

# Social Activism and the City: Cultural Sociology and Radical Politics in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cyprus

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## Abstract

*This article discusses alternative cultural communication processes in the context of urban activism in inner Nicosia, as manifested in the last two decades. It examines a variety of cultural and social practices and their political implications in terms of their interaction with the surrounding space and wider society. The city's division, the growth of the immigrant population and the attempted regeneration of inner Nicosia set the context for a variety of practices of contestation of nationalist and commercialist cultures, challenging them in the fields of culture and lifestyle. Through an overview of the key dimensions of activist interventions in the public space in the last two decades, the article argues that there are both elements of connection across issues, movements and processes as well as continuity across time. By examining practices rooted in social dynamics and expressing dissenting political and cultural worldviews, a more nuanced cultural sociology of the Greek Cypriot community may be constructed which goes beyond generalist images emanating from the mainstream public sphere. Through their diversion from mainstream ideas, politics and everyday life, the urban movements presented here engaged in redefining the meaning of the inner city and the life in it and registering it for more than a decade as an alternative place.*

**Keywords:** Nicosia, social movements, urban activism, cultural practices, politics

## Introduction

Caesar Mavratsas' analysis and critique of Greek Cypriot nationalism in the 1990s, in terms of its shaping social identities and the prevailing political culture, was truly ground-breaking. Who can seriously question the accuracy of his observation that 'nationalism determines political orthodoxy' and the corollary proposition that this fact renders in this context, the mere exposition of nationalist ideology as an act of social critique?<sup>2</sup> That nationalism overshadows identity-building, instrumentalises

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<sup>2</sup> C. Mavratsas, *Faces of Greek nationalism in Cyprus: Ideological contestation and the social construction of Greek Cypriot identity 1974-1996* (Athens Katarti, 1998) [in Greek].

memory and distorts consciousness, resulting in a divided Cyprus to be compared negatively with other societies in several cultural and political respects?<sup>3</sup> Or even that there is a relationship between the weakness of civil society and the unresolved Cyprus problem?<sup>4</sup>

Mavratsas identified crucial themes in the analysis of Cypriot society and sketched a political sociology frame for their discussion. By focusing on the modernisation process, he embedded his analysis of political ideology in the historical trajectory of the country and illustrated the impact of conservative nationalist structures on social consciousness and the political system. Although he did discuss contestations and his frame did acknowledge spaces not colonised or clouded by political nationalism, social conservatism and cultural backwardness, Mavratsas' perspective gradually turned away from analysis of conflicts, and potentials deriving thereof, into a research of the 'essence' of the problem. He articulated this in his last book, *The society of villagers*,<sup>5</sup> which was the most popular but also the most problematic from a social science viewpoint.

It is not my intension to discuss in any detail Mavratsas' last book, as in addition to finding it problematic with the direction he turned his attention to, and the focus adopted, I consider it somewhat too schematic and anecdotal, and as such, although an interesting read, it cannot justify the claim of being a comprehensive framework of Greek Cypriot cultural sociology. What I will do here instead, is to move in a diverging direction or even a sort of opposite one, turning the analytic lens away from social parochialism and towards alternative, quasi-libertarian impulses in urban activism of inner Nicosia, as manifested in the last two decades. I shall examine a variety of cultural and social practices and their political implications in terms of their interaction with the surrounding space and wider society. Via this account of initiatives and small social movements contesting existing institutions, structures and processes, and engaging in semiotic struggles over the definition and interpretation of the city and the right to it, I propose the need for

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<sup>3</sup> C. Mavratsas, 'The ideological contest between Greek-Cypriot nationalism and Cypriotism 1974–1995: Politics, social memory and identity', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1997); C. V. Mavratsas, *National identity and consciousness in everyday life: towards a sociology of knowledge of Greek-Cypriot Nationalism, Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (1999).

<sup>4</sup> C. Mavratsas, *National Homogeneity and Political Consensus: Atrophy of Greek Cypriot Civil Society at the Beginning of the 21st Century* (Athens Katarti, 2003) [in Greek].

<sup>5</sup> C. Mavratsas, *The society of villagers. Cultural and political underdevelopment of Greek Cypriots in the beginning of the 21st Century* (Athens Papazisis, 2012) [in Greek].

a more nuanced understanding of civil society in the Greek Cypriot community. By examining the social networks, the radical politics, the alternative styles and the open community building ideological frames as empirically manifested in old Nicosia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one can paint a different picture with respect to the use of public space and meaning production in the context of everyday life practices.

This article discusses cultural communication processes and meaning attribution to social action by various, co-existing groups, sometimes converging or at times diverging, but expressing directly and indirectly in various ways and forms their dissent from the mainstream ideologies and posing a challenge to the established order(s).<sup>6</sup> This article is not the first one to deal with these issues. Doering and Karathanasis have analysed graffiti and murals in Nicosia as modes of expression and in terms of their impact on social imaginary and social memory.<sup>7</sup> Ilican has approached the Occupy the Buffer Zone (OBZ) movement as a challenge to sovereignty regimes in Cyprus and as a non-identity movement which extended the scope of radical politics.<sup>8</sup> Iliopoulou and Karathanasis have also focused on the OBZ, but situated it more broadly in the context of an analysis of grassroots urban activism before and during its occurrence.<sup>9</sup> This article further enlarges the analytic scope, in terms of time and issues, and examines more explicitly connections, interactions and trends, providing an overview of socio-cultural processes in relation to urban space.

The analysis here focuses on the interaction between the politics of space and the space of (radical) politics. The theoretical section situates the analytic perspec-

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<sup>6</sup> A variation of this article was translated into Bulgarian and published in 2016 in the special issue *Ethnologies of the city* of the journal *Bulgarian Ethnology* 42(2). The author also acknowledges the project 'Framing financial crisis and protest: North West and South East Europe', run by the Open University, UK and funded by the Leverhulme Trust, as some of the issues addressed here were originally presented to and discussed with the network members in the form of a guided walk in inner Nicosia in the Cyprus workshop in March 2015. The author also thanks Olga Demetriou, Pafsanias Karathanasis and Andreas Panayiotou for constructive comments on earlier drafts.

<sup>7</sup> E. Doering, 'With a spray can in Lefkosia / Lefkoshia: Murals, graffiti and identity', *The Cyprus Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2009); P. Karathanasis, *Official Memory and Graffiti: the meanings of the Green Line of Cyprus as field for negotiation of collective memory*, *Utopia: Memory, Theory and Art*, (March-April 2010), Vol. 89 [in Greek].

<sup>8</sup> H. E. Ilican, 'The Occupy Buffer Zone Movement: radicalism and sovereignty in Cyprus', *The Cyprus Review*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2013); H.E. Ilican, 'Radicalising the no man's land The Occupy Buffer Zone Movement in Cyprus', in *The Politics of Culture in Turkey, Greece and Cyprus: Performing the left since the 1960's*, (eds) L. Karakatsanis and N. Papadogiannis (London: Routledge, 2016)

<sup>9</sup> E. Iliopoulou and P. Karathanasis, 'Towards a radical politics: grassroots urban activism in the walled city of Nicosia', *The Cyprus Review* (2014) Vol. 26, No. 1.

tive employed at the intersection of social movements, urban studies and communication, while the methodological section outlines the ethnographic form of data collection used. The historical section introduces the city, its defining characteristics and key processes under way at the turn of the century. The subsequent section examines in more detail these processes and their contestation, while the last section discusses two particular forms of cultural and social contestation that have emerged in 2009-2010, and in 2011- 2012, arguing that their understanding must be based on the genealogy of events and dynamics that preceded their emergence.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

Urban activism is defined here as collective action that not only takes place in an urban setting, but which is also oriented towards and explicitly embedded in an urban space. Ultimately, collective action is more or less always geographically bound in the sense that space operates as a frame of reference as well as a context subject to modalities of political power.<sup>10</sup> However, there is a specifically local dimension at work here, so fundamental in community formation as well as in the emergence and development of social movements as defined by the new social movement tradition. The significance of lived experience and social interaction in the context of everyday life encounters in the production and reproduction of social collective identities has been emphasised in new social movements' theory, which generally focuses on the subjective dimension and understanding of the social world.<sup>11</sup>

The focus of the narrative is on forms of social activism as they appear in the public space, their continuity and change with time and how these are perceived by both the actors themselves as well as the broader society, as it comes across them.<sup>12</sup> Ideological frames and political symbols are of crucial importance here, as they communicate, negotiate and renegotiate meanings, criticisms and propositions about what is relevant, significant and right, and why. The characteristics of social movements are described through an examination of what they express,<sup>13</sup> analysed in terms of how these expressions are related to the space-time nexus in which they

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<sup>10</sup> A. Giddens, *The constitution of society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984); (Harvey 1990).

<sup>11</sup> A. Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); A. Melucci, *Challenging codes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

<sup>12</sup> H. Kriesi, et al. 'New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis', *University of Minnesota Press*, (1995).

<sup>13</sup> D. Della Porta and M. Diani, *Social movements: an introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford: Blackwell. 2006).

appear and how they are interpreted and evaluated with respect to their impact on the broader socio-cultural world.

Although there are obvious economic imperatives, social dynamics and political implications at work, the behaviours and misbehaviours studied here, the issues, processes and the contentions are subsumed and articulated within the cultural field. Culture is understood here not merely as a depository of resources from which agents may draw for their own cognitive and normative purposes but as a structure of fields in which people are socialised in, act within and upon, and thus undergo change through agential practices.<sup>14</sup> Culture sets the context and defines the content of ideological framing, political stances as well as everyday life practices. As a site of meaning production, it is where voices as well as silences need to be sought for and interpreted. Where for the purposes of this article, culture is the domain in which the semiotics of space and communication need to be analysed.

There are thus three different dimensions examined together in this article, because they interpenetrate one another, interact and converge in spatial and temporal terms. The first is the determining significance of the local geography which structures social interactions and lived experience in the urban space of inner Nicosia. The second is the development of a plural social activism, primarily alternative, youthful and radical, which opens up issues and reacts upon the conditions it finds itself in. The third is the semiotic and communicative forms in which the dynamics of social movements and social processes and contestations are articulated as they unfold in the urban setting of the city centre.

The city, especially the city centre, is ultimately the site of multiple co-existence and conflicts, at the same time it is subjected to and is subjecting the web of social relations.<sup>15</sup> Urban space is produced by communing practices, which are themselves multiple, differentiated and related to prevailing social inequalities.<sup>16</sup> In the age of neoliberal hegemony, the public space shrinks, but more importantly it becomes co-opted and appended to the prevailing commodification logic and transformed into an instrument of privatisation and gentrification processes.<sup>17</sup> These constantly

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<sup>14</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (New York: Routledge, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> H. Lefebvre, *Writings on *citie*'s* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996 [1968]).

<sup>16</sup> D. Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Harvey, *Rebel Cities*; J. M. Roberts, *New media and public activism: neoliberalism, the state and radical protest in the public sphere*, (Bristol: Polity Press, 2014).

transformative processes and the contestations that accompany them have symbolic dimensions which are semiotically and culturally mediated. The public space and the public sphere are thus sites where these forces are played out.

## Methodology

The data used in this article draws on more than a decade of participant observation in the social, cultural and political life of inner Nicosia. However, I must qualify this by saying that, in the period from 2004 to 2011 I was more of a participant, whereas in the period from 2012 to 2015, I was more of an observer of the processes that I am analysing. Although I had many times written in electronic media during my 'participant period' about aspects and issues, including an autobiographical narrative focusing on the first bi-communal/common cultural and social centre, Kardash, it was only in 2012 that I made the first attempt to produce a systematic and comprehensive overview on the genealogy of activism set in the urban space of old Nicosia. For this I conducted fieldwork, interviewing and taking photographs, as well as doing substantial print and on-line media research.<sup>18</sup>

Field work was conducted between August 2011 and February 2012, which took the form of taped and not taped interviews, as well as extended participant and non-participant observation, including additional informal conversations and on-the-spot exchanges with other people residing, working or spending much of their time in the area. My informants included Cypriot youth active in the alternative scene and the anti-racist and peace movements, immigrants from various communities and others in the area, such as shopkeepers, residents and frequent visitors of old Nicosia. In addition, reports in print and electronic media that made references about the old town or particular social and political activities taking place there, relevant to the themes under study were considered along with blogs and webpages by and about the social groups active in the old city.

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<sup>18</sup> Part of the findings from that endeavour were published as a report by A. Karatzogianni, O. Morgunova, N. Kambouri, et al., *Inter-cultural conflict and dialogue, Thematic Report* (Transnational digital networks, migration and gender, MIG@NET Project, 2012), and later used as the basis for a book chapter: A. Karatzogianni, O. Morgunova, N. Kambouri, N., et al., 'Intercultural Conflict and Dialogue in the Transnational Digital Public Sphere: Findings from the MIG@NET Research Project 2010-2013', in *The Digital Transformation of the Public Sphere: Conflict, Migration, Crisis, and Culture in Digital Networks*, eds. A. Karatzogianni, D. Nguyen and E. Serafinelli (London: Palgrave, 2016). However, this article focuses exclusively on inner Nicosia, incorporates previously unused data and adopts a different focus and theoretical framework and further in-depth analysis of the issues at stake.

The thematic focus of the investigation is on social action in the public space, its political rationale, its forms of expression and its impact both within and without the social movements themselves. An important ontological presupposition here is the consciousness or at least the semi-consciousness of the actors about the meaning or at least the preferred meaning of their interventions in the public sphere. This need not necessarily involve medium-term, let alone longer-term, strategy and sophisticated tactics but it does imply short-term planning and thinking ahead of what to do and possible ways to do it. And to some extent it does involve some degree of reflection on past actions when deciding and embarking upon new ones. The methodological presupposition here is that the multiple and various actions that constitute the social movements can be analysed and interpreted based on the actors' and observers' descriptive accounts and discussions of political and social ideas that are explicitly and implicitly expressed.

### **Historical Context: The Transformation of a Divided City**

The historical town of Nicosia, surrounded by the Venetian walls, remained the commercial and political centre amidst the rapid expansion of the capital city in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and up until the war of 1974.<sup>19</sup> Although the inter-communal conflict of the late 1950s and early 1960s had left its scar on the inner city, much deeper compared to the scar of the rest of the country, it was only after the watershed of the large scale 1974 violence and its aftermath that inner Nicosia ceased to function as the city centre. The territorial division of the whole country was completed then and more than a third of the Cypriot population was displaced, provoking a humanitarian crisis and a rapid second urbanisation wave which multiplied the city population and shifted the political and commercial centre of the city in the ever-expanding area outside the walls.

The rise of ethnic nationalism in the two communities in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century impacted on the residential patterns and inter-communal relations, resulting in the gradual developments of separate Greek and Turkish quarters in all towns and big villages of the island.<sup>20</sup> The political confrontation of the 1950s, in the context of the anti-colonial struggle and concerning the future of the country after the end of the British rule, came within sight especially after the leaderships of the two communi-

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<sup>19</sup> M. Attalides, *Social change and urbanization in Cyprus: a study of Nicosia* (Nicosia: Social Research Centre, 1981).

<sup>20</sup> R. Patrick, *Political Geography and the Cyprus Conflict: 1963-1971*, University of Waterloo (Waterloo ON, 1976).

ties had established military forces in the form of EOKA and TMT and accelerated the process of separating the two communities.<sup>21</sup> Faneromeni Square and Ledra Street emerged as key symbolic places in the 1950s for Greek Cypriot constitutive narrative, the former as the place of nationalist speeches and Makarios' oath to 'enosis', the annexation of Cyprus to Greece as the ultimate national(ist) goal, and the latter, as a place of violence during the EOKA years, 1955 to 1959.

In the course of the outbreak of the 1958 cycle of inter-communal violence, inner Nicosia was sharply divided into two quarters, each with its own market. Although the establishment of the bi-communal republic in 1960 eased tensions and allowed contacts and exchanges, the municipalities' question remained an open and unresolved issue with the two sides disagreeing whether the two municipalities would have separate territorial jurisdictions or not.<sup>22</sup> After the next cycle of inter-communal violence broke out in late 1963, the un-bridged rift between the two communities widened further and the green line was drawn by the British officer leading the non-belligerent contingent, in an attempt to demarcate the temporary armistice line separating the armed forces of the two communities. Ledra Street was divided while Faneromeni Square fell on the Greek Cypriot side, while the small Ottoman building in its vicinity was closed but remained as a remnant of the 'Other' amidst the Greek nationalist surrounding.

### **The Division, the Border and its Crossing**

The 'Green Line' became the central characteristic of Nicosia, especially after 1974 when the armistice line extended the whole island, dividing the country to a territorial north and a territorial south. The Nicosia Green Line was actually the place with the thinnest buffer zone, marking the capital as the only divided city in Cyprus. As the centre point of the divided country, Nicosia was the place where the politics of contestation left their sharp mark on space and where the 'dead zone' shaped the parallel lives of its two parts.<sup>23</sup> The permanent temporariness of the buffer zone constitutes and represents in a concentrated manner the whole Cyprus problem, producing

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<sup>21</sup> M. Attalides, 'Cyprus, Nationalism and International Politics', (Edinburgh: Q Press, 1979).

<sup>22</sup> M. Drousiotis, 'The First Partition' (Athens: Alfadi, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Y. Papadakis, '*Echoes from the Dead Zone: across the Cyprus divide*' (London: I.B Tauris, 2005); Y. Papadakis, 'Nicosia after 1960: A River, A Bridge and a Dead Zone', *Global Media Journal* (2006), (*Mediterranean edition*) Vol. 1, No.; O. Demetriou, 'Freedom Square: the unspoken of a divided city', *Hagar Studies in Culture, Polity and Identities* (2006) Vol. 7, No. 1.

multiple 'states of exception' and casting its weight not only on the politics but in all spheres of institutional, cultural, intellectual and social life in the island.<sup>24</sup>

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the discourse of the last divided capital of Europe was developed and used for propagandistic and touristic purposes by the Republic of Cyprus. Although the military presence has decreased since the early 1990s, after an agreement was made between the two sides to remove some of their guard posts, it took almost two more decades, in which many developments took place, before inner Nicosia could be somehow dissociated from the image of a militarised area that is ignored and avoided by the city crowds. Although there were many efforts in the 1980s and 1990s to regenerate the historic centre and attract tourists and visitors, the southern part of inner Nicosia was still, at the turn of the century, a primarily degraded area where, beyond the few main commercial streets, the scenery was composed of old buildings, most of them badly maintained and some of them derelict, some old artisan workshops and streets and shops where migrants, alternative artists and youth groups frequented.

In the early 2000s, progress made in negotiations between the leaders of the two communities created a much improved climate in bi-communal relations, while the prospect of an agreement, in the form of the Annan Plan and the expected entry of the Republic of Cyprus into the EU, set in motion of huge mobilisations in the Turkish Cypriot community.<sup>25</sup> It was at this juncture and in this context that the monumental event of the opening of the checkpoints took place in 2003. The first months after the opening were characterised by an absent State allowing the articulation of a subjectivation process, as large masses rushed to cross to the other side.<sup>26</sup> Although the State was quickly able to regain control, by again normalising the condition, the 'silent revolt' of Greek Cypriots, responding to the Turkish Cypriot revolt, which had made the opening of the checkpoints possible in the first place,<sup>27</sup> was historical, as in the first three months an estimated 200,000 Greek Cypriots had crossed to the other

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<sup>24</sup> C. M. Constantinou, 'On the Cypriot states of exception', *International Political Sociology*, (2008) Vol. 2, No. 2; N. Trimikiniotis, *The nation-state dialectic and the state of exception* (Athens: Savallas, 2010) [in Greek].

<sup>25</sup> T. Demetriou and S. Vlachos, *Προδομένη Εξέγερση* [Betrayed revolt] (Nicosia: Sosialistiki Ekfrasi 2007).

<sup>26</sup> O. Demetriou, 'To cross or not to cross: subjectivisation and the absent state' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2007) Vol. 13, No. 4.

<sup>27</sup> A. Panayiotou, 'The unavoidable but censored wisdom of the border experience', paper presented at the conference 'Though the Roadblocks', 24 November 2014, Limassol: Cyprus University of Technology (2014).

side.<sup>28</sup> What is more important, however, is the longer-term impact and consequence of the opening of the checkpoints, more so after the opening of Ledra Street-Lokmaci crossing, eroding slowly and quietly, yet steadily the separation of the communities and significantly exposing the irrationality of partition.

### **Migrants, Alternatives and the Regeneration of the City**

The continuous and exponential expansion of immigrant arrival in Cyprus during the 1990s soon established a significant immigrant presence in the island. Foreign workers came from many different countries of the ex-Eastern Bloc, South-East Asia and the Middle East, and they were employed primarily in unskilled and less skilled, manual occupations.<sup>29</sup> After 2004 and Cyprus' entry into the EU, immigration expanded further, with many Eastern Europeans arriving in search of jobs.<sup>30</sup> Many of them were accommodated in poor quality housing in the old parts of Cyprus' cities, and, by the early 2000s, inner Nicosia had become a truly multicultural place.

As migrants lacked sufficient indoor spaces for their social needs, their presence in streets, shops and public spaces, in general, was more enhanced, increasing their encounters with locals and visitors and their visibility.<sup>31</sup> Especially on Sundays, the day that most Cypriots gathered with family in indoor settings and the only day available to most immigrants for rest, one could see thousands of immigrants assembled in parks. In fact, the park between Eleftheria and Solomou Square became known as the Philippino park, while the municipal garden behind the parliament became known as the Sri Lankan park. Although there was always a xenophobic undercurrent in Cyprus society, largely a consequence of the diffused nationalism as a result of the open ethnic conflict and division, the presence of large numbers of immigrants offered a new target, triggering racist mentalities and discourses, especially after the economic situation began to deteriorate by 2010.<sup>32</sup>

The State treated the immigrants more or less like the economy treated them, or rather offered the context in which the economy could treat them as such: cheap

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<sup>28</sup> O. Demetriou, 'Freedom Square'.

<sup>29</sup> G. Ioannou, 'Employment in Crisis: Cyprus 2010-2013'. *The Cyprus Review*, (2014) Vol. 26, No. 1.

<sup>30</sup> C. Mainwaring, 'On the edge of exclusion: the changing nature of migration in Cyprus and Malta', *The Cyprus Review*, (2008) Vol. 20, No. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Papadakis 'Nicosia after 1960'.

<sup>32</sup> N. Trimikliniotis, Trimikliniotis, 'Preventing racism, xenophobia and related intolerance in sport across the European Union', European Monitoring Centre of Racism and Xenophobia, RAXEN Thematic Study on Cyprus (2009), available at [https://works.bepress.com/nicos\\_trimikliniotis/27/](https://works.bepress.com/nicos_trimikliniotis/27/).

labour with limited rights and little possibility to escape from the social bottom in which they found themselves. First of all they were identified as guest workers, tied to their employer with the work and residence permit, depending on their labour contract. The rest, that is those without papers, were assigned to the illegality of the black market. Integration of immigrants in the wider Cypriot society remained limited, and the overwhelming majority live and work in precarious conditions in the context of a subaltern and transient existence.<sup>33</sup>

Many immigrants both with and without papers have their employer as their landlord, which increases their bond with, and dependence on, them. Losing one job, for many, thus came to mean, in practice, losing both one's accommodation and the right to stay in the country.<sup>34</sup> The hunting down of illegal immigrants in order to deport them started to take place in systematic and indiscriminate manners, with the infamous 'sweep/cleaning operations', in which hundreds of police encircle immigrant corners and enter immigrants' houses, dragging dozens of them to police stations to identify whether they have papers or not. It was against these 'sweep/cleaning operations' that the first anti-racist mobilisations started in the early 2000s. The organisation around which many activists and humanists gathered to express publicly their dissent with government policy and State practice was called Movement for Equality, Support and Antiracism (KISA), a non-government organisation (NGO) established in 1998. KISA offers support to immigrants and advocates for human rights. More generally anti-racism, as a practical form of defending 'the right to difference', had developed into one of the main parameters of Cypriot social movements by the end of the twentieth century.<sup>35</sup>

Inner Nicosia had attracted progressive, radical and alternative individuals and groups since the 1980s, but it was only in the late 1990s that this began to expand in scale and scope, and to become known and socially registered. Overall the number of locals and visitors in inner Nicosia had increased substantially by the 2000s, facilitated also by a series of infrastructural improvements in the area which

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<sup>33</sup> N. Trimikliniotis and C. Demetriou, 'Labour Integration of Migrant Workers in Cyprus: A Critical Appraisal', in *Precarious Migrant Labour across Europe*, (eds) M. Pajnic and G. Campani (Ljubljana: Mirovni Institut, 2011); N. Trimikliniotis, D. Parsanoglou and V. Tsianos, *Mobile Commons, Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>34</sup> G. Ioannou, 'Employment in Crisis'.

<sup>35</sup> A. Panayiotou, 'Border dialectics: Cypriot social and historical movements in a world systemic context', in *Beyond a Divided Cyprus: a State and Society in Transformation*, (eds) N. Trimikliniotis and U. Bozkurt (New York NY: Palgrave Macmillan 2012).

brought investors in and raised the real estate prices.<sup>36</sup> Artists, middle class professionals, intellectuals, politicised youth, nationalists and leftists, soldiers and anti-militarists, hippies and dropouts were gradually attracted to the area and could be typically found in Kala Kathoumena, a sort of non-traditional and non-ordinary coffee shop, which had opened next to Faneromeni Square.

The founding of Kardash (meaning brother in Turkish), the first bi-communal cultural centre in 2003, gave impetus to the broader process of the social registering of inner Nicosia as a place for alternative cultural and social practices. Kardash was initially founded on the initiative of persons coming from various, small left-wing groups, after the opening of the checkpoints, but very soon new dynamics developed, as young people not affiliated to particular groups became more active there, creating thus a climate that was more open and inviting to less and non-politicised people. Kardash gave the opportunity to young Greek Cypriots to meet and socialise with Turkish Cypriots and immigrants, as many young people attended parties and socials every day, as well as specially organised events. Many of them became politicised through their interaction with the place and the more politicised activists who gathered there to attend film screenings, all sorts of discussions, seminars and workshops, art exhibitions and so on. Kardash soon managed to gather a sizeable radicalised youth and become a sort of social node and a point of reference during its different stages and forms, even after it ceased to function.<sup>37</sup>

## **Multiple Dynamics: Issues, Movements and Processes**

### ***The Anti-Racist and the Ppeace Movements***

In 2004, KISA moved its offices into old Nicosia and started doing community outreach, offering anti-racist activists organisational muscle and access to public sphere, thus playing a quasi-leadership and instrumental role in anti-racist mobilisations. KISA, as an NGO, was of course more involved in providing legal aid, consulting and advocating for asylum-seekers on an individual basis, but it was also making reports on the treatment of immigrants by State authorities, and particularly on police arbitrariness and brutality, and issuing public statements and announcements. However, KISA's organisation of the yearly multicultural festivals (Rainbow) allowed it to establish and maintain links with many immigrant com-

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<sup>36</sup> Iliopoulou and Karathanasis, 'Towards a Radical Politics'.

<sup>37</sup> Iliopoulou and Karathanasis, 'Towards a Radical Politics'.

munities and its willingness to organise and participate actively in street protests against the manifestations of racism placed it de facto in the centre of the broader movement. In 2006, extended mobilisation involving demands for asylum, for example, was probably the most significant one.<sup>38</sup>

The peace and rapprochement movement effectively began in the late 1980s and had become fairly large and significant by the late 1990s, reaching its peak with the opening of the checkpoints in 2003.<sup>39</sup> Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot peace activists started to have contacts and to develop connections and relations, discussing the common past, the unacceptable present of division and the prospect of a future united Cyprus. These activists came primarily from the left, both within and without the political parties in the north and south, but gradually many liberals (especially from the Greek Cypriot community) also joined in, in the context of conflict resolution workshops and the new NGOs, which emerged and led primarily internationally funded projects.<sup>40</sup>

Although the Greek Cypriot 'No' in the 2004 referendum on the UN's reunification plan arrested the growth of bi-communal activism, as peace-oriented publics, including peace activists, became disappointed, rapprochement efforts continued with longer term, more solid and sustained efforts and projects in the fields of dialogue and research, peace education and reunification politics.<sup>41</sup> After 2008, the peace talks restarted and discontent in the Turkish Cypriot community started to swell again. Street protests became more frequent, and by 2010, bi-communal events and common protests and celebrations in the buffer zone on 1 September, the international trade unions' day for peace mobilisations, and 1 May had become

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<sup>38</sup> G. Ioannou, 'A concise account of an extended mobilisation', Nekatomata blogspot, (28 November 28 2006), available at <http://nekatomata.blogspot.com/2006/11/concise-historical-account-of-asylum.html>.

<sup>39</sup> The first meetings between groups of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots after 1974 used to take place abroad, but by the early 1990s, this began to happen in Cyprus, with the UN-controlled Ledra Palace Hotel and the mixed village of Pyla, adjacent to the buffer zone and the British base in Dekelia, becoming sites of organised contacts by a small yet expanding number of peace activists.

<sup>40</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article to describe this process – what we are interested in here is its intersection with other movements in old Nicosia in the 2000s.

<sup>41</sup> The Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR) and the teachers' platform, United Cyprus, with their workshops and seminars, conferences and public statements, events and assemblies, established themselves as the main active vehicles of action in the peace movement. The AHDR focuses its action more on the academic dimension and receives significant funding, allowing it to have paid employees as well as to embark on big projects, including the Home for Cooperation, the multi-purpose building under its control in the UN-controlled buffer zone.



Photo 1: Ledra Street, after its opening, symbolic pro-peace protest on the occasion of UN Secretary General's visit in February 2010. Image: Karathanasis Pafsanias, 2010.

some sort of a tradition. Although these were relatively small events, usually involving several hundred people from each side, the fact that common political protests and bi-communal street events had not happened since the beginning of ethnic conflict in Cyprus 50 years ago, rendered them significant not merely for their symbolism but also for collective memory and existential reasons in the peace movement. The opening of the Ledra Street checkpoint, as a result of pressure from the peace movement from both sides in the period 2005 to 2008, and its conversion to the key crossing point shifted the central point for the peace movement as a whole firmly to the heart of inner Nicosia.

### **Gentrification and Anti-Commercialism**

The gentrification process in inner Nicosia progressed at a more or less steady pace throughout the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In effect, the area chosen by subaltern, alternative and radical individuals and groups in which to reside, gather, socialise and express themselves, largely because it was affordable, different and outside the fully commercialised universe of other areas in Nicosia, was being transformed in a way that they detested and felt excluded from. Retail estate prices and rents went up, and derelict buildings, which squatters could use for temporary spaces to meet in or even to convert into social centres, decreased in numbers as owners began to renovate or fence them off, and police patrols in the area became more frequent.

Cafes, bars and restaurants sprang up in various parts of old Nicosia, while the main commercial streets became busier. The opening of the Ledra Street checkpoint in 2008 expanded not only inter-communal contacts but also attracted more people to the area, while the municipal authorities began to make more comprehensive plans and secured more funding for large infrastructural projects that would modernise the old city centre. Although investments were sought for and were gradually attracted to inner Nicosia, the transformation process did not really accelerate until a few years ago. In 2009 and 2010, for example, there were still many places and areas that socially and culturally remained outside the gentrification process, some of which contested it practically and politically. The immigrant quarters, the old artisan shops, the social and cultural centres and the street and public space gatherings of the alternative groups were still the defining characteristic of inner Nicosia.

The emergence and growth of an alternative youth hanging out in the broader Faneromeni area, with Manolis' Square (as they call it after the tree around which youngsters used to sit in the late 1990s) as a centre, has been a gradual and complex



Photo 2: Faneromeni Square. The inscription above the arcade reads ‘Immortal, Leader, Ethnarch Makarios’, and on the marble memorial are the names of the members of the Orthodox Christian Youth (OXEN) who were killed during the EOKA struggle. Image: Gregoris Ioannou, 2012.

process. Faneromeni Square managed to become a frame of reference, as a series of political and social events, projects and initiatives took place there, becoming popular and attracting hundreds of young persons on a daily basis.<sup>42</sup> This made the Faneromeni Square gatherings sort of fashionable attracting crowds of young persons from much wider lifestyle backgrounds, allowing them to shift from a mar-

<sup>42</sup> The 25-year-old activist I interviewed in 2011 also mentioned that ‘the Zena Palace crowd’ (the youth gathering in the video game shops and square in the vicinity of the Zena Palace cinema theatre) in the beginning of the 2000s formed around hip hop and graffiti, but had gradually moved to the space of the old Nicosia and Faneromeni in particular. An old warehouse nearby used diachronically for different functions, including more recently the function of a quasi-art gallery APOTHEKE, which was a place where many groups of youngsters used to gather in different times, and can be seen as important in the development of the Faneromeni Square.

ginal and peripheral cultural practice to a more central one.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the alternative multicultural scene that developed de facto subverted the hegemonic symbolic weight of the Church that had been built on its historical significance for the Greek Cypriot nationalist movement.

The prevailing climate in Faneromeni Square, at its peak from 2009 until 2011 and before the location became crowded with cafes, was one of festivity. Teenage boys and girls played, sang and danced, fell in love, ate, drank, and smoked together in groups, while sitting in circles on the ground or walking around. Some played football, some did skate boarding, and some juggled. At times there were some people juggling with fire. In Faneromeni, one could be oneself and have fun; it was like an everyday impromptu gathering. It resembled a school or college yard or an ongoing festival.<sup>44</sup> To be sure, on different days one could find a variety of people.<sup>45</sup> Individuals used to go there usually to find and mingle with the people they wanted to. *'I go there because I find people with whom I have common ideas and beliefs.'*<sup>46</sup> Besides the casual, everyday gatherings, there were also more organised and systematic events, such as street parties and later street parades.<sup>47</sup>

### **Culture and Politics in Faneromeni Square**

There was a libertarian tendency, a sort of basic anarchism in the air, which was more of an impulse and an instinct rather than a result of organised anarchist groupings that were active at different times, amidst the crowd. The people who gathered were typically searching out different ideologies, experimenting with ideas, dress codes and lifestyles, seeking meaning and essences in philosophy and politics as well as music and poetry. Most importantly, they discussed matters amongst

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<sup>43</sup> P. Karathanasis, *Από τα κάτω δραστηριοποίηση και έξοδος από την οριακότητα: Δημόσιες εκδηλώσεις και δράσεις στην εντός των τειχών Λευκωσία*, [Activation from below and exit from liminality: Public events and actions in Nicosia within the walls], unpublished doctoral dissertation (PhD Dissertation, University of the Aegean, School of Social Sciences, Department of Social Anthropology and History, 2017), available at <http://thesis.ekt.gr/thesisBookReader/id/40823#page/1/mode/2up>.

<sup>44</sup> Immigrants from Georgia, primarily youth but sometimes adults and families, also gathered there, socialising, playing, talking and hanging out. At one corner on the side of the church's yard where the Georgians gathered, there was a sign spray-painted on the wall *'This is Pontos'*, stating the community's claim to the square as well. There was limited interaction between the two groups, but there was no hostility either, despite some occasional tensions arising as a result of the anti-clericalism of the alternatives and the Pontians' connection with the church.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with 20 year old activist (2012).

<sup>46</sup> Interview with 25 year old activist (2011).

<sup>47</sup> Iliopoulou and Karathanasis, 'Towards a Radical Politics'.

themselves and exchanged ideas about social issues, politics and activism in a sort of generalised critique of the system. Street art and murals and social events constituted the bread and butter of their public life – graffiti became a point where counter-cultural aesthetics met politics. Radical and subversive discourses co-existed with a political and politically indifferent worldviews, which also found their place in the social life of Faneromeni Square. Their life experience of everyday ‘residing’ in Faneromeni Square, beyond constituting a sharp contrast with the dominant meaning emanating from the surrounding space, produced new alternative conceptualisations, making Faneromeni Square a different place.

Graffiti, stencils and witty slogans on the walls were (and continues to be) the main form of expression of what may be schematically called the ‘Faneromeni crowd’, constituting an artistic and cultural intervention in the public space, directly as well as indirectly political. In an urban space dominated by the semiotics of

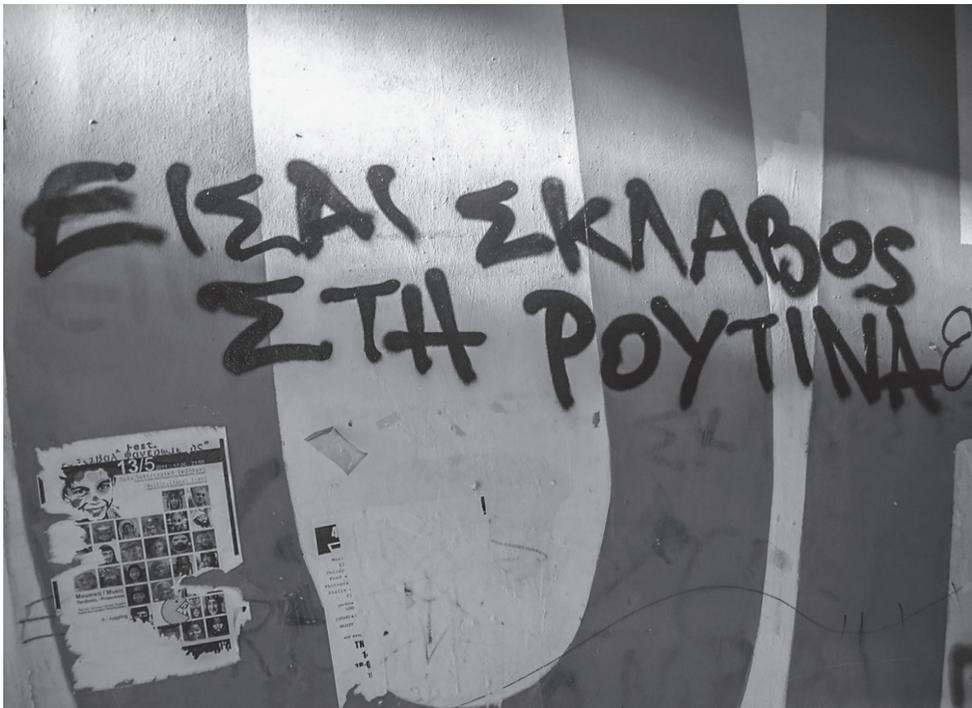


Photo 3: Slogan on the wall: ‘You are a slave to the routine’. Below, a poster for a Faneromeni multicultural festival, organised as a response to a proposed fascist march in inner Nicosia on 13 May 2011. Alley street connecting Faneromeni Square and Ledras Street. Image: Gregoris Ioannou, 2012.



Photo 4: End of Aischylou Street, in the vicinity of Faneromeni Square.

This was one corner of the 'parkou', the little park that was constructed after reclaiming an empty plot which was primarily used for parking. The occupation of the plot lasted for more than a year, in which, through collective work, trees were planted and the external space was shaped so as to host many gathering of youth groups. Image: Gregoris Ioannou, 2011.

prevailing nationalist discourse that sustains the city's and the country's division, and in a commercialised universe of the consumerist definition of a 'normal' lifestyle, often the street art on the walls of inner Nicosia operates in a confrontational manner.<sup>48</sup> Street art destabilises the dominant meanings as expressed by the monuments, the flags, the symbols and the advertising signs; it challenges existing ideas and promotes alternative orders of significance and memory, and more generally, it claims the right to exercise the power of imagination in the public sphere.<sup>49</sup> Besides

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<sup>48</sup> Doering, 'With a spray can in Lefkosia; Karathanasis, 'Official Memory and Graffiti'.

<sup>49</sup> H. Kenaan, 'Nine notes on street art and the sovereign's imagination', in *Street Art, Tel Aviv Museum of Art*, available at [http://www.tau.ac.il/~kenaan/street\\_art.pdf](http://www.tau.ac.il/~kenaan/street_art.pdf).

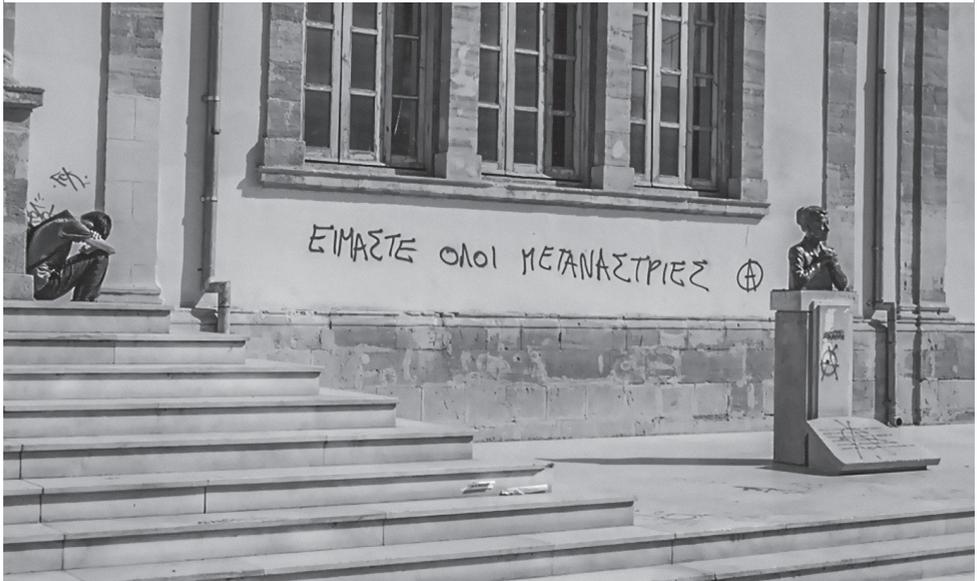


Photo 5: Faneromeni Square, 2011. On these stairs, numerous organised and spontaneous assemblies were held in the context of various initiatives and mobilisations. The slogan on the wall says, 'We are all immigrant women'. Images: Gregoris Ioannou, 2011 (above), Pafsanias Karathanasis, 2009 (below).

the visual and bodily expression of this spirit, there were also specific conscious attempts to articulate this theoretically as well in the form of written text.

In addition to the various personalised as well as collective words on the Internet, in blogs, forums and social media, leaflets were produced and distributed, explaining what this young ‘crowd’ was doing, why they were doing it and expressing their own narrative and building their collective identities and their connection with the particular urban space, with Faneromeni as the epicentre. In a leaflet accompanying the street parties organised in Faneromeni Square from 2009 to 2011, we read *‘We contest the walls to express ourselves. To say all these which are not said and draw all these which are not drawn. Because poetry exists in the streets’*.

More directly political graffiti turned against the State, its police and its educational system, against capitalism, the church, consumerism and xenophobia, and was in support for immigrants, workers’ solidarity and revolution. The less directly political graffiti and the apolitical graffiti assumed a sort of post-modern form, often taking a self-referential twist or opting for the particular, while refusing to be bothered with the need for coherence, generality of message or indeed communicational goal. A quasi-local(ist) tendency, animating the space and engaging in toponymical politics<sup>50</sup> was also present among the Faneromeni crowd in their discussions and slogans, such as *‘this is Manolis’ Square’* or *‘I thank the square for making me an anarchist’*.

### **Bringing It All Together: Ideologies and Socio-Cultural Contestations from Faneromeni to Occupy the Buffer Zone**

The rapprochement and peace movement, the active anti-authoritarian groups and their spaces, as well as the broader anti-racist mobilisations organised by KISA, constituted a sort of context in which the alternative, urban youths’ social and cultural practices emerged in Faneromeni. The youth revolt in Greece in December 2008 and the citizen’s initiative ALERT, formed in 2009 after the acquittal of policemen who were caught on camera brutally beating two persons, also played a significant role in stoking suspicion against authority and the police in particular,

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<sup>50</sup> In the OBZ movement (see below), naming the occupied areas was an important part of the intervention.



Photo 6: Street parade on Ledras Street, inside the buffer zone, December 2009.  
Image: Pafsanias Karathanasis, 2009

bringing more youngsters in the area and enhancing the inclination towards protest and activism<sup>51</sup>.

The dominant ideas circulating in Faneromeni, or ideas that united most of the people, constituting a sort of lowest common denominator were '*atheism, opposition to God and especially Christianity, and anti-racism*'.<sup>52</sup> Questioning one's religious beliefs is more generally a very popular theme among people in their late teens, so it is not a surprise that this was also dominant in the discussions in Faneromeni. What is significant, however, is the public anti-clericalism and the mocking of religiosity, expressed in slogans and graffiti, as well as on leaflets and on the Internet. Phrases like '*God died yesterday*', or '*Thank money, we have God*' or '*church=business*' have been quite common references for years and can be seen as somehow provocative for religious people in a setting such as Cyprus, where the organised church is very powerful. The contrast looms bigger when one takes into account the co-existence of this crowd in the church's yard with church-goers during religious service.

Anti-racism, besides being a general principle in alternative circles globally, and even more so in Cyprus, where the massive arrival of immigrants and the overt public expression of xenophobia have happened quite in a span of less than a decade, is not a surprise, especially if one takes into account the composition of the population of old Nicosia, with an immigrant majority and the recent history of the anti-racist mobilisations mentioned before. The prevailing immigrant-friendly predisposition of the alternative culture is in effect an expression of a more generalised blending with Otherness. However, what is significant here is the firmness and the confidence expressed in slogans like '*Hands off immigrants*', '*We are all immigrant women*' or '*Me gusta inmigrantes*'.

There were of course other ideas flowing beyond the core leftist and anarchist views and the broader atheist and anti-racist stances. Ecology was also a significant dimension in the form of prioritising the protection of urban green areas, experimenting in utopian agrarian collectivism and vegetable gardening as well as dreaming and planning about forming agricultural communities. Spiritualist ideas and

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<sup>51</sup> ALERT was not directly linked to inner city Nicosia, but was formed and held most of its organisational and public meetings and events there. The same applies with the various anti-fascist initiatives that, although not able to be constituted as organised or systematically networked, were able to hold significantly large events and protests in the period 2009-2011.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with 20-year-old activist (2012).

engaging in yoga, general pacifism, hedonistic worldviews were also there, co-existing with nihilist undertones, mixed with a focus on violence (almost fetishistic in emphasis) that was imported from Greece, and a generalised reaction against everything, because *'The system is everything'*, and flirtation with disorder per se because *'Chaos is sexy'*.

The Occupy the Buffer Zone (OBZ) movement appeared in late 2011 as an initiative on Facebook, involving young persons from both communities, as a local adaptation of an international phenomenon.<sup>53</sup> Being a bi-communal initiative from the beginning, its focus on the island's division rather than the locally based institutions of finance was more or less the expected direction. There were, of course, efforts to situate the Cyprus problem in the context of the global system and to understand it as a by-product of an inherently unjust system, but the buffer zone, and specifically the small buffer zone area between the two checkpoints of Ledra street, became the target, the base and the territorial confines of the initiative.<sup>54</sup> It began as a weekly occupation of Ledra street buffer zone, when a small crowd would gather there every Saturday evening to spend a couple of hours. At some point they decided to camp for one night and, once this was done, they decided to stay there indefinitely. Soon tents multiplied, a makeshift kitchen was set up, and the whole thing acquired the feeling of permanence, building on the camping and squatting experience that many participants had. People came and went, both locals as well as internationals. There was, of course, a more or less steady core of people, some of whom also staying there at nights, some coming for a few hours during the day, while a periphery of sympathisers also emerged. Some political groups in the south openly supported the initiative, radical groups in the north were more sceptical and their support, if given, was indirect.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> unpaue, 'Occupy the Buffer Zone: Understanding the Dead Zone', Radiobubble.gr (13 January 2012), available at <http://news.radiobubble.gr/2012/01/occupy.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Ilican, 'The Occupy Buffer Zone Movement'; (2016).

<sup>55</sup> The Occupy The Buffer Zone movement appeared in a time of total disappointment with the formal peace process; one might add in a time of degeneration and a blame game between and within the two communities. It came also at a time when the credibility of the AKEL-led government, the politicised trade unions and the left as a whole was declining rapidly (G. Ioannou, 'The Connection between Trade Unions and Political Parties in Cyprus', in *Party-society Relations in the Republic of Cyprus*, (eds) G. Charalambous and C. Christophorou (London: Routledge, 2015); G. Charalambous and G. Ioannou, 'No Bridge Over Troubled Waters: The Cypriot Left Heading the Government 2008–2013', *Capital and Class*, (2015)Vol. 39, No.2; Ilican 'Radicalising the no man's land'. In this context, the diehards of the peace movement, leftists as well as liberals welcomed it as the only hope, although not really believing it could change anything.

Although the OBZ was a significant and novel development in inner Nicosia, involving new people and being pluralist and, in some way, post-political in its ideological framework, it is important to see it in terms of continuity rather than rupture. The OBZ developed in the historical trajectory (outlined above) and emerged in the context of a genealogy of events and practices that preceded it and had already shaped the field.<sup>56</sup> Ledra street, the only checkpoint which had opened up as a result of pressure from the peace movement from both sides in the period 2005 to 2008, was, in 2011, the most often crossed checkpoint in the island and the centre for peace activism. Being in the vicinity of Faneromeni Square, it was a familiar space for the crowds gathering there. Most of the ideas and slogans that sprang out and found full expression in the OBZ were already circulating in the air and sprayed on the walls of inner Nicosia. In fact, the idea itself, of occupying a space in the buffer zone and using it for alternative and peace purposes, was being discussed in various circles with varying degrees of seriousness, ranging from a plan for a bi-communal school to the setting up of the Buffer Zone Republic. Although it was never attempted, when the spark of the global occupy movement emerged there was already sufficient 'flammable material'.<sup>57</sup>

The general public, both north and south, remained largely indifferent to this, like with most peace activities. However because of the centrality of the location, seen by large numbers of people crossing the checkpoints, the initial media coverage, as well as the skilful Internet promotion and the relative longevity of the action, it is not an exaggeration to say that it became probably more known than anything that happened before, either in the context of alternative activism or peace activism. The OBZ movement was fluid, open and difficult to understand. It was, at the same time, a peace group, anti-authoritarian, hippy, and not only that,<sup>58</sup> which gave it both potential as well as set limits. The potential was largely realised as soon the camp expanded into the buildings in the buffer zone, despite the obstacles erected by the two sides and the UN soldiers. The limits were made evident by its lack of coherent politics,

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<sup>56</sup> Iliopoulou and Karathanasis, 'Towards a Radical Politics'.

<sup>57</sup> This refers to the specific, small-scale context of inner Nicosia and the alternative, radical and everyday forms of contention, as opposed to the large scale, macro-societal national context of central political contention. As the economic crisis developed in 2012 and 2013, although there were multiple international examples of protests and mobilisations, in Cyprus there was not sufficient 'flammable material' and ended up being the South European exception in terms of contentious politics (G. Charalambous and G. Ioannou, 'Party-society linkages and contentious acts: Cyprus in a comparative South European perspective', *Mobilisation: an International Quarterly*, (2017) Vol. 22, No. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Ilican 'The Occupy Buffer Zone Movement'; Ilican 'Radicalising the no man's land'.

which allowed pluralist coexistence internally of activists from multiple backgrounds and ideologies, but prevented it from mastering sufficient external support. This in its turn left it less protected in the face of swift and violent repression in spring 2012 by the Republic of Cyprus' anti-terrorist squad, whose invasion in the buffer zone was tolerated by both the UN and the Turkish Cypriot security forces.

## Conclusion

This article discussed how the recent historical development of the old city of Nicosia shaped and facilitated a series of cultural and social processes, which in turn were acted upon, producing alternative readings and social imaginaries around it. The city's division, the growth of the immigrant population and the attempted regeneration of inner Nicosia set the context for a variety of practices of contestation of nationalist and commercialist cultures, challenging them in the fields of culture and lifestyle. Through an overview of the key dimensions of activist interventions in the public space in the last two decades, the article argued that there are both elements of connection across issues, movements and processes as well as continuity across time.

By examining practices rooted in social dynamics and expressing dissenting political and cultural worldviews, a more nuanced cultural sociology of the Greek Cypriot community may be constructed which goes beyond generalist images emanating from the mainstream public sphere. Through their diversion from mainstream ideas, politics and everyday life, the urban movements presented here engaged in redefining the meaning of the inner city and the life in it and registering it for more than a decade as a place of alternative practices.

Nationalism and the division of the city and the country remain, of course, the dominant frames. And although they originate in the political space and should be analysed primarily in the context of power contestations, cultural sociology and cultural studies are fundamental in illustrating the connections, interactions and dynamics between elites and communities. Beyond the circumstances of the division of Cyprus, there is a subjectivation process under way, which is historical, ideological, and semiotic, as I argued in Ioannou (2019).<sup>59</sup> At the same time, however, the conflicting frames and the diverging communicational practices and semiotic contestation of dominant symbolic orders are also present, significant and interesting from the perspective not only of radical politics but also of Cypriot sociology.

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<sup>59</sup> G. Ioannou, *Denktas in the South: The normalisation of partition in the Greek Cypriot side*, (Thessaloniki: Psifides, 2019) [in Greek].

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