With a Spray Can in Lefkosia/Lefkosha: Murals, Graffiti and Identity

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Abstract

This paper is rooted in the observation that there is radically less graffiti of any kind in the north (Lefkosha) than there is in the south (Lefkosia). It presents an overview of kind, presence and absence of anonymous public writing – graffiti – in Lefkosia/Lefkosha, and then poses possible reasons for this discrepancy. What social and political identity differences does this discrepancy indicate? Why are murals not part of the visual public discourse in Lefkosia/Lefkosha, as they are in other divided societies? What is the graffiti writer's role, in the absence of murals? What political meanings are articulated in the interactions of graffiti writers in specific areas of Lefkosia/Lefkosha, and how does whitewashing fit into a much larger civic discourse that includes individuals, groups and authority? In particular this paper aims to parse the group-oriented visual discourse from the discourse related to individuals, and at the same time looks at gender equality in these expressions. Why, and in what ways do women seem to be less visible in terms of public political expression? How can reconciliation programmes clarify the audiences they target when designing cultural projects? Under what circumstances would a public mural arts programme be appropriate in Lefkosia/Lefkosha, and why is there none in place now? The methodology for collecting data is peripatetic and qualitative, because the emergent nature of graffiti and its erasure calls for a visual-ethnographic and documentary approach to sources and data. The instances of graffiti that shape the content of this paper have been selected from specific parallel areas located in Lefkosia/Lefkosha, although they sit within an expanding and temporal textual framework of graffiti documented in paint and in incision on Cyprus.[1]

Keywords: graffiti, murals, gender, street art, identity, hooligans, Cyprus, Lefkosia, Lefkosha, anarchists

1 This 'expanding temporal and textual framework of graffiti' is a documentation that began in 1997. At that time much graffiti in Lefkosia, and elsewhere on the island, was collected by *frottage*: graphite rubbings of incisions in the walls. The walls near the Buffer Zone were especially interesting in that regard. As spray paint became more popular photography was used to catalogue this and other emerging trends. The catalogue now includes a thousand or more images, digital and film, contemporary and historical graffiti from both sides of the island, including some twenty remaining wall rubbings from 1997.

ΔΕΝ ΑΝΗΚΩ ΣΕ ΚΑΝΕΝΑ (sic.)
ΔΕΝ ΑΝΗΚΩ ΠΟΥΘΕΝΑ

[I don't belong to anyone/I don't belong anywhere]
– social anarchist graffiti in the moat of the Venetian Walls, Lefkosia

Introduction: Walls, but no Murals

Lefkosia/Lefkosha has no wall murals.[2] A mural is defined here as *a planned, oversized image executed on a large expanse of wall that conveys a specifically local socio-political message in an*

2 Several noteworthy projects have been commissioned to non-Cypriot artists working for entities such as the British Council of Belfast, the British Council, the US Embassy in Cyprus, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Artists include Farhad Nargol O'Neill, 'Constructing the Past' (2006); Xavier Cortada, 'Listen to the Children of the Green Island Mural' (2000); and Dan Perjovschi, 'Leaps of Faith. A Project for the Green Line and for the City of Nicosia' (2005). None of these fits the precise definition of 'mural' given here. All are more or less pan-Cyprian in nature, do not depend on local demand and were spurred by international programmes for social change and reconciliation.

evocative manner. Murals, even if publicly funded, arise thematically from local initiatives to express lived and site-specific experiences, social identification with place, and a desire to express aspirations for the future of the community, by the community. Although the media may vary, murals are usually painted with a brush rather than spray-painted or stencilled and they are usually painted by non-local, semi-professional artists who often act in collaboration with community leaders. Murals can be located on the sides of buildings, homes, highway retaining walls, or any place deemed appropriate by neighbourhood leaders whose interest it is to represent and indicate the presence of a knit community. Where dividing walls as were in Berlin, and are in Israel-Palestine have become an expressive focal point for the populations on either side,[3] Lefkosia does not have this kind of solid wall division. The city, and the island, are bisected by what is known as the UN Buffer Zone, the Green Line or the Dead Zone, which consists of sandbagged dead-ends, barbed wire, and mined or military patrolled open spaces. This 'line' has been perforated by pedestrian and auto checkpoints since 2003, and it is also an area of varying widths, featuring derelict buildings, wild overgrowth and makeshift dead-ends.

The lack of politically erected dividing walls in Cyprus does not explain the lack of murals. In the socially divided city of Derry/Londonderry there are no political dividing walls either,[4] yet murals are the central feature of Bogside, the community that experienced Bloody Sunday in 1972. There, murals are on the sides of buildings and houses, and they are meant to galvanise social recognition of a common local and national past, and also present and claim solidarity with other historical causes such as in Palestine and Cuba. Furthermore in Belfast, where there are politically erected walls ('fences') dividing the two communities, murals are not painted on the fences themselves but rather, like in Derry/Londonderry, on the sides of buildings and homes in politically charged neighbourhoods. The Berlin Wall and the Israeli/Palestine wall may be unique examples of site-specific political wall discourse.[5]

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3 Such murals are not limited to areas of ethnic and political conflict. In addition to the historically controversial, explicitly communist works of Diego Rivera, murals are now a high-profile component of contemporary urban renewal programmes. The largest of these is in the United States: the Mural Arts Programme of Philadelphia – itself inspired by a programme in Chicago – employs murals and muralists to "work on a symbolic level, providing opportunities for communities to express important concerns, values ... their desire to remember those who were overcome or who overcame ..." (Golden *et al.*, 2002, p. 11).

4 "Free Derry Corner" was painted on a freestanding house wall in 1969 to demarcate the entry into Derry; that is, it acted not as a dividing wall but a boundary marker. It now serves as a monument to the community and to the events that took place there, standing without support in the intersection of Lecky Road and Fahan Street.

5 For politically motivated painting on the Israel/Palestine wall, see BANKSY's work, commentary and feedback. One transcript follows:

> "*Old [Palestinian] Man*: 'You paint the wall, you make it look beautiful ...'
> [*BANKSY*]: 'Thanks ...'
> *Old Man*: 'We don't want it to be beautiful, we hate this wall, go home'"
> (BANKSY, 2006, p. 142).

In Lefkosia/Lefkosha, it seems that the cultural apparatuses for mural painting are absent, since blank walls of buildings abound on both sides of the Buffer Zone. But what are these cultural apparatuses? Where and in what social and political circumstances do societies create murals, support them, and maintain them? Why has this fashionable international mode of community expression not been exploited in Lefkosia/Lefkosha?[6]

One reason may be that the Cypriot societies that experienced the events during and leading up to 1974 are deracinated; they are removed physically from the sites of their experiences. Many, although not all, are also removed socially and as a community from their lived past, so that younger members of displaced Lefkosia/Lefkosha communities are not growing up in places that are invested with the history lived by their elders. Turkish Cypriots are officially encouraged by the state to focus on their present life in the north rather than dwell on experiences shared in their former villages in the south. Greek Cypriots by contrast are not at all discouraged from remembering the past.[7] In the south, local memory is preserved through coffeehouses and *somateia*,[8] however refugee church parishes seem most clearly to preserve and transfer the [displaced] social structures and shared experience of one locality. These parishes are self-identified through their priest and the name of their parish but importantly not through a built church.[9] In this way, some activities of the Orthodox Church may serve to exhaust some of the local or community sentiments that might otherwise have resulted in murals in the south. And since displaced Turkish-Cypriot communities are discouraged by the state to envision their past in the south, there may be no local desire to mount a mural – at least about the past. However there would be good reason to do so in order to reinforce concepts of the present and future.[10] Finally, Lefkosia/Lefkosha was, with a few notable exceptions, not resettled after 1974 by many of its

6 The unbalanced relationship between state-sponsored monuments and publicly arranged murals needs to be probed further: Lefkosia/Lefkosha has many state-sponsored monuments and political statues on both sides of the division. When is this a void filled by the state, in terms of the need for public expression; and in what situations does this void-filling pre-empt/proscribe public expression?

7 "Greek Cypriot refugees were re-housed indiscriminately and their settlements contain people from many villages and towns. Thus, on the one hand, they are encouraged to think of themselves as members of a community (the previous village) that no longer exists, while on the other hand, they were placed with people from other villages with whom they were unable to share memories of their previous lives" (Papadakis, 2006, p. 11).

8 For a detailed understanding of the socio-political roles of the coffeehouse in Greek Cypriot culture see (Nicos Philippou, 2007). *Somateia* are the Right wing, often nationalist coffeehouses/sports team clubhouses.

9 In the last ten years many of these transient parishes began to build their own churches. This may in part be because the refugees have finally achieved an economic status that allows for church building. Or it may be a tacit recognition that they will not be able to return in the manner they would have like to.

10 "Officially, the attempt has been to turn the area into their own place. This has led to a policy of erasing the traces of its previous inhabitants, and substituting them with their own. They also had to persuade those who moved into the north that this was truly their 'place'. This necessitated the discouragement of fond reminiscences of their previous 'places', which were officially deemed improper" (Papadakis, 1998, pp. 22-23).

original inhabitants. Instead, parts of the area became derelict and parts were re-populated by foreigners, guest workers, refugees and Turkish settlers.[11] The bulk of the people who experienced the local history of Lefkosia/Lefkosha no longer inhabit the divided city. Those people are dispersed throughout Cyprus, and the world, and their relative sense of community might be formed and found among other Cypriots in general, based on 'Greek/Turkish-Cypriot-ness', rather than in their specific locality within Cyprus. These are some suggestions as to why Lefkosia/Lefkosha are visually silent as *communities*.[12] But in this kind of environment graffiti becomes a salient feature of visual public discourse.

The youth growing up now in Lefkosia/Lefkosha are the ones who are spraying (or not spraying) the walls.[13] Graffiti in Cyprus is nearly exclusively a young male interest, even though in other places female graffiti writers are recognised and active. In introducing graffiti as a mode of public political discourse in Lefkosia/Lefkosha, this paper chooses to look not just at the occurrence of graffiti, but also at its erasure and – pointedly – at where graffiti is noticeably absent. In addition to the central question as to the general absence of graffiti in Lefkosha, there is also a marked absence of graffiti done by young female artists. Where do the female counterparts to male graffiti artists find adequate modes of political expression or dissent? Even though most graffiti is anonymous or pseudonymous, the gender of the writer can be ascertained through social research and then tracked by style. The quote used in the introduction ("I don't belong to anyone/I don't belong anywhere") is interesting in this respect.[14] The writer of this phrase is male. Knowing this

11 A 2004 Household Survey prepared for UNOPS assessed the demographics of all households within the walled city. It indicates that only forty-five per cent of households in the south are occupied by Greek Cypriots. The rest of the households claim a diversity of origins: Pontic, Indian, Philippino, Pakistani, Russian, Greek, Sri Lankan, Chinese and others, making up a thirty-nine per cent minority of extremely diverse origins. In the north the majority are occupied by mainland Turks – fifty-seven per cent – and followed by thirty-two per cent Turkish Cypriots. Only two per cent of those households are other than Turkish or Turkish Cypriot.

12 This disassociation is well exposed in Papadakis' research in the Tahtakallas area of Lefkosia:

> "The refugees typically spoke of 'being' from this or that village in the north, and of their own home and their own place as the one in the north. They complained that it was difficult for community life to emerge in Tahtakallas, since each family came from a different village and they were 'like strangers' to each other ... An attempt to set up a coffee shop in 'Tahtakallas Settlement' which could become a focus for (at least male) community life did not work out. The man who tried to open the coffee shop in the Settlement saw his efforts completely fail since, as he said, 'there is no sense of community here, so how could a coffee shop work?'" (Papadakis, 1998, p. 22).

13 Some of these youth are part of a discussion related to children of refugees and post-memory (see G. Dawson, 2007 and J. Nassari, 2007); how this generation of youth envisions itself now, as part of [or not part of] a community linked to a place, may be related to the stories they hear about the past from their family. Graffiti's spontaneous expression, or the lack of graffiti, may be indicative of more psychological – historical ends than will be discussed within the framework of this paper.

14 The phrase is written on a wall inside the D'Avila moat, below Plateia Eleftherias, in a garden area frequented more often by foreign workers than by Cypriots. In a sense, the contemporary reading of this quote is the most

problematises the implicit feminist criticism of the gendered – possessive surnames in Greek culture.[15] In Lefkosia/Lefkosha, only one work by a female writer was identified but here the veridicality of the source is questionable. Her identity and activity is guarded by a male who is himself interested to be noted, while hiding her.

Traditionally, and until a few years ago, female faces fronted the cause of the Missing[16] but this cause is less popular in the current generation of youth who are distanced by time and other layers of personal and family history from the war in 1974. There are not many other public arenas for the female voice in political matters.[17] The lack of female hooligan graffiti is not at all surprising,

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interesting, because even though it is written in a language perhaps unreadable to most of the park's denizens, it nevertheless speaks to their extraction from 'home', while ironically commenting on their non-negotiable status as workers here. In some qualified respects, they do belong to someone (their employers). If a foreign worker did personalise the phrase, however, it could be understood as a declaration of personal freedom and dissent. By contrast, the non-transparency of Greek-Cypriot culture is also implicit in this reading. The Greek phrase may be interpreted as part of the dominant national culture that is present, visible, and yet largely unavailable to all non-Greek-speaking inhabitants: a graphic image of linguistic dis-inclusion that may be read reflexively, interpreted as being aimed at foreigners and non-Greek speaking nationals themselves (i.e. [since you can't read this,]"you don't belong ..."). If there was no attempt by the writer to take audience into consideration, then the work is interestingly posed on a historical ring of walls that were intended to unify and protect what is now a famously divided city. The moat itself is a remainder and reminder of the failed Venetian attempt to resist the Ottoman invasion that took place on 9 September 1570, and resulted in a massacre of Nicosia's 20,000 male inhabitants, and the sale of women and children as slaves. In a historical framework, a Cypriot male's expression on the moat's walls could be read as a claim to independence as a result of total loss; or as a complete lack of root, identity and direction. Since the writer of the graffiti in focus here is supposedly affiliated with anarchists, the last interpretation is probably the closest to what he was claiming, and probably without intentional semiotic overlap with the architecture on which it was painted. At the time of this revision only two phrases of graffiti have been found that are most likely written by a Sri-Lankan. Both are in support of the LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam], and both written on the portals of Paphos Gate.

15 It has been suggested that this phrase, "I don't belong to anyone" has long been a part of pan-Mediterranean feminist challenges to the patronymics that literally mean that the woman belongs to her father or husband.

16 Greek Cypriots count 1468 missing from the time of the Turkish Army invasions of 1974. Among other groups fighting for attention to the problem of the Missing, *Oi Manadhes tis Kyprou* (Mothers of Cyprus) is a group of women who sat at the UN Buffer Zone checkpoint at Ledra Palace and handed out leaflets about their cause. These women lost family members and/or spouses during the war. They dressed in traditional mourning attire and confronted tourists crossing to the north when there was only one UN checkpoint by the Ledra Palace Hotel. They also appeared internationally and actively sought written and personal correspondence with politicians, diplomats and policy makers. Since 2003 their activities lessened.

17 In *Violence* Žižek concludes, "Those in power often prefer even a 'critical' participation, a dialogue, to silence – just to engage us in 'dialogue', to make sure our ominous passivity is broken" (Žižek, 2008, p. 217). The silence of Turkish Cypriots in general, and women in the south should be well noted, as this non-participation in public discourse may set liberal expectations about [participatory] government off course.

since football and its *somateia* or *syllogoi*[18] are almost without exception for men. Young women, when asked, feign disinterest in the Left vs. Right athletics discourse and usually follow a masculine social lead in choosing sides. In addition to outlining a masculinity study worth probing further, the noticeable absence of young women participating in the public political spectrum, including graffiti writing, casts light on a masculine hegemony in Lefkosia/Lefkosha that seems to co-opt the feminine point of view by appearing to promote or protect women, their concerns and interests. Perhaps the feminine voice can be viewed as a silent narration that is visible by way of a recognisable absence.

With a few sparkling exceptions, there is little current graffiti that confronts the actual and mundane political issues of ongoing conflict and occupation on either side of the city. One anarchical stencil appears near the Buffer Zone in the north with the silhouette of an electric drill inside the silhouette of a speedy-looking shopping cart. It reads simply, "drilling the border". Another exception is on part of a wall ending at Ledras Street closing off a road going into the Buffer Zone.

18 Right-wing and Left-wing assembly places/football clubhouses.

This roadblock made of flimsy whitewashed boards was sprayed with several layers of graffiti and again whitewashed in early March 2009. But in February of 2009 blue letters read, "close the roadblocks [or checkpoints]", and signed with a fascist sun-cross. This was over-sprayed in black with tight lettering reading above, "I don't forget nationalism (1963)[19] – burn the roadblocks", and signed with the encircled 'A' of anarchy. Finally only "nationalism" was left, the rest being sprayed over with blue. The content and style are directly related to the location of the graffiti – more or less within 200 metres of the Lokmaji Checkpoint on Ledras Street – an area where anarchical, socialist groups tend to confront hellenocentric groups. The details of the groups involved and their signature styles will be advanced later in this discussion. Even though the graffiti on this roadblock is an exception, it distinctly reveals the south's internal conflict at a group level about the political *status quo*. Graffiti close the Buffer Zone in the south is almost exclusively a blunt, clashing discourse of socialist-anarchical (Left wing) against Right wing hellenocentric expression; it is less about popular culture, football and personal expression, some of which are also politicised modalities that become more prevalent further from the actual contested areas.

Popular Culture and Street Art

Graffiti here is openly defined as *rapidly produced anonymous public writing by an individual*. An examination of the amount and kind of graffiti in Lefkosia/Lefkosha reveals significant differences in the way graffiti is deployed as a medium for expression of identity in this divided society. Why does the individual actor, the graffiti artist, take the place of more collaborative efforts like murals? What is gender's role in graffiti's discourse? What groups are [meaningfully] left out of the discourse? What kinds of political sentiments get expressed? Who are the intended readers? What is the relationship between architecture and graffiti? The kinds of graffiti that appear merit careful parsing because they suggest a current picture of local identity and identities. Recognising these and other differences that are exposed in graffiti may lead to better application of reconciliation programmes designed for both communities and the island as a whole.

For this paper, it is essential to distinguish and set aside the style of graffiti associated with popular culture, and that emerged as the significant visual apparatus associated with the rise of the hip-hop music and skateboarding scenes, in the 1990s. This is the kind of spray-can graffiti that originated in New York and Philadelphia in the 1960s and which rapidly became popular thereafter in Europe, Latin America and elsewhere. It was a direct response to so-called ghettos and the advancing differences between rich and poor in capitalist and consumer societies. This kind of graffiti is sometimes viewed as a form of class struggle: a way for working class youth to express

19 An ironic overlap of the ideological use of "I don't forget [the Turkish invasion and occupation]", associated with conservative Greek Cypriots; and "1963" which was one of the flashpoint years for interethnic violence often cited by Turkish Cypriots and Left-wing Greek Cypriots, but ignored by conservative Greek Cypriots. .

their individual existences in a global society that is systematised, sterilised, and beholden to wealthy corporations. Through a simple act of writing one's moniker on a wall ('tagging'), commercial architecture, advertising billboards and other strategic uses of free viewing space become spectra for social criticism. In this way, graffiti can be interpreted as a form of class struggle that articulates dissent against corporations which hijack the gaze of local, working class populations by appropriating the space for commercial purposes including advertising.[20] For similar reasons graffiti on vehicles of public transportation[21] is a symbolic act in an arena where individuality is subordinated to the mass [transit]. The border between graffiti and vandalism is difficult to define, usually contingent on point of view, and often situational; graffiti is often associated with gangs, and sometimes with territoriality[22] although these determinations are also strongly contingent on point of view. There is a huge volume of websites, published papers and newspaper articles given to declaiming graffiti's place as an art form.

Street Art: Throws and Pieces, Tags and Crews

Contemporary use of the aerosol can to spray graffiti has evolved into general types, all which appear to varying degrees in Lefkosia/Lefkosha. The most visible kind are the large and colourful, fat-lettered 'throws', and also 'tags' which are quickly scribbled, simple (sometimes marker) signatures that serve as personal logos, sometimes related to an act of daring. More evolved works that include recognisable imagery, story and often portraiture, combined with expressive phrases are called 'pieces' (from 'masterpiece'). Pieces appear rarely in the south[23] and have not yet been tracked in the north.

Throws and tags appear with proficiency in the north and the south, put up in areas where graffiti seems to be condoned, and elsewhere. Graffiti is more sophisticated in the south than in the north, a fact explained by several things, including a difference in the arrival and spread of the hip hop music scene and its related styles. More centrally, there has been a difference in high speed internet access: the north did not get ADSL lines until June 2007. Interviews with graffiti writers in both the north and the south confirmed that access to images and networking on the Internet

20 See Werwath (2006).

21 For originary examples, see Takis 183's role in the expansion of graffiti in New York, and Banksy's self-described beginnings as a graffiti writer in the British transport system (Banksy, 2006, p. 13).

22 Cities then were an "... environment that fuelled an artistic battle against the powerbrokers in society, and a breakaway from poverty and the ghetto" (Ganz, 2006, p. 8).

23 There are several noteworthy pieces on the graffiti walls near Kykkos High School in Lefkosia. They seem to be the result of an interest group that passed through the school around 2003. Nothing of this complexity has emerged, at least there, since then and, in contrast to other more rapid kinds of graffiti, there are no pieces in highly visible areas in or around Lefkosia/Lefkosha aside from those aforementioned.

is an essential way that these street artists learn and improve their styles and techniques.[24] Another absolutely essential point of difference is the infrastructural development in the south where poured concrete walls and smooth concrete underpasses and retaining walls are common. These are the best surfaces for street art, and as the north develops its built infrastructure there may also be an increase in desirable areas for graffiti artists to work there.[25]

Some graffiti might appear to indicate territories of graffiti 'crews', or teams of writers operating under one tag, and their 'turf' – the territory they attempt to dominate. It was gleaned through interviews, however, that these are appropriated signs, without reference to actual territory battles that can occur in other cities with more hardened forms of urban culture.

Graffiti associated with popular culture can be interpreted as a mode of dissent, even in Cyprus. As a visual language of urban, low-income oppression graffiti is transmitted through popular culture, hip hop music and even the skateboard scene. The international popularity of these modalities compressed the individuated meanings of, and dissociated graffiti from its roots in urban North America and it has become a visual mode of dissent *in general*, including and especially on Cyprus. More elaborate works sometimes feature portraits and names of people perceived as liberators from oppression, and this is also true in pieces located in the south. Che Guevara is a popular graphic icon in Lefkosia, so is Griva Digenis.[26] Quite recently the popularised stencilling style of street artist Shepard Fairey[27] is used to iconize Alexandros Grigoropoulos.[28] His face appears in high contrast with the phrase, "he was 15 years old – HERO", and these images appeared in Lefkosia around the time of riots about the cause of his death. On one of these stencils "HERO" was over-sprayed with [Right wing] blue paint, so that the image simply read, "he was 15".

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24 See also Ganz (2006, p. 10).

25 It has been suggested that a reason for the lack of graffiti in the north is a difference in the perception of public space there, and the related ways in which youth would 'hang out' in such places but not write graffiti there. In this study little correspondence emerged between so-called 'hang out places' and spray can graffiti in either the north or the south; the primary aim of the graffiti observed in this paper is visibility to a particular, even if reflexive, audience. Of course graffiti scratched with a pen or written in marker seems to be a universal and historical remainder of boredom when located on benches, bus stations, school desks and other such spaces designated for passing time. On Cyprus this kind of graffiti is found in the north, the south, and in archaeological sites.

26 Georgios Grivas, a.k.a *Digenis* (1898-1974): Greek Cypriot Colonel in the Greek Army and leader of EOKA fighters. "Liberator" of Cyprus from the British Colonial Administration, and leader of EOKA B organisation for the purpose of uniting Cyprus with Greece after self-determination was achieved.

27 Shepard Fairey is known for his graphic portraits with slogans, especially the well-known image of 2008 US presidential candidate Barack Obama with the slogan, "hope".

28 A fifteen year old killed by police in Athens in December 2008, whose death spurred weeks of anti-police and anti-state violence all over Greece and elsewhere. Left-wing and anarchical groups tend to view him as a victim and a martyr, while most Right-wing groups and Greek nationalists see him as the opposite.

Most proponents of graffiti as an art form would like to distance themselves from the criminal, while still preserving the so-called 'street credit', the *caché*, which graffiti acquired in its romanticised present and past in working class areas and so-called ghettos. While owning or disowning the history of this kind of graffiti, its proponents have renamed what they do: *street art*, *aerosol art*, *neo-graffiti*, and *post-graffiti*. These designations are intended to diffuse and re-direct the notion of graffiti as plain vandalism. Street art is often touted as an 'art form' and since the early 1980s works of graffiti have been imported into museums and otherwise co-opted by the market economy.[29] Street artists apply different (primarily aesthetic) goals to similar (and often still illegal) methods, but the most important distinction here is that street art is inextricably linked with cosmopolitan trends in style (e.g. hip hop music, skateboard culture), and style-based market consumption. Given graffiti's origins, there would seem to be a paradox in the fact that many of the young street artists in Lefkosia/Lefkosha come from upper-middle and upper class families. But these are the sections of the population that currently can afford to take an interest in popular culture through exposure in travel, access to the internet, and in some cases by communicating with each other across the Buffer Zone. Still, some of street art's aesthetic power, its *caché*, comes from the fact that it contains historically recognised visual signals of the so-called ghetto. It is 'cool'.

29 See A. Charalambous (2009), for a description of the self-styled vandal and commercial graffiti artist, 'paparazzi' in Lefkosia.

And it evokes a *frisson* that is commercially available to bourgeois and middle class voyeurs or consumers.

In Cyprus, where land occupation is an essentially definitive question, some of graffiti's origins in territoriality bring out an ironic, local dimension to that *frisson*. Cyprus' street art is different because it was always an appropriated art form, hitched to a romanticised understanding of urban culture and life. Few of the issues of class and corporate dominance have been relevant on Cyprus until quite recently, but now that such societal fractures are appearing, graffiti may become more importantly interpreted as an articulation of dissent than before. For now the number of graffiti writers is small, by one graffiti writer's estimation there is a group of about twenty active and inactive artists in Lefkosia; and from the point of view of the establishment, it seems that street art is more or less understood as a way for youths to express cosmopolitan (even if romanticised), aesthetic yearnings. In different ways, schools and other institutions normalise graffiti, with an aim to take advantage of this apparently bi-communal desire to be cosmopolitan among Cypriot youth.

A case in point is where the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) held a bi-communal graffiti contest, the winners of which have their work on a wall outside the Ledra Palace Hotel within the UN-patrolled Buffer Zone. In this example street art presents a mixed message, because on one level it uses the expropriated visual language of gang territoriality, while simultaneously advertising bi-communal partnership in a zone still hotly under negotiation. The subtlety of this situation is almost certainly lost on the participating youth whose passive interest in popular culture has been their stylistic guide, but it is not likely to be lost on other passers-by, especially foreigners for whom graffiti style is nuanced by a different set of connotations. It also begs attention to the fact that there are few if any such elaborate works of street art remaining permanent in the north; i.e. graffiti is not [yet] an accepted medium of expression there. The UNDP's street art project is aimed to do what murals do: it makes a social cause visible as an appeal to the community and to the passing public. But the medium delivers a confusing message.

Street Art Discourse

Street art is varied in terms of the reflexive discursive properties of each mode. Throws can appeal to the general public because of their graphic and colourful aesthetics, regardless of the literal content, which is only sometimes self-evident. Discourse related to tags (both individual and crews) are specific to the in-groups; i.e. the writers themselves. Tags are usually considered to be a public nuisance because they are prolific, appear rapidly *en masse* and can become a palimpsest of scrawls indecipherable to the general public. Because street art is part of another more general and international discourse that is also intertwined with the hip hop music and skateboarding scenes, I will localise this paper and continue with a focus on graffiti that is not considered street art, but which is demonstrably part of a local discourse that includes regional politics and dissent.

Graffiti in the North and in the South

The most defining feature of Lefkosia/Lefkosha is the ring of Venetian walls that encircle it,

enclosing the old city on both sides of the Buffer Zone. Other than where demographic considerations shaped data collection, this paper refers to instances of graffiti collected in parallel areas within or just outside of the two halves of the Venetian Walls. Both societies have easy access to spray paint. But where graffiti itself is not considered a crime in the north – it is generally considered "dirtying the environment" (Yazilari, 2008), or destroying someone else's property[30] – offenders in the south could face up to 3 years imprisonment and up to €2,560 in fines. Regular articles about graffiti in the south's newspapers rarely if ever report someone being caught; officials reluctantly commenting something like: "they work at night", or "they run" (Saoulli, 2008).

A comparison of two incidents that took place within days of each other in early September 2008 reveals how differently authorities in the south and north deal with graffiti. Confrontational graffiti, either in scale or in message, can appear in the south without pursuit from the authorities as demonstrated by the massive defacement on 2 September 2008 of a monumental sculpture of Archbishop Makarios III.[31] This landmark within the walls of Lefkosia, centred on the lawn of the Archbishopric, was splashed using balloons filled with yellow and red paint and accompanied with a slogan reading "For Sale: Down With Idols", written on a retaining wall at its base. The slogan, while probably intended as an affront to the Church, also confronted the general public because of its spectacular location. In spite of the largeness of the statement, no one was accused. Makarios' combined affiliation with Church, state, and his nostalgic significance to large parts of the Greek-Cypriot community causes a range of interpretations and possible group affiliation or political orientation of the writer(s). In the Archbishop Chrysostomos II's words, it "could've taken place in mere seconds". (Leonidou, 2008). Instead of launching an effort to find the actor(s) responsible, he thought better to let the matter drop saying, "the best response to crazy people is not to respond" (*ibid.*), and the monument was covered until taken away for conservation and reinstallation elsewhere.[32] Similarly, Demetriou and Trimikliniotis (2008) discuss decisions and assessments made by the Cyprus Equality Body where school authorities did not make full police reports where graffiti with Nazi content was conflated with football team graffiti. Apparently, even though the schools condemn the Nazi content of the graffiti, authorities are reluctant to make the problem public because they claim that to do so might glorify the perpetrators.[33]

In contrast, there was one isolated incident with Turkish-Cypriot graffiti that took place in

30 Personal conversation with a Turkish-Cypriot judge, 26 February 2009.

31 Makarios III was the Archbishop of Cyprus (1950-1977), Ethnarch of the Greek-Cypriot community advocating union with Greece and self-determination for the island. He was president of Cyprus (1959-1977).

32 The incident occurred while the monument was overdue to be relocated to Kykkos Monastery.

33 The decision refers to a report by the Head of Educational Psychology, which claimed that whilst racial discrimination and racist behaviour are to be condemned, such issues must avoid any media coverage for fear that it would spread as "psychosocially vulnerable persons are at risk of copying action which is self-destructive or destructive of others when they know that they will [be] glorified as heroes via exaggeration" (Demetriou and Trimikliniotis, 2008).

Lefkosha the same week as the Makarios statue was painted. Four boys were accused of, and arrested for writing "Occupying Turkish army, sod off" on a wall. The police response in the north was radically different than the Archbishop's response in the south. First, police apparently apprehended the young men in the act, and they were additionally accused of graffiti that had taken place in the area over the course of a month. Second, they were publicly identified individually by first and last name, held in confinement for three days, and then taken to court.[34] Their parents were also exposed individually by name, the police raided their homes, and several computers were confiscated. Both the examples in north and south were ostensibly anti-state messages, albeit different ones, but the ways in which follow-through by the entities offended diverged shows the individual – versus group – identity differences in all aspects of graffiti in Lefkosia/Lefkosha. Individuals were exposed in the north, presumably to keep order and maintain social conformity by way of shame and small-society recognition. In the south, neither groups nor individuals were exposed, presumably to keep order by refusing to exclude the actors from the social structure. The authorities' refusal to recognise a group and refusal to punish (and thereby glorify) its actor is also a strategy that forces social conformity.

Graffiti not associated with popular culture in Lefkosia/Lefkosha seems to articulate dissent and also conformity, individual and group identification. These ethnic, political, social and historical postures can be interpreted through verbal and visual graphic content, symbology, medium, strategies of location and placement, over-writing and also erasure. This study reveals two completely different kinds of discourse related to group, or non-group identification. Graffiti writers in the south tend to identify themselves as members of groups. In the few places where graffiti occurs in the north, writers tend to identify themselves as individuals. But it is the Turkish Army writing, and chalk writings by children in Turkish settler areas that make up the bulk of this individualised action. With the special exception of the incident described above, in general one could say that the Turkish-Cypriot population is visually silent; graffiti in the rare case is usually about love, or a personal name.

Baudrillard's idea that the silence of the masses is a strategy of dissent in the face of a dictatorial Media monologue[35] is perhaps not very useful in looking at other Western or European societies. But it does bear some resemblance, at least visually, to Cypriot society in Lefkosha. Some of the Turkish Cypriots interviewed for this project say that their belief in fair government ended long before that of the Greek Cypriots, and as a result they are less likely to be motivated by group concerns. One Turkish Cypriot interviewed commented that the lack of graffiti, especially political graffiti, was protective self-interest intensified by fear of the police. Exoteric influence may explain

34 Deputy inspector Oral Ordu said under oath that the young men had written slogans against the Security Forces Command (Turkish Cypriot army) on the sides of buildings. This is obviously not the case with the graffiti they had apparently written when they were arrested which specifically named the Turkish army (Yazilari, 2008).

35 See Baudrillard (1988). For social group silence as provocative dissent, see also Žižek (2008).

some of this difference also: in Greece graffiti is, and historically has been, a feature of public spaces.[36, 37] This is not particularly the case with graffiti in Turkish and Ottoman public spaces, with the major although recent exception of street art, associated with popular culture. Even if the difference in graffiti is purely a result of external influence, it is quite a strong indicator of differing concepts of social identity as well as different orientations concerning uses of public space.

Graffiti and Group Identity in the South

With some effort graffiti can be expunged with paint and, to push the obvious, whitewashing truncates discourse. In the south there has been minimal effort to do this, resulting in conversations that bloom on walls, sometimes with humour. Is this apparent tolerance of graffiti a way to condone the content? Is it an implicit resignation to or acknowledgement of the continued, visceral division between the Left and Right in contemporary Cyprus?[38]

Left-wing and Right-wing politics are inconveniently convoluted in the Republic of Cyprus and conflated with elsewhere non-ideological organisations. This division becomes architecturally visible in the emergence of politically separate coffee houses[39] and the football clubs affiliated with them.[40] Greek-Cypriot athletic teams have been officially politicised since 1948. Bitter, sometimes violent local class struggle during hard economic times in the 1930s – late 40s meant a new critical

36 Graffiti has been found in the Athenian Agora dated to the time just after the introduction of the alphabet in Greece, in the eighth century BC. The graffiti was both incised and painted and contains all the features of modern graffiti: names, polyglot notes and lewd remarks (American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1974).

37 In Cyprus, as elsewhere in the world, there are numerous examples of historical and modern Greek graffiti that remain in areas no longer inhabited by Greek speakers. One particularly strong example of this is in the village of Yılmazkoy/Skylloura, in north Cyprus, where the Greek Orthodox church was converted to a mosque. The front left wall of the mosque now bears remnants of graffiti in support of Grivas [Digenis], leader of the Right-wing nationalist EOKA organisation.

38 Lefkonos Street in Lefkosia is an interesting example of strategic erasure. In the spring of 2008 a large expanse of wall enclosing the elementary school was emblazoned in red with "Greek Cypriots, Turkish Cypriots – workers, brothers", finishing with the red star of Communism/Socialism. A similar swathe of wall perpendicular to the first wall, leading down into a municipal parking lot, had a separate work: a conversation. The under-writing was blue lettering with the symbols associated with APOEL football club, saying: "Turkish Cypriots: sons of whores" *(putanas yioi T/C)*, which was then over-written in black by an Omonoia football club supporter to read, "oranges: sons of whores". APOEL's colours are orange and blue, and 'orange' also rhymes, *(putanas yioi portokali)*. Close to 25 August 2008 the anarchist-socialist slogan was whitewashed, while the football discourse, which is essentially a political Left–Right discourse, was preserved on what is practically the same walled area. Inquiry at the Mayor's office eliminated two possible whitewashers in that locale: the municipality and the school district. The only remaining likely whitewasher is the Church, on whose grounds the school is built. There is an additional irony here in that the street's name, Lefkonos, carries a semblance of the word for 'white', or 'pure': λευκός.

39 See Panayiotou (2006).

40 For more on period athletics in the media, see Sophocleous (2008).

awareness and unity among workers at the time. Political divisions also emerged with different alliances (Left – Right) during the Greek Civil War, and later during the EOKA period where Cypriots fought against Colonial rule. This animated Left-Right athletics discourse results in even some small Cypriot villages having separate football pitches for the Left and for the Right, and it bears explanation because sports-related (hooligan) graffiti in the south is laden with political-cultural references.

The Cypriot Left emerged in the 1920s out of a yearning for modern ideals, coinciding with labour uprisings and lower class struggle for economic survival. It came into existence against an already present Right, made up of Cypriots who maintained wealth and power under the British Colonial system. The Cypriot Communist party (KKK), officially founded in 1926, was ideologically inspired from outside Cyprus and for the following score of years it united and mobilised Greek- and Turkish-Cypriot workers, eventually becoming a target for entities wishing to maintain power (i.e. the Right, the Church, the British Colonial Administration). Alternating between a legal trade union and outlawed political movement,[41] the Cyprus Communist Party eventually became the current, legally recognised Left-wing party AKEL, (the Uplifting Party of the Working People). AKEL continued to promote the agenda of the working-class and it took a staunchly pro-Soviet position during the Cold War. At the same time the Right, and the Greek Orthodox Church hoped for *enosis*, or union with Greece. The recent version of this dialectic became most visible during the Annan Plan referendum. But where one would have expected the proletarian agenda of the Left to affirm the reunification of the island, the leadership of AKEL officially promoted a 'no' vote and the majority of AKEL voted 'no'. And where one would expect the Right to want to affirm their "Greek-ness" by rejecting the plan for reunification with Turkish Cypriots, some of the Right-wing parties officially affirmed the plan (the centre-right party DISY), but many did not: most visibly the ruling party at the time (DIKO), the Church, and various nationalist groups who supported President Papadopoulos. Reasons for the official party positions on the Annan Plan are and were numerous; individual decisions were often linked to personal interest, party politics, and also were often unrelated to the facts of the Annan Plan itself.

During the period leading up to the Annan Plan referendum it was quite common to see discourse around affirmations or rejections in both the north and south, and what little political graffiti in the north exists, some remains from that time. Leftist graffiti usually affirms the Annan Plan, and nationalist graffiti associated with the Right usually comes along with a "no". A unique example of this from the north are two fading triple-crescent symbols (or *three hilal*) most often used by the MHP [Nationalist Action Party] and the [Right-wing fascist group] Grey Wolves. It was found behind the Lemar store near Kermia: a place where the authorities are slow to whitewash graffiti. Their symbols are an obvious response to the *'EVET'* [yes] written first, underneath.

41 Except the period 1926-1931, where the KKK was a legal political party.

This fragment of discourse is possibly complicated: the Leftist who wrote '*EVET*' in favour of the Annan Plan is likely to have been Turkish Cypriot, where the *three hilal* symbol could have been written by a settler from Turkey or by a radical conservative Turkish Cypriot. It is also possible that the graffiti writer was only visiting the island for a strategic period of time: university-aged supporters of the aforementioned Right-wing Turkish groups are known to arrive on Cyprus around election times in order to rally support. In a very much smaller way than in the south, there is a conservative Turkish presence visible in the north but it is not, however, in opposition to a visible Left. Since the referendum, the amount of political graffiti in the north has declined, just as in the south those '*oxi-nai*' [no-yes] slogans are also fading. But a bifurcation of Greek-Cypriot society now comes out with force in writings by sports fans, animating the politicised athletics discourse that precedes the Referendum by almost sixty years. Such is not visibly the case in Turkish-Cypriot society.

Lefkosia's hooligan fans of football teams Omonoia (Left wing) and APOEL (Right wing) are prolific. Typically APOEL hooligans and Right-wing writers use blue, orange or black spray paint, and include but are not limited to the sun-cross symbol of fascism, the Greek flag and the following phrases: '*ELLAS*' [Greece]; 'EOKA' [National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters]; '*dhen ksexno*' [I don't forget], 'ultras'; 'A.U.' [APOEL ultras]; and references to Grivas.[42] Unlike

42 See endnote 26.

Omonoia, which aligns itself with the presently ruling Cyprus Communist party AKEL, APOEL officially claims no affiliation with a named political party. Omonia hooligans and Left-wing writers never use blue, probably because it refers to the Greek flag. They usually use red (of Communism) or black spray paint, and include but are not limited to the hammer and sickle symbol of Communism; AKEL; 'Gate 9' or '*ΘΥΡΑ* 9' – their gate in the football stadium; or a mysterious '*ΚΑΟΥ* 9' – which several people interviewed insist refers to the burning of stands, or of being 'burned out' as in smoking marijuana. They also co-opt the encircled 'A' of anarchy, references to Che [Guevara] and antifascist or 'antifa' slogans.

Most hooligan graffiti takes place just outside the walls of Lefkosia. As the contested landscape becomes essentialised, so does the graffiti argument, which looks similar in style to hooligan graffiti but is unfettered by football symbology in proximity to the Buffer Zone. Therefore a general discussion can be debated about the graffiti of Left versus Right in Lefkosia, but the actors may be dissimilar, and variously motivated in different places. By the Buffer Zone, Right-wing, pro-union with Greece graffiti tends to overlap with anarchistic socialist graffiti; slogans refer to global struggles between the Left and Right, but are sometimes anchored in the history of Cyprus as well. This is particularly true in the neighbourhood of the Archbishopric of Cyprus where atheist, anti-Church, anti-State graffiti is often countered with pro-*Enosis* discourse. Actors writing closer to the Buffer Zone may be, and seem to be slightly more informed than average football hooligans about the content of the symbols they use and references they make.

Hooligans write anywhere, but most regularly on top of graffiti by the opposing group. They write on temporary walls erected in front of building sites, shop doors, retaining walls along

roadsides, the sides of shops, houses, road signs; in sum, they write on almost any surface anywhere. There is no apparent order or reason in the choice of placement except, if anything, to deface and corrupt what was written underneath. Hooligan symbols and phrases are crudely followed in the context of group identity and often not equated with social reality; i.e. an APOEL fan may not personalise the way a fascist government would affect his life, and yet he identifies with fascist symbols.[43] Thus, as with the assumed nature of street art and its associated styles of graffiti in Lefkosia/Lefkosha, the meaningful use of hooligan slogans is often legitimately open to question.

Audience: Hooligan Graffiti in the South

Cypriots recognise and understand the political meanings and cultural implications of hooligan graffiti and even though they are likely to have seen the same phrases and symbols repeatedly, this is not viewed as an attempt to shape public knowledge. Hooligan graffiti is an in-group dialogue between Left-and Right-wing hooligans: each the audience for the other. Where Durkheim claims that "crime draws honest consciousnesses together ... [and] a common indignation is expressed", (Durkheim, 1933, p. 58) the hooligan spraying and over-spraying the opposition can be interpreted multiply. First, because graffiti is a crime in the south, it generally reinforces the 'hool' (hooligan) identity against the rest of society. Interpreted from within the group, the graffiti is also a reinforcement of an in-group, shared set of values implied by conservative or radical slogans. Hooligan graffiti is often an expression of indignation about the opposition's set of values. No strategy is evident to convince the general public of anything. Certainly there is no attempt at

43 As of writing, the most recent letter to the editor of the *Cyprus Mail* regarding the rampant use of swastikas by APOEL fans was printed 19 March 2009 (see Porter, 2009).

aesthetics, as is the case with street artists. The importance of the APOEL vs. Omonia graffiti is in its indignant use of political slogans and writing and over-writing in an internally significant and culturally specific battle of Left vs. Right. No such battles exist in the north.

Graffiti and Individual Identity in the North

With a few noteworthy exceptions, most of the writing in the north is personal: about love, and names, nicknames. There are some examples of sports team initials, but the teams do not have the political connotation that they do in the south, except that they are almost always Turkish football teams not local ones. One lonely example of such graffiti, "CARSI" [meaning 'downtown' and short for the Group Bazaar] was written just outside the Venetian walls in Lefkosha. It is the name of a supposedly-defunct trend of Beshiktash football club supporters: interesting in that the trend (expressly not a fan club) is so anti-everything "except Ataturk" that they self-negated in May 2008. Even the 'A' of anarchy that is sometimes used in their slogan is officially denied its common significance.

A demonstrably large number of the names inscribed or written in the north are linked to Turkish army, and 'someone from a town' in Turkey. None of the fulminating conversations that occur in the south are apparent in the north. One exceptional example of a conversation does stand out, even though it is a simple give-and-take statement. It is 'HATAYLI' written on the back of

Turk Marif Kolegi (high school), probably by a Turkish army soldier. Students interviewed said that this was written by "a guy from Hatay,[44] and we don't like them – they cause crimes". The overlay of the word *piç* (bastard) exposes an anti-settler discourse that was reinforced by the student's comment. The graffiti is complicated, however, in terms of authorship. This ethnic slur could have been written by a Turkish Cypriot who is wary of mainland Turkish settlers (as was the informant). But it could also have been written by a conservative mainland Turk staying in Cyprus, even and especially another army member; in this case it would be someone who is against the presence of ethnic Kurds in the modern Turkish state. The same mode of thought applies here as it did previously in the discussion of the *three hilal:* the graffiti writer may have been visiting.

There is an interesting difference in exoteric orientation, where it occurs among football hooligans and the Cyprus Army in the south, and the Turkish Army in the north. A football hooligan in the south will sometimes also name similarly politicised Greek football teams, for example an APOEL fan may write PAO 13 (Panathinaikos – Gate 13), as both are Right-wing teams.[45] Greek-Cypriot hooligans identify themselves within a group, and externally link that group to other groups in Greece. Football graffiti in the north has no local-to-external links. A very few, rare instances of support for Turkish football clubs, unaligned with local Turkish-Cypriot clubs, have been noted but with problematic authorship. Similarly, a soldier's graffiti in the south commonly links him with his military group identity in birth year and division (A or B); the branch of the military is sometimes written also, but less frequently than in the past.[46] Graffiti by soldiers in the Turkish Army, who are distinctly part of a group in northern Cyprus, do something different: they externally identify themselves as individuals by using their first name and their hometown in Turkey. They do not tend to identify themselves externally with any other group. No indication of group identification or exoteric identification such as occurs in the south has been observed in the Turkish-Cypriot community.

Audience: Graffiti in the North

The implicit audience for the graffiti in the north varies depending on the type of graffiti. For the soldiers carving their hometown, this may be a purely solipsistic act of self-identification and hometown pride, whereas the declarations of love may be read within a small group of people who know the lovers and can identify them. Authorship, and therefore contingent meaning is

44 Hatay is a province in Eastern Turkey, with a sizeable population of ethnic Kurds and also Arabs. Until recently it was a contested area between Turkey and Syria.

45 The interpretation of football allegiances in Greece is different than in Cyprus, however. Football clubs and their fans do not seek/form identities so directly with political alignment; instead, these identities tend to be spread out in the spectrum of social/economic class characteristics of the area they – in effect – represent.

46 LOK, or Special Forces; and OYK or Cyprus Navy Seals, for example, are less frequently written than when this study began in 1997.

problematised by the existence of two parallel and yet similar and overlapping cultures: Turkish Cypriot and Turkish. In fact, the occurrence of graffiti is so limited and site specific that it is impossible to generalise about the intended impact of the writings in the north.

Anarchist Graffiti

Self-proclaimed anarchist groups exist on both sides of the city, often contributing humour to the political discourse with graffiti and stencils. There appears to be a similar anti-capitalist and anti-political agenda in both Lefkosia and Lefkosha, and possibly collaboration between them especially near the checkpoints. Some anarchists interviewed in Lefkosia believe that real anarchist activities are not about graffiti but are more about 'smashing capitalism' by stealing and squatting.[47] These young men and women sneer at the Omonoia fans' co-opting their symbol [the encircled letter A] and they claim no political affiliation. Women are involved in anarchist activities, sometimes as partners to the active male elements of the group, and sometimes as active participants themselves as in the example of a woman who features herself in an anti-capitalist poster, photographed in a birdcage. Women are fronted by or spoken for, however, by male members of this sometimes cohabitating group. The small number of anarchists in the north has local notoriety for political views rather than criminal acts, and there is evidence that the groups cooperate across the Buffer Zone.

Audience for Anarchist Graffiti

Since spring 2008 there has been a proliferation of anarchist phrases written in marker in commercial areas of Lefkosia. While possibly no more than the rants of one or two individuals, the anarchist sign is included and these phrases link meaningfully with anarchist writings elsewhere in Lefkosia/Lefkosha and the rest of the world. Phrases include "Be realists. Demand the impossible" (a slogan known from the May 1968 uprising in France), "Time isn't money. It's life", and "The wealth of the boss is the blood of the worker".[48] There have also been substantial improvements in the quality of stencilling, where corporate logos are combined with derisive phrases, such as [with the McDonald's M] "I'd Rather Eat Dirt" and [with the Nike logo] "Riot", and [with the Shell Oil logo] "Hell".

47 Since August of 2008 there has been an increase in graffiti reading "smash capitalism". On 29 September 2008 anarchists began formally squatting (see www.squatofcyprus. blogspot.com) in a building on Diogenes Street in Lefkosia previously used by the state artists union (EKATE). Called "the Light of Diogenes" *("to fanari tou Diogeni")* its intention was to be an alternative cultural centre based on anarchist principles. [As of this revision, the squat seems to have folded based on disagreements about whether or not to be organised.]

48 *Politis* recently published a thoughtful although Hellenocentric article on the subject of these anarchistic and other wry phrases: "If they say walls have ears, why are we writing?" (Sidiropoulou, 9 October 2008).

The highly visible placement of this graffiti, eye-level in shopping districts and malls, in clear block lettering or stencilling, points out that there is an intended audience (the mainstream, middle-class Cypriot consumer) and an anti-corporate, anti-political-hegemony ideology being promoted. This kind of graffiti is therefore entirely different in look and intent from the graffiti produced by the hooligan or the street artist, and these ideological and aesthetic characteristics appear on both sides of the city.

Graffiti in High School

The ways that school authorities attempt to control graffiti, or ignore it, is indicative of larger societal norms regarding graffiti and the way authorities deal with groups and individuals who deviate from the *status quo*. For this study a high school in the north, Turk Marif Kolegi (TMK) near Kermia was chosen to compare with the Kykkos Lyceum in Lefkosia in the south because they both have predominantly Cypriot students with similar middle-class economic status. The comparison could not be in higher relief: TMK regularly whitewashes its walls, while Kykkos is one of many high schools in the south with a high profile problem of nationalist and Nazi graffiti occurring, and remaining on school walls.

Both schools have areas where graffiti, most of which refers to popular culture, is tolerated. That area at TMK is regularly painted over. But at Kykkos there is an underpass and long

passageway where a cacophony of vibrant throws and urbane tags are not in any way controlled. Inside the schoolyard, a similar amount of graffiti appears, but in pen. Topics range from puerile insults to political 'insights' and a few notes about love.[49] Inside the schoolyard of TMK the walls are relatively spotless; the most obvious scrawls are declarations of love on the tables in the canteen, in pen or Tip-ex. The walls at TMK are visibly whitewashed. Some students interviewed for this report were surprised to see that the street art they had done, and wanted to show, had been whitewashed within the last few months. In a brief conversation with the principal of the school about the need for whitewashing, he said graffiti does not occur as much as it used to in the 1980s when society was 'more political'. The teachers call this generation of children *genç sev* – love children – because of their relative disinterest in politics.[50]

Conclusion

Graffiti of all kinds including street art suggests a current picture of local identities. It occurs much more often in Lefkosia than in Lefkosha and is nearly entirely a young, male pursuit. Graffiti in the south tends to be framed in the context of groups. Graffiti in the north is framed more within the scope of the individual. This difference is carried through in the manner in which authorities deal with graffiti, revealing significant differences in the ways the two societies exercise social control by exploiting critically different modes of identity construction and maintenance.

The social and political messages carried in graffiti vary, as do the presumptive audiences. These messages are specific to the particular kinds of graffiti writers: street artists, athletic hooligans, Turkish army, Greek-Cypriot Army, anarchists and other politically or personally motivated individuals. Even though messages contain slogans and symbols that may possibly be misunderstood by the writer, this kind of public discourse could be regarded as a kind of hegemonic means to access or mediate civic or social aims. This is not always for the better: who is or is not writing is one aspect of the discourse; who is whitewashing needs also to be examined. For sure, a municipal programme of whitewashing in the south would be quite desirable if citizens' complaints, in letters to newspaper editors and to the mayor, were to be acted upon. But it would also be viewed critically as an intrusion on the presumed right to free speech.

There are graffiti writers whose agendas are parallel on both sides of the Green Line, and they seem to interact. The messages of so-called anarchists and graphic imagery of street artists are examples of ways that some youth in the north and south seem to have moved away from hard-line national politics and focus on more global, anti-capitalist concerns and aesthetics. Such agendas should be recognised by policy makers, that is, reconciliation and urban renewal programmes should use care to match the place and style of the project with the programme's intended message, whether aesthetic or not.

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49 See Demetriou and Trimikliniotis (2008).

50 Personal conversation with Fehmi Tokay, 28 March 2008.

This paper raises and identifies questions about the effectiveness of mural art and street art programmes in the unique set of challenges in the unique context of Lefkosia/Lefkosha and on the island as a whole. Turkish Cypriots are not the only section of the population that is visually silent. Since males implicitly, and nearly exclusively, are the ones writing graffiti in Lefkosia/Lefkosha, where are such political and nationalist sentiments of women? If reconciliation programmes appropriate the language of graffiti art in appeals to youths on both sides of the Buffer Zone, are males in the south purposefully being targeted? Why?

Returning to this paper's original questions – why there are not murals in the divided city; why there is less graffiti in the north than in the south; and how graffiti acts as a medium of communication – the issue of place again becomes a central consideration. One of the defining features of graffiti in Lefkosia/Lefkosha is ideology, but *not* a sense of place or neighbourhood; i.e. typical Left-Right sports team commentary is the same regardless of its, or its writer's location in Lefkosia.[51] Even as the discourse becomes more political toward the contested area in Lefkosia, it indicates confusion about political direction, and a lack of local or community identification. Murals work in the opposite type of space. Murals are effective where there is already a collective identity established in relation to place. Murals represent the imagination of a group that inhabits the areas directly around the site of the art work. Interestingly, and symbolically, where murals are usually painted traditionally with a brush and bucket – a bucket that can be shared by others painting – graffiti is done with a spray can or marker: by using a pen, or pressing a cap. Graffiti is a solo act. Murals can be cooperative. As part of urban renewal programmes, murals are credited with a decline in tagging, and with an increase in social cohesion where neighbourhoods had been troubled by crime. Proponents of murals claim they construct a visible, even if imagined, social reality in urban areas that have undergone major economic, social and physical transitions over the last generation of inhabitants.[52] This improvement is possible, but it is also probable that there is already a high degree of social cohesion existing in the communities beforehand, such that a mural can be organised. Is it time to consider the mural as a constructed mode of reconciliatory discourse for Lefkosia/Lefkosha?

Probably not. The fact that mural art programmes seem to work in other divided societies is not necessarily a good recommendation for them as a mode of reconciliatory discourse here. Conflict on Cyprus has a particular set of actors and situations that are unique and unlike Belfast, unlike Berlin. Aside from the historically fragmented nature of neighbourhoods on both sides of the city, and the varied national agendas concerning memory and place on both sides, the visual

51 Limassol's hooligan graffiti seems to be more territorial; more indicative of gangs and neighbourhoods; perhaps an essentialised anti-immigrant discourse, especially in schools. This is an opportunity for further study. Also see Petrou (2008).

52 For a full history of murals viewed as part of urban renewal programmes in the USA, see J. Golden *et al., Philadelphia Murals and the Stories they Tell* (2002).

silence – or the apparent silence – of the Turkish-Cypriot community challenges the usefulness of mural programmes on Cyprus. The social reasons (fear, apathy) for the lack of graffiti that people living in the north suggested need to be better examined, but where the walls are blank, this emptiness is probably the most comprehensive, flexible marker of local identity. Murals are not a good recommendation for a community that may anyway be culturally disinclined or discouraged from public writing, no matter how engaging murals are in the eyes of reconciliation programme coordinators and others interested in peace building and visual media. A blank wall includes the possibility of future artistic action (imagined or real), while also being a stark surface for the play of shadows (symbolic or real). In effect, an empty wall *is* a mural.

Public mural programmes may seem educational in view of diversity and collaboration, but they negatively advantage participants who are, in study and in practice, already comfortable with expressing on walls notions such as solidarity, dissent, and informal verbal political conflict. Graffiti and mural arts programmes are forms of popular expression, but not modalities by which or through which a society can be formed. Communities and individuals must already self-identify as part of a place, or location, before effective mural arts programmes are instrumentalised as a step toward reconciliation. There are certainly other modalities for cultural reconciliation that could be explored, and preferably ones that are essentially shared on both sides. What if a public transit system were in place between Lefkosia and Lefkosha? Graffiti writers might then have a chance for transformative exposure. What national or transnational identities might be projected onto such transit cars and shelters? In this imagined scenario graffiti could appear and evolve naturally, instead of within a paradoxical scope of permission and guidance from peace-builders.

Viewed from a practical level, the graffiti artists and writers in the city who share agendas – adherents to all kinds of popular culture and anarchical and socialist writers – their work might seem to be a good starting point for considering a project. Street art style is particularly leading because these artists tend to work by pseudonym, exposed and articulated as individuals, but often without ethnic identity. Anarchical collaboration is also quite interesting and is occurring naturally without programmatic encouragement. Approval or identification of their activities by any authority, however, would likely mean a self negotiated end to their already shared dialogue.

Finally, the issue of 'where to paint?' will not go away.[53] The fundamentally historical connection that murals have with place is their social, civic and political strength. Murals are located where the viewers understand, and possibly feel validated by the content, which they have usually generated themselves based on their experience of living in that place. Putting aside the

53 In a letter dated 29 January 2009, the mayor Eleni Mavrou wrote, "The Nicosia Municipality expresses its support to the proposal for an aerosol art wall (graffiti) in Nicosia by the University of Nicosia [Elizabeth Doering] ... This initiative is an innovative, international and bi communal project that will promote ... intellectual outreach, critical thinking ... and encourage a responsibility for the inherent power of writing on walls" (personal correspondence with the Mayor's Office).

evident social divergences on public wall expression in the two communities, the biggest challenge to a mural programme in Lefkosia/Lekosha are community relationships with public space or property. The challenge is to find a wall where murals can emerge in place naturally, from local stories of shared experience among a group of people that is adhered as a community to the place. Since Lefkosia/Lefkosha does not have actual dividing walls, this shared surface is elusive, and rare.

This version of the study is extremely limited by a narrow focus on parallel geographic and social locations within the general Lefkosia/Lefkosha area. Nevertheless, given similar material circumstances the study shows differences in the ways that Greek Cypriots identify themselves and show emblems of their identity, from the ways that Turkish Cypriots do. The study should be expanded where possible to look comparatively at the graffiti cultures in Greece, Turkey and the UK as well as on Cyprus in general. It should also include an examination of the micro-cultural make-up of the areas in which the graffiti was located, and it could well be mapped over time. Further study should certainly include a comprehensive comparison of architectural and infrastructural differences that would variably encourage graffiti.

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