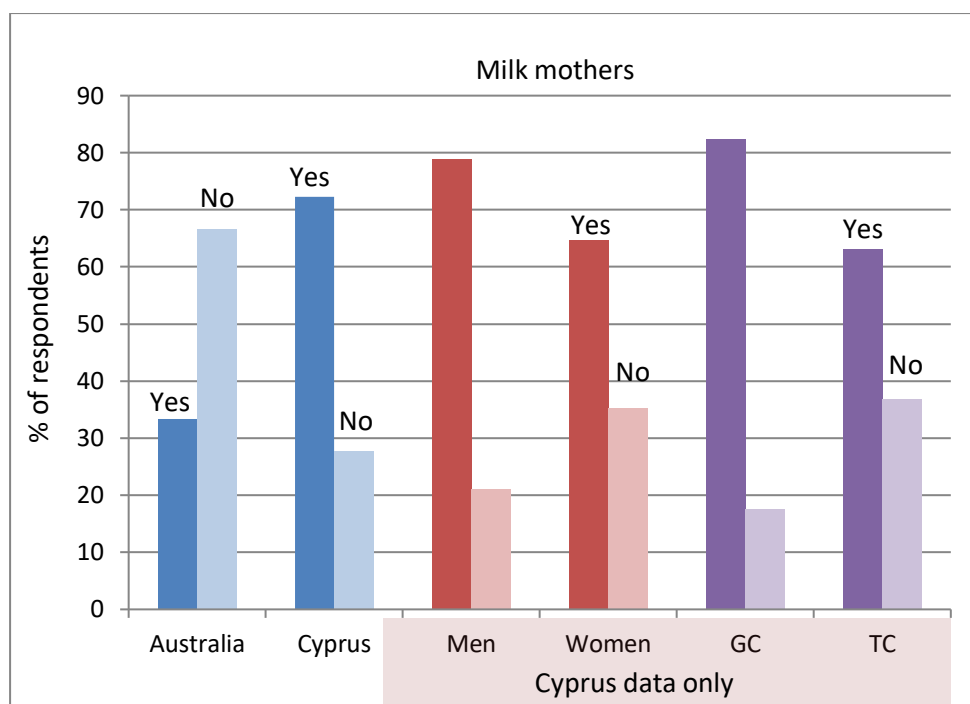


Figure 7. Interviewees recollections of cross-religious milk kinship

Nine of the 36 people in Cyprus who were asked about milk mothers (25 percent) — told of their own experiences, as shown in Table 3. This points to cross-religious milk kinship being widespread within the former mixed villages of Cyprus, and quantifies this practice, for the first time.

Table 3. First- or second-hand knowledge in response to the question “Do you remember women acting as milk mothers for the ‘other’ group?”

	Greek Cypriot	Turkish Cypriot	Female	Male	Total
I had a milk mother from the ‘other’ group	Father Andreas			Father Andreas	1
My sibling had a milk mother from the ‘other’ group		Ramadan		Ramadan	1
My baby had a milk mother from the ‘other’ group	Elli		Elli		2
I fed a baby from the ‘other’ group	Paraskivou		Paraskivou		1
My mother fed a baby from the ‘other’ group	Kaiti Paraskivou	Feriha Ramadan	Feriha Kaiti Paraskivou	Ramadan	4
My grandmother fed a baby from the ‘other’ group		Huseyin		Huseyin	1
My neighbour fed a baby from the ‘other’ group	Despina	Ibrahim	Despina	Ibrahim	1
Total individual respondents	5	4	5	4	

Women in villages, living off the land, needed to go to work in the fields. Cooperative child-minding relationships naturally developed. Ibrahim, a Turkish Cypriot man born in 1948, lived next door to a Greek Cypriot family. “When a Turkish mum go away to the garden or somewhere else, she gives the baby to the Greek mum and she feeds him. Or if the Greek woman goes out; the baby [feeds] from Turkish lady.”

Father Andreas, a Greek Cypriot man born in 1927, had a Turkish Cypriot milk mother:

My mother and Greek mothers and the Turkish mothers – they would work together. Sometimes they would leave their children to the Turks, and the Turks sometimes would leave their children with us. ... When my mother went to work – I was a baby, about six or nine months old – she left me with a Turk, her name was Ayshe, to breast-feed me. She was a very good neighbour. I have two mothers.

After the checkpoints opened in 2003, allowing for passage between the two segregated communities after 29 years of division, many Cypriots crossed to the ‘other’ side. “Old friends were found and new ones made, and many Cypriots revelled in the simple freedom of being able to stroll in the streets that had long been forbidden to them.” (Bryant, 2010: 1). My interviewees spoke not of their reactions at seeing their old homes, but of their great joy at finding old friends, and their milk relatives.

Huseyin, a Turkish Cypriots man born in 1956, knew that his grandmother had fed a Greek baby. A few months before our 2015 interview, a man came to the village looking for Huseyin’s family. “He said that his wife and my mother are sisters! My mother and that man’s wife are sisters, and the other children could not marry because they became brothers and sisters; they were the same. It’s in the Qur’an.” Paraskivou, a Greek Cypriot woman born in 1936, has a Turkish Cypriot milk-sister: “They come and visit us every year. [She] lives in England now and every time she comes down she is welcome to stay here.”

Many of my Greek Cypriot interviewees proudly and carefully explained milk-kinship, describing their adoption of the understanding of such kinship via trans-cultural diffusion. Several Greek Cypriots described milk kinship as something that the Turkish Cypriots believed more strongly than them; however, they still adopted the understanding that they should not marry milk relations (including two Greek Cypriots who were breastfed by the same woman). Others did not seem to understand that milk kinship practices originated from the Qur’an; instead they spoke of the practice as ‘Cypriot’ in nature.

Conclusion

The experiences of elderly people from the formerly mixed villages of Cyprus yielded new insights to personal-level relations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots prior to the rise of nationalism and conflict in the 1950s.

Deep friendships were common – so common, in fact, that they sometimes led to the choice of *koumbaroi* (best man, matron of honour, groomsmen and bridesmaids) from the ‘other’ group – an unexpected finding as such roles cross religious divides. Intermarriages were common enough that the majority of the participants knew of some; 10 percent described intermarriages within their own families.

The practice of cross-religious milk kinship demonstrated a level of real intimacy between the groups. The Islamic meaning grew into a shared cultural practice adopted by Greek Cypriots as a form of trans-cultural diffusion. Both Greek and Turkish Cypriot interviewees loved and honoured their milk mothers and rejoiced to meet with their milk siblings, pointing to love, trust, friendship – to real inter-communality – within the former mixed villages of Cyprus. One quarter (25 percent) described personal experiences of milk kinship, the reliability of such accounts supported by accounts of the ‘other’ family visiting after the checkpoints opened in 2003, searching for the child who was a milk-sibling, or for the old woman who was the beloved second mother.

Many participants had suffered greatly, losing homes, land and loved ones to conflicts between 1963 and 1974. Nevertheless, they divulged memories of wonderful, loving relationships with the ‘other’, including through friendships, *koumbaroi*, intermarriages and milk-kinship, revealing that intercommunal relations thrived in the former mixed villages of Cyprus, and demonstrating that the two groups were not ‘other’ to each other at all.

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Dealing with a history of conflict in the Cypriot public space and its impact on both teaching and learning

Marie Pouillès Garonzi, PhD student at Université Lumière Lyon II, UMR 5600 EVS-IRG
marie.pouillesgaronzi@univ-lyon2.fr

Abstract

The present paper considers different elements of the Cypriot public space that could interfere with how the Cyprus conflict of 1955-1974 is taught and perceived. I focus on empirical and tangible research material such as photographs of monuments, flags, stickers, banners, graffiti and museum displays, and the similar and differing ways they can portray and influence the perception of the conflict on both sides of the divide. There is an overwhelming physical presence of these conflict reminders on the researched field. I have looked at how this creates specific memories of the conflict and furthermore, I consider its impact on identities.

Keywords: Cyprus conflict, teaching, learning, public space, monuments & memorials, flags, museums, graffiti, memory, identity.

Introduction

The research undertaken analyses the use and practises of the Cypriot public space and how it is connected to the Cyprus conflict (1955-1974). While traveling through Cyprus, one can perceive the profusion of items associated with the recent conflictual years on the island. The hypothesis of the use of the Cypriot public space as a powerful tool to teach and learn history outside the school system is engaging to understand the holistic problematic of teaching and learning conflictual history in divided societies and the overall societal issues that arise from them.

This paper relies on the geography concept of “dwelling” (Besse 2015; Biaggi 2015; Lazzarotti 2015) with which researchers question how inhabitants practise the space around them. The research is also based on the issue of monuments and memorials (Brice 2008). In addition, the problematic deals with “territorial identity” (Naranjo Henríquez, 2011) which is vivid in Cyprus. The article examines war museums research (Poulot 2008) like Papadakis’s work on Struggle Museums in Cyprus (Papadakis 1994). It is most of all related to the question of teaching conflictual history in Cypriot schools (Christou 2007; Papadakis, International Peace Research Institute 2008; Zembylas 2013, 2015, 2016). I formulate the hypothesis that the complexity of teaching the Cyprus conflict in schools could be emphasized by the way it is portrayed in the public space, extending the dilemma.

I try to show how the presence of different objects associated with the conflictual years in the public space can interfere with both teaching and learning about the history of the Cyprus conflict. The results focus on elements found in open areas: the public space in general

(everything outside the intimate/personal sphere) and on objects encountered in enclosed spaces like museums: these closed spots are still part of the public area and are included in the questioning here.

Methodology

The methodology to undertake the present analysis is based on empirical statements, helped by tangible material collected through field research conducted in 2018 but also on scientific publications. Personal pictures highlight the arguments mentioned.

Results

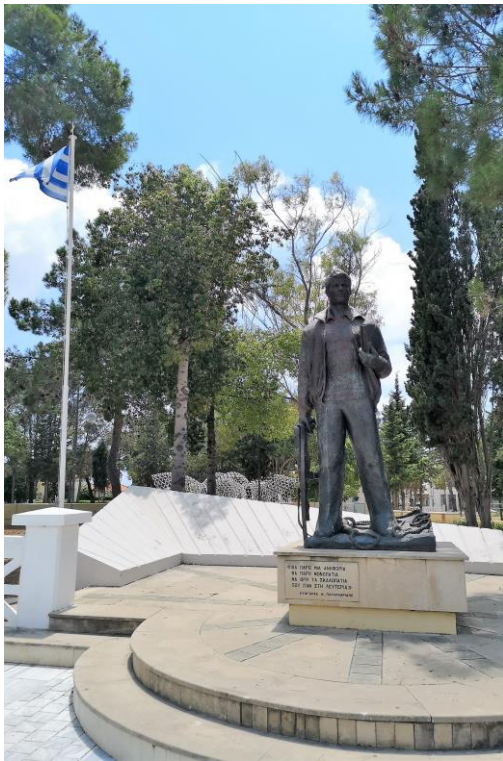
Appropriation of the landscape and of the past

To analyse the appropriation of the Cypriot land(scape) in connection to the conflictual past, I focus first on the case of monuments in the public space of Cyprus, I only tackle those found in urban areas since my rural field research is not completed yet. I visited several cities in Cyprus: Paphos, Limassol, Larnaca, Ayia Napa, Nicosia on both sides of the divide, Kyrenia and Famagusta. The prominence and profusion of statues and diverse monuments is notable in the public urban sphere of Cyprus. They are part of the landscape, physically and ideologically, since they participate in the creation of a national memory and identity (Brice 2008: 202). Most of them refer to the period of decolonization 1955-59 and the Turkish “invasion” of 1974 in the South, and to the ethnical massacres of the 1960’s and the “peace operation” of 1974 in the North. The majority (if not the entirety) of memorials, monuments and statues is accompanied by flags: the ones of the Republic of Cyprus and Greece in the South, and the ones of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Turkey in the North.

Most of the statues represent belligerent figures: soldiers who died in battle, missing persons, mothers in mourning (images of *mater dolorosa*) and anthropomorphic personification of a dying homeland are displayed all over the territory. The question of identity is invoked by this huge number of anthropomorphic statues. Identity allows us to “tell ourselves and others” according to Lazzarotti (Lazzarotti 2011: 6). Through these monuments, each community “calls itself a victim” and proclaims “the Other” as an executioner. Monuments displayed all around the island convey an identity continuum enshrined in the soil of the territory: the statues physically represent the ancestors, what they fought for, what the present inhabitants must remember. They participate in “the invention of the “soil”, the land of the ancestors.” as mentioned by Lazzarotti (Lazzarotti 2017: 18). Thus, the problem does not lie in monuments themselves, but refers to the speeches and ideas that cling to them, such as the persistent nationalist homilies. They can be obstacles to reframe conflictual memories and to allow nuanced discourses about the past on both sides of the divide.

The location of many monuments and memorials seems significant and recurrent all over the territory. The first main location of those artefacts is next to schools. The statues found are located either around schools or even inside them. It can be a way of teaching history unconsciously as the schoolchildren see these statues daily. Other places of memory are situated next to main arteries. One can find monuments where people tend to travel: next to traffic lights, kindergartens, on roundabouts, but also next to residential areas. One could formulate the hypothesis of the political implication regarding the location of those monuments. Since most of the memorials are displayed by authorities (for example municipal councils) , there might be

a political desire to landlock the past in strategic areas that people tend to use daily, immersing them consciously or not in this particular memory of the past, where intense commemoration of these figures take place throughout the year, in the public space but also inside schools (Zembylas, 2013).



Figures 1 & 2: Statue of Evagoras Pallikarides (EOKA fighter) opposite Nikolaidio high school in Paphos and monument “We won’t forget” on a roundabout in North Nicosia © Marie Pouillès Garonzi 2018

The appropriation of the territory and landscape seems visible, as if any corner of Cyprus was covered by artefacts related to war and a violent past, which creates a peculiar memory. The image of the territory devoted (by force) to the past and the dead can find an echo in Cyprus. This overwhelming presence of material reminders of the conflictual history prevails over the process of continuity in remembrance. The example of monuments and memorials is huge: according to Vicky Karaiskou (Karaiskou 2017 : 400), one can find “political memorials” in “an average of approximately one every 10km²” in the Republic of Cyprus. These lands of memorials have become sacred places, dead persons fallen during the conflictual events are celebrated and honoured. Those deceased people have become martyrs according to Karaiskou (Karaiskou, 2017 : 406). In the North, one can observe the same concept: the ‘şehitlik’ is a cemetery designed for the martyrs (‘şehit’ means martyr in Turkish) and is the name of the monuments dedicated to victims of the troublesome years. Sacred places and “sacred history” (Christou 2007) appear difficult to be discussed, the narrations on the conflictual past seem hard to tackle in Cyprus.

Beyond the mirroring effect in the processes of memorization: interwoven identities emerging from the use of the public space

By analysing the uses of the public space of Cyprus, one can apprehend the mirror effect in the mechanisms of memorization and especially the way they create conflictual and contradictory identities. Several features are considered to grasp the essence of conflict recollection procedures. One can point out the prominence and abundance of flags and how they have become standards of identities and especially “territorial identity” (Naranjo Henríquez 2011).

Flags of the “motherlands” are used as conveyors of identity and memory, directly related to conflictual history but also to the present time. There is a recurrent use of flags placed around significant places such as schools, town halls, churches, but also petrol station. The Cypriot landscape is crowded with banners that invade the public space. One can also refer to the special case of the Pentadaktylos flag, also called “the flag of shame” as mentioned by Stella Theocarous (Theocarous 2017: 4) in her paper referring to the common phrase in the media and among the population of the Republic of Cyprus, where the shame should be borne by the Northern side and Turkey, “responsible” of the partition of Cyprus, “humiliating” the South by showing “their pride to be Turkish” and nourishing acrimony with those flags. These gigantic banners, illuminated at night are identity emissaries and are provocative to the South of the island, asserting that the Northern side belongs to TRNC but also to Turkey. The question of the plethora of flags on this tiny island fuels conflicting identities and memories. It allows inhabitants to constantly identify to a specific “nation/guarantor”. Flags seem to divide people by arguing that one part “belongs” to Greece and the other to Turkey. The citizens of each side must assimilate to those conflicting identities features. It can be difficult to “create” its own identity out of those “motherland affiliations”, since daily life is impregnated with references to those countries (example of the national anthems). Some monuments link the land to (Ancient) Greece, or Turkey such as statues of Kimon and other Greek figures in the South, or the worship of Atatürk in the North. Those monuments instil a sense of national identity by invoking the “motherlands” in the public space, deepening the identification process.



Figures 3 & 4: Statues of General Kimon in Larnaca and of Atatürk in North Nicosia © Marie Pouillès Garonzi 2018

Another memory scheme lies in nationalistic stickers or boards like the one of “I don’t forget” (“Den Xehno/ δεν ξεχνώ”) that are spread all over the southern streets of the island and participate in creating a specific identity and memory. In the Northern part, one can encounter a similar adage: “We won’t forget” (Unutmayacağız). This overpowering method of memorization with popular slogans creates a monolithic vision of history. The same events are not seen and displayed equally: the “I don’t forget” motto and iconography related to it refer to the lost land and missing persons for Greek Cypriots (Zembylas *et al.* 2016: 5) whereas the “We won’t forget”, that is visible on monuments and museums in the North for instance, refers to

the massacres in the 1960's and to the "peace operation" of Turkey that came to "save" the Turkish Cypriots from the "Greek yoke" (Rappas 2012: 89). Both sides use equal semantic field to relate to the same past but convey different memories and sense of belonging. One could also analyse the linguistic choice on those mottos: the South enrolls the "I don't forget" in the present time with this injunction to remember. It forces the population not to forget, as a forceful "duty of memory". Every person undergoes this exercise of recollection. Contrarywise, the North inscribes its slogan in the mutuality and in the future (*we won't forget*) as if it would signify that the northern population will never forget (and forgive?) the past and will not rebuild the ancient time of interculturality in daily life, as Papadakis explains (Papadakis 2005: 126).

In museums dedicated to this conflictual history, as in the Museum of Struggle (the struggle for independence and freedom) analysed by Papadakis (1994) in the South and the Museum of Barbarism (barbarism embodied by Greeks and Greek Cypriots during the intercommunal massacres of 1963) in the North, one can spot the same horrifying images displayed with the iconography of camp life, the destructions or victims horribly maimed in both museums. There is a profusion of photographs, nationalist aims and lack of scientific embodiment (because those places are more oriented towards sensationalism rather than education). Other museums, not related to Cyprus history, art galleries for example (e.g Leventis gallery in Nicosia) enable a more balanced narration on the conflictual past, exposing works of art depicting the ancient multicultural past of Cyprus.

"Re-painting" the past in a "shell of memory" (Bakshi 2012)

Leaving the "sacred areas" established by memorials or some museums, the old walled city of South Nicosia is filled with a myriad of graffiti and can work as a shelter for creating a new way of "telling" the past. These paintings reflect different views on the conflictual history and convey an image of reconciliation and pacification of the frozen war zone. Those artistic works suggest a new approach to violent history departing from the grandiloquent mourning monuments and memorials. The street artists adhere to a specific ideology, linking their art to "irenicism", since they are committed denouncing other conflicts (ex: the nicosian artist CRS created paintings criticizing the Syrian or Israeli-Palestinian conflicts). This generates an effect of intertextuality, as if those works of art are embedded in a worldwide street art movement, engaged in building a new future.



Figures 5 & 6: works of street art in the old town of South Nicosia by CRS © Marie Pouillès Garonzi 2018

Discussion

Fanning the flames of discord and resentment can be eased by using conflictual objects in the Cypriot public space. Through the overwhelming presence of material reminders of the conflictual years and antagonism still going on in the island, hostility can be fuelled, because those objects stir painful memories of the past. The resurfacing memories when dealing with the conflictual past could be an obstacle when it comes to working on reunification and reconciliation processes.

The overpowering manifestations of these conflictual items shed light on the difficulty to overcome a “frozen conflict” (Jolicoeur ; Campana 2009) situation when the inhabitants are immersed in this “open air museum of war”. How can one shift from an ethos of “negative peace” to “positive peace” (Galtung 1967: 12-13) when daily life is depicted with conflict reminders?

Even if the major use of the public space is dedicated to the “duty of memory” [“devoir de mémoire”] (Lalieu 2001), deeply commemorated and respected as a sacred place where anamnesis is observed, some transgressions of this solemn practises are noticed. They play as a barrier to the dominant vision of the conflict and how the society should remember it. The societal ethos of conflict reminiscence and understanding is associated with how the troublesome years of a divided country are still taught and learnt after decades of *statu quo*.

Conclusion

The singular situation of the Cypriot political and territorial status enables to conclude the present paper with Henri Michaux’s reference to sum up the case of the public space of the island: “ who/what leaves a mark leaves a wound ” (Michaux, 1950). This quotation particularly resonates in the case of Cyprus. Many marks of the conflictual past are still visible and highlighted in the public sphere, which could make the healing of the injuries more difficult. This first analysis on the materialization of the conflictual history in the Cypriot public space serves only as an introduction to the topic and will be highly developed in future enquiries to expand this thesis.

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