Zone of Passions: a Queer Re-imagining of Cyprus's "No Man's Land"

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Abstract

Focusing on a selection of literary and critical texts, this article explores the Dead Zone as a space that is decidedly queer in its undecidability, unspeakability, and resistance to normalisation; a landscape where desire, apprehension, and memory play themselves out. Re-reading this zone as queer space allows us imaginings of Cyprus beyond the normalising regimes of the island's north and south. And, such re-reading also invites a re-conceptualisation of the Dead Zone as a profoundly ambiguous geographical site, political space, and imaginary topos.

> The Dead Zone is a part of us all, the no-man's-land where memory resides. Where there is memory, even as a debased political commodity, there is death and there is poetry. This ruined architecture of memory is not merely a metaphor but a methodology. Memory is the architect of the Dead Zone, of this labyrinth at the heart of Cypriot identity.
> Alev Adil, *An Architecture of Forgetting: Journeys in the Dead Zone*

> Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, *troublant*. The word "queer" itself means across – it comes from the Indo-European root *–twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (twist), English *athwart*.
>
> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies*

> But place is also a mobile imaginary, a form of desire.
>
> Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, *Queer Diasporas*

Introduction: Defining a teeming emptiness

The air was crisp and the light was beginning to soften in that late afternoon of March 2003. As a recruited reserve soldier I had to present myself for service at an army camp southeast of Nicosia, close to the Dead Zone, the no man's land that is the geographical

divide between a North and South, Turkish and Greek Cyprus. Even though I had done my full army service when I was a young man in the mid-eighties, like every Cypriot male who could not find a way out of compulsory army service my relationship with army culture was never easy. What I experienced on that afternoon, however, made me feel almost grateful for the call. Armed with my own lived sense of the concept of "camp" I found the place, the army camp, presented myself and my papers (there is often a huge disparity between the two), and proceeded to scan the landscape. We were on a hill barely five kilometres from Nicosia, and yet it felt quite removed and isolated. Below the hill where the "camp" was set up, and from northeast to southwest stretched Cyprus' Dead Zone, its thickness uneven and its character quite distinct from the adjacent lands north and south. The sensation it evoked has remained indelible in my memory. Not only the softening afternoon light, but also the colours and the sounds of the landscape gave texture to my moment. I was not afeard. Rather, I was eager for the sounds and sweet airs to delight me with an experience of a Cyprus that seemed distant yet intimate, desolate yet immediate. I was also stunned by the wildlife I saw in the space of a single afternoon; a large black snake appeared suddenly and undulated swiftly and eloquently the entire length of its sleek, muscular body, and a hare vanished in the thyme bushes as suddenly as it appeared. Later, at dusk, as the shadows deepened and the imagination widened, a large owl landed momentarily on an enormous eucalyptus tree just beyond my sentry post. Since no hunting, no building, and no movement of people was allowed there, Cyprus' wildlife had survival opportunities not found anywhere else on the island. The natural richness induced in me a state of deep reflection, even elation.

Indeed, there is a marked contrast between my memorable (army) camp moment on the edge of the Dead Zone and the established modes of reference. These include dilapidated buildings, overgrown vegetation, ruined gardens, abandoned fields, barbed wire. A decades-long process of ideological filtering has turned these signs into standard representations for this in-between space. These are signs of conflict, yet they are also lingering evidence of abuse and violation. As such, they have been used in the creation of what one might call a semiotic canon through which the Dead Zone accesses its meanings. And meaning is always entwined with the national will to show the other side as the perpetrator. The paradox, that may be no paradox at all, is that these same signs also render it strangely attractive and, at times, almost irresistible. In the words of Alev Adil, "the melancholy lassitude of their ruin becomes aesthetic" (*An Architecture of Forgetting*). Even post April 2003, when passage from one part of the island to the other was permitted

for the first time since 1974 (Dikomitis 7), the Dead Zone's outlook did not change. These characteristics continue to dominate its literary and photographic depictions. One illustration is the American poet Alicia Stallings' contribution to the volume *Cyprus: Tracing the Non-visible*:

> The visible tantalized with the invisible: walls at the end of amputated streets, festooned with razor wire. You could see the tops of trees, heavy with dates, and your imagination would rise with the flocks of Aphrodite's unyoked sparrows over the barriers, to where grand sandstone houses crumbled into their own emptiness, abandoned even by their ghosts. (98)

Stallings' poetic prose is haunting and moving, and her images are evocative. I am particularly moved by the sandstone houses of a bygone Nicosia collapsing into what seems like a void of history and desolation. This typology of images, however, does not stray from canonical semiotic depictions of this space and can be anticipated. The streets that are "amputated" and suggest the horror and pain of the city's maimed body, the reference to Aphrodite (whose value is solely touristic), the palm trees "heavy with dates" and, therefore, in contrast with the images of desolation, the sparrows that can fly free without concern for the division; all these are familiar tropes and they recur in Cypriot poetics of division.

More than what is visible, however, I feel that it is the background of silence, capable of bringing every sound into sharp relief that exacerbates the "lassitude" and abandonment. As Lysandros Pitharas puts it in his poem "Green Line," "and sometimes our little towns are quiet/and only flags flutter as tributes to the silence." I will return to Pitharas' poem later in my discussion, but now I want to focus on an important detail that his image brings to our attention: that silence also has proven peculiarly photogenic. Sound and silence *can* have an image and they can affect the texture of a photograph, and this quality has inspired a number of artists, professional and amateur, to "capture" and frame for viewers what is believed to be some essence of this in-between space.[1] Moreover, since its inception, in a political gesture that responded to developments, and despite its complicated history, the Dead Zone has suffered the pressure of each side to interpret it in ways that agree with nationalist rhetoric; hence the need for establishing a semiotic canon. Gazing through a patriotic lens, this zone is legible only as a line that demarcates clearly defined binaries; civilised from uncivilised, conquered from conqueror, victim from perpetrator. And, ultimately, it has become an essential symbol of the destructive war of 1974. Deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of Cypriots of both communities, the zone that

divides the island of Cyprus in two has had a profound effect on the spatial dimension of Cypriots' identity.

In this article, I want to reopen the question of what the Dead Zone is and how it figures as geographical and ideological space; and, perhaps more importantly, how identity negotiations have come to depend on the Dead Zone for meaning. Of course, one might wonder what the relevance and implications of "a queer re-imagining" are. Postcolonial theory has enabled, among other things, profound reflections on the complex politics of embodiment, identity, and power. In a parallel mode, queer theory may enable reflection on issues of identity and its embodied negotiations with power, yielding insights that are often but not always connected with questions of sexuality. "Queer re-imagining" implies an exploration of the potential of a *topos* to inspire emotions, thoughts, possibilities that reach beyond the dominant narratives, transverse, and go across essentialist national discourses. Such reimagining could not be simply subversive or deconstructive. "Queer" penetrates deeply into the interstices of history and spatial dynamics, makes silence audible, and, very importantly, renders essentialism awkward. In political terms, queer resists, critiques, and challenges the regulatory practices of power. Akis Gavriilides articulates these properties in a paper entitled "Η αποδόμηση των φύλων και το άγχος του μεταμοντερνισμού" ["Gender Deconstruction and Postmodernism Anxiety"]:

> Τι είναι όμως αυτό που βρήκα στην queer και τη μετα-αποικιακή σκέψη; Για να το εκφράσω συνθηματολογικά, είναι η έμπρακτη κριτική στην ουσιοκρατία. Ως ουσιοκρατία, θα ορίσω πρόχειρα την αντίληψη ότι αυτό που είμαστε ανάγεται όχι σε μία σχέση αλλά σε μια εσώτερη ουσία, φύση του ανθρώπου ή της κοινωνικής ομάδας, αναλλοίωτη κάτω από τη φαινομενική ποικιλία των μορφών – η οποία ποικιλία λοιπόν συλλαμβάνεται ακριβώς ως αλλοίωση, σύγχυση, πτώση (με την θεολογική έννοια του όρου).

> But what is it that I found in queer and postcolonial thought? To express it in the rhetoric of catch phrases, it is a critique of essentialist regime in action. I will define essentialist regime as the perception that what we are is relegated not to a relationship but to an internal essence, the nature of a human being or a social group, unchanged before the apparent diversity of forms–a diversity that is understood precisely as deformation, confusion, fall (in the theological sense of the term). (My translation)

Indeed, a great deal of what is said to constitute Cypriot identities is predicated on notions of an inner purity with claims of validation by nature, that is perhaps the most tenuous, but, in effect, the most powerful ideological argument. And, Gavriilides defines not only the ontological modes of essentialist constructs but comments on how this essence acts. Its agency is powered by truth and correctness:

Η ουσία δηλαδή αυτή έχει ταυτόχρονα οντολογικό, επιστημολογικό όσο και κανονιστικό χαρακτήρα: εκφράζει την κρυμμένη αλήθεια του υποκειμένου, αλλά και υπαγορεύει συγκεκριμένους τρόπους ύπαρξης ως μόνους ορθούς, γνήσιους, αντίστοιχους προς αυτή την αλήθεια, οδηγώντας μας να απορρίπτουμε τους άλλους ως παρεκκλίσεις. (http://koinoniko-ergastirio.blogspot.com.cy/2014/01/blog-post.html)

This essence, therefore, possesses an ontological, epistemic, as well as regulatory character: it expresses the hidden truth of the subject, while it also dictates specific modes of being that are the only correct and authentic modes that correspond to this truth, leading us to a rejection of all others as deviations. (My translation)

In the literature I will explore here, the Dead Zone emerges as a complex site that is capable of inspiring beyond nationalist discourses that place it in the margins that surround an essentialist regime (to use Gavriilides' term). Inspired by Alev Adil's oracular utterance (quoted in an epigraph above), I see the Dead Zone as internal as much as it is external, as subdued by memory but, at the same time, directing remembering, a passive repository and an active catalyst. The ambiguities that intercept this zone are connected to nationalist discourses and they affect profoundly the zone's definition as physical but also conceptual boundary. Reading against the grain, however, may allow us to venture beyond the Dead Zone of horror and amputation, beyond the standard rhetoric that regulates Cyprus as experience and as identity. In the ensuing exploration, I challenge those rather established notions of a fixed and mute line of singular meanings and strive for a re-reading of the Dead Zone where silence is not mute but articulate in the midst of various possibilities; a site that interrogates desiring Cypriot subjectivities, and unsettles what have come to be known as the grand narratives and their injurious effect on the island's people.

Some comment on the terms of reference for this in-between zone is necessary before I conclude this inevitably long introduction. As befits a place ridden with anxiety and laden with political and cultural meanings, this zone carries the burden of a heavy nomenclature; "buffer zone," "green line," "no-man's land," and "forbidden zone" are the most common names. "Border" is a somewhat more prosaic term of reference that remains unacceptable and disturbing to many because it infringes on national imaginings of the Republic of Cyprus' territorial reach, and insinuates a permanence to the dividing line. Besides signifying the site of trauma, these names also map historical developments. "Buffer zone" draws attention to the need for alleviation of tension between the two sides, a kind of shock absorbing layer between the two island parts. Also, "buffer zone" refers to the United Nations Peacekeeping Force, UNFICYP, whose very arrival in 1964 internationalised and made official the division of the island's two dominant communities ("Establishment of UNFICYP"http://www.unficyp.org/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=1354&tt=graphic&lang=l1)."Gree

n Line" evokes a chance historical moment where a British United Nations officer marked on the Nicosia map the line that roughly separated the two communities. He used a green pen. As Spyros Spyrou writes, "the green line he drew marked the buffer zone, or the ceasefire line, and aimed to keep the two groups apart. More than ten years later, when–in 1974–Turkey invaded and occupied the norther part of Cyprus, the Green Line was further extended east and west to divide the entire island in two" (Spyrou 42). "No man's land" is a more generic term that saw frightful and tragic applications in the two world wars of the twentieth century. "Forbidden Zone" sounds like a vague reference to Christian belief (the "forbidden fruit" of the Garden of Eden, or something interdicted by a supreme authority and made unreachable), blended with a sense of taboo but also military proscription: entry is forbidden. To complicate the nomenclature even further, Haris Pellapaisiotis reminds us that since crossing became a (controversial) possibility the dead zone acquired epithets that no longer cited directly the island's military zones or hitherto established terms of colloquial reference: "it has been described as liminal space, suspended space, a porous border, a space of common, an in-between space" (222).

I will mostly use "Dead Zone" throughout this article even though "no-man's land" is in my title.   Each use stresses the point that the zone is not at all dead space. And this declaration resonates in my article along with the vague association with "erogenous zones." Relying on Sedgwick's description of the expanse of "queer" as a political term of possibility, I perform a reading of Cyprus' zone as a moment that continues rather than standing still in time, and as a movement and motive, that is recurrent, eddying, and not only troubling or troubled but "troublant" as much as it is "articulant," the first term borrowed from Sedgwick (and quoted in my epigraph) and the second term inspired by her writing. Both terms are performative in the sense that they produce a series of effects that aptly convey not only the paradox and complexity of this zone but also its potential. How fitting that "queer" can be thought to embody not a particular space, place, or body but the process of traversing. I interpret this process as conveying a constant becoming, a sense of residing not in a fixed meaning but rather investing its energies in shifting across meanings and set identities. Both parts of Cyprus, to the south and to the north of the line, strive to gain political purchase by claims to a normalcy, but this normalcy completely dissolves in the Dead Zone. This dissolution is greatly productive. It turns the Dead Zone into a space that resists the normalizing regimes of the north and south and urges for useful and productive ambiguities. Queer reimaginings of this zone can take us across, to domains away from the trappings of bipolar binaries and nationalist essentialisms.

Echo wanders in the Dead Zone

Echo's unrequited love for Narcissus evokes the spectre of queer love. Echo is left wanting consummation, and meets the embodiment of her emotion not in physical embrace with its promise of sexual fulfilment, but in the reverberation of a sigh and the empty form left behind by a forever escaping body; not even in the word (discourse) itself, but its echo. There is a parallel here with the anxious trajectory of dissident sexualities in the social sphere. Their embodiment is also relegated to a fleeting body, a desire whose proscription generates echoes of itself in the social realm. Such reflections on Echo and queerness may or may not have motivated Yiannis Papadakis's title *Echoes from the Dead Zone: Across the Cyprus Divide*. However, what we are offered in Papadakis's book is a striking rearrangement of Dead Zone politics. By exposing the ideologies that motivate each side's construction of "truth," Papadakis lays bare the deceptive absoluteness of nationalism's discursive binaries: "For 400 years we were enslaved under the brutal and oppressive regime of the Ottoman Empire, a barbaric regime that laid waste our previously glorious, refined and tolerant Byzantine civilization" (7). This idea that, historically, Ottoman and Byzantine saw a "natural" and seamless continuation into contemporary Turkey and Greece respectively, and the simplistic ideological split that everything Turkish is bad and everything Greek is good, foregrounds the convictions that form the basis of contemporary Greek Cypriot national narratives. Moreover, Papadakis underscores the Cypriot subject's co-option by such convictions. "I was a product of this history," he writes (9), alluding to the process through which hegemony fashions subjectivity. However, this is the kind of production that not only Papadakis, but most, if not all, Greek Cypriots have been subjected to. Interestingly, the subject is not always aware that s/he is the product of such histories. And it is even harder to become conscious of the intricate processes through which we as products comply and offer our consent for our own production.

   The most obvious, ubiquitous, and salient manifestation of the workings of national narratives in everyday life is in the language used by the Republic of Cyprus to refer to the island's north side. The south is the internationally recognised Republic that presents itself as the legal, just, and free state on the island. The north is unrecognised, illegal, unjust, and occupied by the Turkish army. When referring to anything about the North side of the island, the Republic of Cyprus terms it "pseudo." As prefix, "pseudo" goes in front of many things: "pseudo police," "pseudo court," "pseudo ministers," and, the grand and ubiquitous favourite, "pseudo state" (Papadakis 75). By naming the north of Cyprus "pseudo state," the

Greek Cypriot nationalist dogma traps the Cyprus Republic in an odd political dichotomy that threatens the non-pseudo with annulment, the threat already built into the deconstructive binary dynamic. It might be fair to assume that most Greek Cypriots accept the terminology and succumb to its authority without question. There are, of course, individuals who challenge the efficacy of "pseudo" and are able to discern the vanity and political misdirection of the term, notwithstanding the illegal status of the internationally unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. At times, such individuals may even trivialise the term, turning it into the subject of humour: "in the occupied areas [κατεχόμενα] you can gorge yourself on *kattimeri* [a traditional Cypriot pastry rich in milk butter]. It's pseudo-food and has no calories; eat freely." Such jokes are common and popular; but only with few. Nevertheless, even humorous treatments of the term indicate that every Greek Cypriot enters by default into some kind of negotiation with the official Cyprus Republic rhetoric.

The creative reconstructions that Papadakis's *Echoes from the Dead Zone* occasions are indicative of a powerful sense of engagement with this line not merely as a signifier of conflict, war, and tragic division. This site emerges as a location of imaginative re-workings of the conflict of the two communities. It becomes an utterance that remains impervious to interpretations while interpreting transitively at the same time. How and what then does this zone interpret, situated in the midst of this anxious chasm?

Passion and *Nicosi-Senses*

It interprets in a manner akin to the political and artistic tenets of translation. And it does so with passion. Both the manner and the emotion become apparent in Niki Marangou's *Nicossienses*, a project that involves a complex and wonderful performance of a subject who sites and cites her narrative. The small book comprises of a short autobiographical memoir accompanied by English and Turkish translations[2] of the original Greek text and illustrated with black and white photographs by the Lithuanian photographer Arūnas Baltėnas. *Nicossienses* is a narrative of going across, of traversing the various cultures of the island's capital city, but also of crossing the various thresholds in someone's personal history and development. We could, perhaps, assume that since the piece is autobiographical, this someone is the author herself. Having moved to Nicosia from Limassol, Marangou feels that the cultural wealth that she discovers in the capital's various quarters compensates her for the claustrophobia of a city without the sea. When still a child, she thrives in the sensuousness of Nicosia's municipal market, and develops a certain

attachment to the vendors who come from all the island's communities. This development is assisted by her innate love for history and old buildings, when "old" in Cyprus denotes a sense of culture and traditions of a loosely defined past: "I liked the Turkish quarter, ever since I was a child I had a love for history and old buildings, and I found all sorts of pretexts to wander there" (no page numbers). This is an agreeable aesthetic that could be termed romantic in that it processes real life experience through associations with an imagined past that belongs to us, while at the same time it is removed and lost. These associations and their textures impact both the experience and the context of reference as they allow a certain detachment from the lived moment. Apart from romantic, this aesthetic also motivates politically since it resists the relentless waves of changes that swept through the island in its first postcolonial phase; changes that promised "modernisation" at the expense of sacrificing sandstone buildings, hand-carved furniture, and age old handicrafts. The image of crumbling houses in Alicia Stallings' prose poem, discussed earlier, re-emerges here. In *Nicossienses*, Balténas offers us striking photos of such houses, reminding us that some of them collapse because they are in the Dead Zone and others collapse because Cypriots neglect them.

This romantic aesthetic informs Marangou's artistic sensibility and motivates her affinity with the Turkish neighbourhood of Nicosia. She grows through exchanges with her compatriots who become interesting because they are from different communities. Moreover, her sense of who she is and the cultural, social, and gender locations that she inhabits are shaped by the varied smells, colours, and textures of Nicosia's neighbourhoods. Her predilection for brightly coloured clothes prompts her grandmother to comment, perhaps disapprovingly, that these are "Turkish colours." Interspersed with historical references from Nicosia's past, the narrative becomes an account of how the writer is created by her city, but also how she recreates her city not as a monolithic entity with the spurious confidence that a single ethnic character promises. She recreates it as an exciting succession of contiguous moments that are motivated by a promising difference embedded in the diverse richness of her everyday interactions.

Introducing this engaging sense of place as varied, shifting, constantly eddying, is an opening to *Nicossienses* that is as arresting as the striking images that frame it:

> Η Λευκωσία, έλεγε ο Χριστόφορος, έχει μια ένταση που τη δημιουργεί η πράσινη γραμμή. Όσοι είναι από δω λαχταρούν να πάνε στην άλλη πλευρά, κι αυτοί που είναι από κει, θέλουν να ρθούν εδώ. Αυτό δημιουργεί ένα πάθος στην πόλη. Η πόλη έχει σχέση με την Κωνσταντινούπολη και τη Θεσσαλονίκη και καμιά με την Αθήνα.

> Nicosia, Christophoros was saying, has a tension generated by the Green Line. Those who live here long to cross over to the other side and those living in the north want to come south. This creates a passion in the city. The city bears a resemblance to Constantinople and Salonica, but none to Athens. (*Nicossienses* no page numbers)

To discern that a state of division and conflict generates passion is an unexpected claim that could only derive from Marangou's cautious politics and delicate intuitiveness. To trope Nicosia as a magical place of transformations and desire, despite or because of its dividing line, is a gesture that heeds the imposing power of nationalist definitions only to reach beyond them (the grandmother's comment about the "Turkish colours" is a reminder of the dominant rhetoric). I quote the Greek text above because I feel that the use of the Greek verb "λαχταρώ" furnishes with lyricism this literary moment. "Λαχταρούν" suggests stirring, motion, and impulse, all of them contributing to an emotional intensity. Indeed, we are moved to imagine the Nicosians of both sides stirred by a desire to go a-cross, to transverse, to twist in their embodiment of their city. Even after the troubles of 1963, when an inchoate Green Line was in place, Marangou cannot resist crossing:

> I carried on going to the Turkish Quarter even when roadblocks were erected on both sides. As a young girl on a bike, no one thought of stopping me. The line of division cut the town in two precisely at Hermes Street. That was the street through which we passed almost daily with my mother.

Writing about Nicosia as a city in translation, Sherry Simon offers theoretical insights that illuminate historically and linguistically Marangou's narrative. It is those locations where contact is vibrant and dynamic that are the most likely to be cut off by a line of division. Hermes Street was a busy and thriving meeting point where difference created the culture:

> The transition from place of contact to place of separation is not as contradictory as it might seem. It is precisely the fact that this street was a thoroughfare open to everyone that made it a candidate for a line of separation. Because the area was never firmly imprinted with one single ethnic identity, it belonged to neither side. And so, according to the logic of the political rivalries of the time, the most diverse and convivial territory would become the "deadened" border zone. (Simon xv)

Placing Marangou in Simon's theoretical frame allows us to make sense of Hermes Street (also discussed by Papadakis in *Echoes*) as an eddying nexus where the flow of goods, emotions, and languages afforded Cyprus its continuous becomings. But we can go further in our understanding once we link Marangou's persistent crossings to an identity that is "a highly mobile cluster of claims to self that appear and transmogrify in and out of place" (Patton and Sanchez-Eppler, 4). My insistence to read her crossings as queer acquires its

force when her crossings and transformations through "Turkish colours" and transcultural zones are contrasted with the rigid and pure identity that the nation dictates. Marangou does not seem prepared to settle for a specific definition. It is in gaps opened by identity shifts, in productive uncertainties, in imaginative embodiments "in and out of place" where Marangou realises her zone of becoming.

Alev Adil on memory and forgetting

Political discourses of the island claim that the Dead Zone's meaning is self-evident. Various parts of this 'photogenic' Dead Zone are framed in photos and read against an island landscape where ideologies informed by nationalism are reflected in a large variety of monuments. For example, the enormous flag that dominates the side of the Pentadaktylos mountain range in the north of the island is a favourite photographic subject for many of the island's visitors. It is visible from most places in the south and its visibility gains in glamour after dark when this assertive and ostentatious symbol is lit up in colourful lights with a bit of a lightshow that resembles discotheque signs. Turkish Cypriot friends often comment with humour mixed with bitterness that even in a power failure this flag is always lit. Along with the flag, there exist representative museums, cenotaphs, heroes' tombs and statues; monuments that claim to be the offspring of pure and true sentiment generated by love for a motherland, Greece for the Greek Cypriots and Turkey for the Turkish Cypriots (Toumazis 79). In a detailed study concerning the "Museums of National Struggle" erected on both sides of the island, Yiannis Papadakis helps us understand that claims to purity and truth dissolve before the violence with which these monuments direct remembering ("The National Struggle Museums of a Divided City"). Memory is heavily manipulated by mo(nu)ments, and the Cypriot subject is reconstituted every moment that they encounter a flag, a statue, a museum of national struggle, an image whose monstrosity gains its currency when it depicts the other side's barbarity.

Mainstream narratives rely for their impact and sustained circulation on memory evocations according to specifications that yield those interpretations that reinvent and re-enforce the ideology that enlists them in its service. In her project entitled *An Architecture of Forgetting: Journeys in the Dead Zone* (quoted in the epigraph), Alev Adil recreates a Dead Zone that is quite formidable in its multiplicity of incarnations and meanings. It is at once the repository of memory and the place where memory is created. In a surprising but adroit gesture, Adil recognises that memory can be manipulated and turned into "a debased political commodity." Yet, even in this state, memory and the Dead Zone where it resides

retain a certain cosmic agency that yields death, poetry, and a methodology for conceiving the intricate structuring of the poetics of identity. And, a most striking metaphor concludes this section of Adil's project: "memory is the architect of the Dead Zone, of this labyrinth at the heart of Cypriot identity."

> Perhaps the Forbidden Zone is almost beautiful in the way it speaks to all of us of our failures, our culpability–unless we choose to forget our own responsibilities for this, our own bloody legacies and see ourselves as only and always the victims of others. Mine is a small forgettable war but all wars give birth to ruins. Ruin eternalises and naturalises destructions, as though it has always been this way, and always will be.

Memory works in striking ways. It is not merely a passive repository but an active catalyst building experience, shaping the imaginary landscape where our moments are processed and re-membered. Some of what we remember may seem to be factual memories of actual events but all of it involves projection of subsequent thoughts and experiences modelled on vague recollections without solid references. It is precisely this projection that bespeaks the constructedness of memory and, therefore, its value in building new contrapuntal identities that depend on the past while looking forward to the future.

Lysandros Pitharas

Pitharas is the poet who introduces a sexual dimension to my discussion of "queer" in this article. The Cypriot diaspora lost a promising artist, performer and poet when he died of HIV in London, England, in 1992 at the age of thirty three. Despite his short life, Pitharas was successful in making an impact through his activities in the diasporic Cypriot community of Britain, and Mehmet Yashin believes him to be one of the most talented Cypriot poets (1244). Recognising the promise in his work, Niki Marangou posthumously published through Kochlias, her publishing house at the time, his collection of poems *I am the Twentieth Century* (1999). Pitharas' poetics are marked by an urgency and political astuteness. Cyprus is prominent throughout his work, but this is a prominence mediated by incisive critique.

In "Green Line," what is striking about the poem's opening lines is that the speaker claims that he is unable to see the green line. The claim is made through a decisive, one line statement that introduces the green line, making it present in the poem paradoxically by declaring it invisible:

> I can't see this green line.
> Textures are more useful,

> like the crevice this finger traces around your masks
> and the damp breath of those still alive
> and the theatre of sighs,
> as we post our condemnation to various presidents,
> the acrid envelope's lip (9)

The inability to see the green line invites all kinds of questions: what does this invisibility imply about the poet and about the green line itself? Is the speaker's declaration intended as political critique of how the green line figures in Cypriot politics, or should we read this statement as relating an impulse to reject normalised views of the green line–views that are shaped by the standard nationalist discourse adopted by the Cyprus Republic? And, if the poet is unable to see this green line then does he see something else in its place that remains unnamed or is it an empty hole (anticipating "the hole of my history" that follows)? The reference to the "theatre of sighs," makes Cypriots' declaration of grief appear a well-rehearsed show that may not always be as genuine or emotionally engaged. And, in the next line, there is a reference to the republic's international appeal for support against Turkey as the perpetrator of the 1974 war and subsequent division of the island. The "acrid envelope's lip" suggests the tongue tasting the acridity as it works to activate the glue on the envelope's lip in order to post the condemnations to the powerful of the earth, in the process validating the republic's status as helpless victim. Yet, the implied image of the tongue turns into a sexual metaphor in the third stanza which concludes, again, with the speaker's insistence on the invisibility of the green line:

> and I poke my tongue
> into the hole of my history
> and wriggle my toes in the damp sand, beyond the cafeteria,
> and observe that I can't see this green line, I just can't see it. (9)

In the sexual moment evoked in these lines, the "history" that comes up could be read as a reference that coincides with the production factory that Papadakis critiques. But here, the metaphor of a hole suggests an emptiness whose gaping void is explored by an insistent, perhaps enquiring tongue that is not licking envelopes now but investing its energy in different acts. The image is immediately recognisable because the kind of sexual act it indicates has a distinct prominence in gay sex. And it is indeed quite striking how history, a subject so manipulated by nationalist narratives and so abused by Greek Cypriot patriarchal moralising ("patriarchal" used also for its etymological and political connection with the Patriarch, Father of the Church), is juxtaposed here with homosexual lovemaking,

emptying history of its significance in orthodox terms and claiming it as a site overtaken by the sexual properties of identity.

> I can only see gold,
> and the eyes of my people blacker than embers,
> and the strong smell of their lovemaking,
> and secrets which they say nestle in their breasts,
> standing like monoliths looking toward the sea,
> saying nothing
> as if they are chanting. (9)

The erotic denotes an aesthetic and often involves an artistic treatment of the experience of embodied desire. The sexual grounds the experience on the body. It reintroduces the body's gendered being and its materiality into the domain of pleasure. Pitharas' poem deactivates the green line as an established symbol with recognisable characteristics that have secured a position in the Cypriot canon of suffering. Cypriots here are not the suffering victims holding black and white photos of the missing husband or father, nor proud Hellenes posturing awkwardly against a backdrop of Hellenic glory. Their hypostasis is sexual. Dark-eyed–a wonderful image that evokes Cypriot swarthiness, often unacknowledged before the imperative of European whiteness–they become because they make love. And the strong smell provides a sensual confirmation of the passion and intensity of the sexual moment and enhances the sexualised subjectivity. The poem's climax eddies into a mystical conclusion where the spoken secrets become monoliths that chant their silence; an arresting oxymoron.

In a discussion about memory, nostalgia, and the future, Stephanos Stephanides alludes to Pitharas's lines:

> To find nostalgia for the future in Cypriot poetry, one must look to its poetics in disjunctures rather than continuities, by putting our tongues in the cracks and insisting on the nonlinear relationship between departure and arrival so that arrival lies not in a particular end but in the process of cultural translatability. (10)

Stephanides's focus on disjunctures rather than continuities marks a break away from oppressive orthodoxies. Apart from alluding to Pitharas, Stephanides also aligns himself with queer methodologies. His comments in the quotation above resonate with Sedgwick's references for queer. Queer, Sedgwick asserts, may refer to "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't* be

made) to signify monolithically" (8). In tandem, then, with Stephanides's comment on process and discontinuity, I emphasise the sexualness of Pitharas's image that doesn't signify monolithically. Charged with sexual energy against a green line that remains invisible to the speaker throughout, the poem becomes an indictment against the oppressive regime of Cyprus "truths." Rather than becoming complicit with this regime, the poet reinstates the potency of sexual expression, especially and importantly non-heterosexual expression, as a powerful force in contemporary Cypriot thought and poetics. His poem invents a language that gestures suggestively towards an embodiment that enables the subject to negotiate queerly and in hitherto proscribed terms.

In Cypriot politics, the expectation is that the sexual is exclusively located in the heteronormative domain, its validity often judged by its relationship with heteronormative masculinity, lauded as the safeguard of the nation state's reproduction. In standard discourse, the sexual as an experience beyond male domination of women's bodies is dismissed. Also dismissed is an experience of embodied pleasure where the body realises its artistic as well as political potency, and the site of secret-sharing rituals. The exalting conclusion of Pitharas's poem conjures the "transformative powers" (Spurlin 200) of the sexual. The same discourse that wants the green line attended by a semiotic canon also wants Marangou's incessant crossings to stop, and it calls for queer sexualities to be suppressed or prohibited. Or, they can be restricted to a dead zone of sexuality, in the margins of the normalised regime. Such prohibitions aim at deferring necessary re-theorisations of nation, citizenship, sexuality, and identity. Pitharas's poem shows him fully cognisant of the island's complicated politics and strongly aware of the tragic dimensions of the division for all of the island's people. Thereby, he persists in the attempt to restore the subject's ability to pursue erotic and sexual pleasure and re-orient the body's attitude not as a mourning body that sighs, but as a loving body propelled by a strong sexuality. In this extraordinary gesture, the Cypriot body is liberated from a past of violence, conflict, and division. The gesture also turns a system of past/present oppression into a liberating present/presence, the emptiness of history to love making and a re-vision-ary memory building.

Epilogue: Poets in no-man's land

The 2012 documentary *Poets in No-Man's Land*, directed by Stephanos Stephanides and Stephen Nugent, has its inception in an ambitious project that involved the establishment of a Centre for Writers and Translators. The centre looked to the Association for Historical

Dialogue and Research and the Home for Cooperation for further support. The Home for Cooperation is an exciting venture that materialised in the Dead Zone in response to the new climate of optimism that followed the 2003 opening of checkpoints. Bi-communal collaboration required a venue that could house its activities and offer a fertile space for further development of collaboration across the divide, and the Home for Cooperation was created to accommodate such efforts in its renovated premises. Events of literary, political, and artistic interest began to be organised reviving the area around the Ledra Palace hotel. The Centre for Writers and Translators had its inaugural activity in March 2011, with the support of the University of Cyprus and the European funded network "Literature Across Frontiers." This was an event that occasioned the collaboration of four international poets with prominent Cypriot poets. Together, they worked on translating each other, and also produced new work that would be translated as part of the seminar's proceedings.

The documentary is infused with poems and commentary on what poetry is and, more importantly, how poetry performs, and how translation is informed by and in turn informs political thought. *Poets in No-Man's Land* is invaluable in reimagining literary and critical possibilities for the island's Dead Zone. Sigitas Parulskis, the participating Lithuanian poet, talks of poetry itself as no man's land, a place without ownership titles. "But, for instance, when you find yourself there, you can become a god, a demiurge." This is a thought echoed later in the documentary by Ana Luísa Amaral, the Portuguese poet. And, shortly after the documentary opens, Stephanides comments: "I'm interested in the whole way that difference can be made to tell; how translation can be a subversive and creative activity." "Difference," then, and not sameness, is the axis of literary investigation of themes, and emotions. Furthermore, there is Greek and Turkish in the documentary, along with Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese and Catalan. The linguistic medium of the experience is not the mother tongue of the so-called mother nations, Greece and Turkey, but translation. This gathering of international literary personalities, their words heard in many tongues, is in itself a subversive concept in the Cypriot political context. No longer is the Dead Zone the empty space that bespeaks Turkish barbarity (in the Greek Cypriot political discourse) and Greek intransigence (in Turkish Cypriot political discourse). The documentary turns it into a lively zone of poetic exchange, making all kinds of imaginative transformations possible, and challenging the fixity of official histories of Cyprus' sides.

For Sherry Simon the relevance of translation to Cyprus is evident: "the power of translation is a theme deeply embedded in Cyprus's history" (xvii). In Alicia Stallings too the potential of translation exists across languages and histories: "you think of translation

as metaphor–a poet's struggle to carry something across from one language into another, from the characters (that is, too, the character) of one alphabet into another, from the past to the present" (98). *Poets in No-Man's Land* drives home the relevance of translation to queer re-imaginings of the Dead Zone. Translation readily aligns itself with a queer mode of inquiry. Indeed, how fluently translation speaks to an inquisitive subject's desire for place not as a static territory but as a shifting boundary, "a mobile imaginary, a form of desire" (that I quote in the third epigraph). Traversing cultural and political spaces and intimating a productive cosmopolitanism, translation seems a vital, indeed invigorating, medium in the struggle to understand how fixed narratives in Cyprus can be creatively unsettled and usefully challenged. Theorising across linguistic barriers brings into perspective linkages and relationships that are inherent in the island's various language idioms. In a very interesting review of the Greek translation of *Echoes from the Dead Zone*, Akis Gavriilides turns his attention to what he finds as the book's distinctive characteristic; a "heterolingual address."[3] Gavriilides observes that the book speaks its own language as if it were foreign and the foreign languages as if they belonged to it, thereby undermining the concept of national languages as monolithic entities and the attendant view that translation entails the carrying of meaning from one such language to another ("Η 'Ελλάδα' ως ξένη γλώσσα").[4]

The binary structures that claim to represent sexuality and the Dead Zone seriously impact a person's knowledge of who and what they are. They also curtail any desire for creative transformations and impose upon subjects the imperative to position themselves in relation to the values and contrasts implied by (a pseudo) binary. Looked at from either arrangement of opposite sides (the Greek Cypriot version is likely to read as Greek/Turk, civilised/uncivilised, moral/lascivious etc.), they deliver themselves as well-rehearsed and perfectly ordered, self-righteous and uncontested. In the case of Cyprus and its communities the pressure to identify in binary terms is a form of epistemic violence with more than a touch of irony. The Turks and Greeks of Cyprus, as well as the Maronites and Armenians, have identities that drift away from the national paradigm. Pitharas's vision of his island and his people incorporates a critique of monolithic signification. He also finds it impossible to see the Green Line as delineated by the nationalist narrative. However, in its place he offers us a vision of his compatriots as sexual and attractive beings whose identity matters in the fleeting, evanescent and yet powerful moment of sexual fulfilment. Albeit invisible in Pitharas's poem, the Dead Zone performs its gestures with narrative eloquence and evokes a void that elides the "straight" forward but strained definitions imposed upon it.

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1 Kieran Corcoran's illustrated article "Pictured: Eerie scenes" in the *Mail Online* is one of many such works.

2 Niki Marangou's *Nicossienses* lists four different translators without specifying which sections were translated by who. The four names appear in the following order: Stephanos Stephanides, Xenia Andreou, Murat Bülbülcü, Tuncer Bağışkan.

3 https://nomadicuniversality.com/2011/04/01/%ce%b7-
%c2%ab%ce%b5%ce%bb%ce%bb%ce%ac%ce%b4%ce%b1%c2%bb-%cf%89%cf%82-
%ce%be%ce%ad%ce%bd%ce%b7-%ce%b3%ce%bb%cf%8e%cf%83%cf%83%ce%b1/#_ftn2

4 https://nomadicuniversality.com/2011/04/01/

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