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DE-NATURALIZING ANTAGONISTIC NATIONALISM THROUGH AN ACADEMIC INTERVENTION
The Reception of Two Photography Exhibitions on the Memorialization of the Cyprus Problem

Abstract
The article evaluates an academic intervention which consisted out of two photography exhibitions in Cyprus, focussing on the memorialization of the Cyprus Problem. These exhibitions communicated academic research into antagonistic nationalism and aimed to trigger societal debate, empowering the more agonism-oriented parts of society, and offering opportunities for reflection to others, simultaneously acknowledging the limits one intervention has. The article starts with reflections on academic interventions and on the agonization of conflict, and then describes the two exhibitions and the intervention’s objectives. The reception component, which is the heart of the analysis, first shows the considerable reach the intervention had, and then discusses how the visitors argued for the analytical and critical relevance of the exhibitions, how they problematized (parts of) the exhibitions and how they triggered new signifying practices (after the exhibitions). Finally, the conclusion critically reflects on the de-naturalizing strategies of the intervention.

Keywords
Exhibition; photography; intervention; reception; Cyprus Problem; agonism; conflict.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cyprus is characterized by a long history of violent conflict, and nationalist discourses have been, and still are, a key driving force of what is called the Cyprus Problem. For instance, Baruh and Popescu¹ wrote that “[…] there is no question that Cyprus is a contentious issue prone to focusing nationalistic discourses […]”. Nevzat’s² words are more careful, although they still explicitly point to nationalism, which “all agree, contributed to some extent at least to the conflict that wrought such havoc on the island during the twentieth century”. Of course, there are many different forms of nationalism, but the variations that nested in Cyprus after the Second World War, were highly antagonistic, and legitimated and motivated decades of bloodshed. Even when there are nowadays hardly any occurrences of material violence between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, or between the Republic of Cyprus, the non-recognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Greece and Turkey, the discursive constructions of the other-as-enemy continue to be used, in particular by the island’s elites and, naturally,

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even more so by far-right radicals. And of course, the ultimate materialization of the conflict, with the island remaining until today divided by a UN-guarded Buffer Zone, after the invasion of Turkey and occupation of the north part of Cyprus, in 1974, is always very much present.

This article is grounded in a normative ambition to contribute to the agonization of the Cyprus conflict, with a focus on the southern parts of the island that are controlled by the Republic of Cyprus. This ambition is translated into an academic intervention in the political struggles in Cyprus, de-naturalizing the support that the large majority of Greek Cypriot statues and commemoration sites provide for a Greek Cypriot antagonistic nationalism. This de-naturalization process has been organized in four phases. In a first phase, Greek Cypriot antagonistic nationalism, and its counterpart, Turkish Cypriot antagonistic nationalism, were analyzed, paying ample attention to their constructed and interdependent nature. In a second phase, the role of statues and commemoration sites in the Greek Cypriot antagonistic-nationalist assemblage was analyzed, during a three-month long ethnographic research project. The third phase consisted out of the communication of this analysis, first of all, through the production of three visual essays, one of which has been included in this special issue. Another way to communicate the research, optimizing its reach and potential de-naturalizing impact, was by reverting to a multi-modal intervention which centered around two photography exhibitions in Cyprus. Here, two genres (photography and exhibition) were deployed to communicate this academic analysis. This article is particularly concerned with the fourth phase, which dealt with the evaluation of these two exhibitions and their reception (using self-ethnography and textual analysis), and with the relatively simple question of how visitors responded to the two exhibitions.

2. ACADEMIC INTERVENTIONS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF ANTAGONISM INTO AGONISM

The phase 3-intervention discussed in this article is particular in nature, as it is theoretically embedded in discussions about conflict transformation and in Mouffe’s analysis of antagonism and agonism, which, arguably, share two basic assumptions and positions. The first is the normative position that violent conflict is not desirable. The definition of conflict transformation used by Lederach, one of the conflict transformation concept proponents – which is seen to consist of “[…] constructive change processes

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1 For a brief historical account of the Cyprus Problem, see N. Carpentier, “Deconstructing Nationalist Assemblages. A Visual Essay on the Greek Cypriot Memorials Related to the Violent Conflicts of the 1960s and 1970s”, Comunicazioni sociali. Journal of Media, Performing Arts and Cultural Studies, which is included in this special issue.


6 This part uses text from Carpentier, The Discursive-Material Knot.


that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures”, and that respond to “[…] real-life problems in human relationships” – enhances this argument. Although Mouffe’s work is grounded more in democratic theory, its focus on the transformation of antagonistic conflicts into agonistic conflicts is very similar. In Mouffe’s perspective, the aim of democratic politics is “[…] to transform an ‘antagonism’ into ‘agonism’”\textsuperscript{10}, in order to “tame” or “sublimate”\textsuperscript{11} antagonisms. In her approach, this transformation consists out of the redefinition of the enemy into an adversary, who still shares the same symbolic space. In contrast to antagonism, where the other is the enemy, agonism articulates the relationship between self and other as a “[…] we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents”\textsuperscript{12}.

The second basic assumption these approaches share is that conflict is not restricted to violent conflict, and that thus conflict does not necessarily disappear when a society (or situation) becomes agonistic. A conflict transformation approach actually emphasizes that “[…] conflict is normal in human relations and conflict is a motor of change”\textsuperscript{13}. Also Mouffe\textsuperscript{14} puts considerable emphasis on “[…] the ineradicability of the conflictual dimension in social life […]”. Mouffe’s\textsuperscript{15} reflections about conflict are very much embedded in a democratic theory of diversity, where “[…] the specificity of liberal democracy as a new political form of society consists of the legitimation of conflict and the refusal to eliminate it through the imposition of an authoritarian order”. Conflict transformation, or the agonization of conflict, thus rejects the idea that an ultimate consensus (or resolution) can be achieved, and argues instead that conflict transformation consists out of the democratization of conflict. These approaches also imply that both conflict and conflict transformation are intensely political processes, that cut through a variety of societal fields and are not limited to institutionalized politics. This is exemplified by Mouffe’s\textsuperscript{16} distinction between politics and the political, which supports this broadening of the democratic-political scope:

By ‘the political’, I refer to the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and emerge in different types of social relations. ‘Politics’ on the other side, indicates the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of ‘the political’.

As a consequence, also academic actors can engage and assist in these political processes of conflict transformation or agonization. The study of violent conflict has a long history, but also academic activism\textsuperscript{17} and academic diplomacy\textsuperscript{18} in relation to

\textsuperscript{11} Mouffe, On the Political, 20-21.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{13} Lederach, The Little Book of Conflict Transformation, 5.
\textsuperscript{14} Mouffe, On the Political, 4.
\textsuperscript{16} Mouffe, On the Political, 8.
violent conflict have a substantial history. Moreover, so-called action research, used also in conflict-affected societal contexts\(^{19}\) incorporates a similar interventionist dimension. For instance, Reason and Bradbury’s\(^{20}\) definition of action research, in *The Handbook of Action Research*, exemplifies this. Action research is seen as seeking: “[… ] to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities”. Action research is a broad concept, but, as Dickens and Watkins\(^{21}\) remark, it is characterized by “cycles of planning, acting, reflecting or evaluating, and then taking further action”. Of course, a broad range of action and interventions are possible, which is beyond the scope of this article.

Secondly, also the arts have been working with the objective of agonization (or conflict transformation). Obviously, the arts have a long history of communicating about and sometimes fiercely critiquing violent conflict\(^{22}\). We can use the work of Krzysztof Wodiczko to illustrate these dynamics, although many other examples exist. Wodiczko is most known for his large-scale projections on monuments, reflecting about memory and trauma, but also critiquing the culture of war. For instance, the Abolition of War is an arts project that proposes to transform the *Arc de Triomphe* (in Paris, France), which celebrates the Napoleonic Wars, into the *World Institute for the Abolition of War*\(^{23}\). Wodiczko’s writings about the need for a transformative avant-garde, tackles the culture of war head-on, for instance, when he writes:

> Building a war-free civilization demands dismantling the workings of the culture of war, disarming its symbolic arsenal, exposing war’s human toll and fallout, and confronting our drive to enter war situations. An even more important task is to create and disseminate new and effective peacemaking and peace-securing projects\(^{24}\).

Authors writing in the traditions of conflict transformation and agonization have taken on this challenge, and have been addressing the capacity of the arts to contribute to agonization. Bergh and Sloboda\(^{25}\) argue that this literature started developing in the 1990s, and point to Liebmann’s *Arts Approaches to Conflict Resolution*\(^{26}\) and the European

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Centre for Conflict Prevention’s *People Building Peace*\(^{27}\). The arguments behind this articulation of the arts and agonization are well captured by Lederach – when he writes, addressing the conflict transformation community – “We need to envision ourselves as artists. We need a return to aesthetics […]”\(^{28}\). He continues by emphasizing that academics still need to maintain discipline, and respect the specifics of the artistic field, but also that “[a]esthetics helps those who attempt to move from cycles of violence to new relationships and those of us who wish to support such movement to see ourselves for whom we are: artists bringing to life and keeping alive something that has not existed”\(^{29}\). One example of this kind of analysis in the Cypriot context is Ungerleider’s text from *People Building Peace* about the role of music and poetry in the Cyprus Problem. He argues for the capacity of the arts in the following terms: “Lyric music helps keep the vision of peace alive and deeply felt. It is a tool and impetus for communication, collaboration and celebration, cornerstones of a budding common culture, not Greek or Turkish, but Cypriot, non-divisive and hopeful – peace culture”\(^{30}\).

In the exhibition project that is discussed here, the intervention consists out of the communication of academic research about antagonistic nationalism in non-traditional and more accessible ways, shifting from written texts (that follow the academic writing conventions) to photography exhibitions, taking on the above-mentioned challenge. This intervention articulated non-academics as worthy focal points of academic communication, while circumventing the communicative limitations of more traditional academic publications. In addition, it aimed to trigger societal debate, reflections and further initiatives, empowering the more agonism-oriented parts of society, and offering opportunities for reflection to others, without over-estimating the capacity of one project to achieve social change. Simultaneously, it is important to stress that academic interventions and action research remain political (in Mouffe’s meaning allocated to the concept of the political). However valuable academic work is, regardless of its form and modes, its truth claims are not automatically accepted\(^{31}\). Academic interventions, more specifically, however truthful they may be, may be fiercely resisted, problematized and rejected. Or they may simply be ignored. Some of these rejections might be grounded in the refusal of the conflict transformative and agonistic assumptions, or in the logics of antagonism itself (leading, for instance, to accusations of partiality). Other rejections might be related to critiques on academia in general (e.g., the ivory tower metaphor), on action research in particular, or to critiques on the communicational tools and repertoires that are deployed (e.g., the use of photography). Arguably, the responses to academic interventions, including its rejections, are important to study, as they allow to evaluate the interventions themselves, but also because they yield more


\(^{30}\) J. Ungerleider, “My Country is Cut in Two: Music and Poetry Build Bi-Communal Peace”, *People Building Peace*, The Hague: European Centre for Conflict Prevention, 1999. See: http://artonconflict.blogspot.fi/2011/03/music-and-poetry-build-bi-communal.html. Ironically, military songs which may resound from both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot army barracks, would use exactly the opposite logic – deploying similar elements of lyrical music to promote a culture of war. It is impressive how the same melodies are sung by both armies – with different words, in a different language, addressing the respective enemy.

3. TWO PHOTOGRAPHIC-ACADEMIC EXHIBITIONS AS INTERVENTION

The research on the (Greek) Cypriot nationalist assemblages – communicated through the visual essays and the photography exhibitions – argued that most memorials and commemoration sites in the south of Cyprus are part of the (post-)antagonistic nationalist assemblage, through their representation of heroism and sacrifice, but also through the articulation of victory and freedom (in relation to the independence war), and loss and occupation (in relation to 1974)\(^\text{33}\). Still, in the current post-antagonistic discursive setting the taken-for-grantedness of these nationalisms has weakened, and the invitations, extended by the memorials – to support antagonistic nationalism – have lost some of their strength, even if the presence of the more nationalist memorials remains virtually uncontested. The analysis did identify a number of memorials that undermine the hegemonic (post-)antagonistic discourse, by representing the importance of Turkish Cypriots for the south, and the joint Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot Left-wing resistance against nationalism, and sometimes by celebrating peace. However, these material attempts to counter the hegemonic (post-)antagonistic discourse remain rare.

In order to communicate this academic analysis, there was a strong reliance on photography. As mentioned before, three visual essays\(^\text{34}\) were produced, that combined written text and a series of photographs. But it is the two photography exhibitions, organized in November 2015 and in January/February 2016, that are the focus of this article. The first exhibition was organized in collaboration with the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR), and took place in the Home for Cooperation (H4C), which is located in the Nicosia Buffer Zone. The second exhibition ran in the NeMe Arts Centre (NAC) in Limassol, a coastal city in the south of Cyprus. The exhibitions were curated by Nico Carpentier, and the organizing teams included, apart from the co-authors of this text (Vaia Doudaki, Yiannis Christidis and Fatma Nazli Köksal), also Eva Giannoukou and Stella Theocharous (for exhibition 1), and Helene Black and Yiannis Colakides (for exhibition 2). Figure 1 shows the posters for these two exhibitions.

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\(^{32}\) Dickens, Watkins, *Action Research*.

\(^{33}\) See in particular Carpentier, “Deconstructing Nationalist Assemblages”, which is included in this special issue.

The objective of these two photography exhibitions was not only to experiment with the use of non-textual genres for the communication of academic analyses, but also to deconstruct and de-naturalize the Greek Cypriot hegemonic (post-)antagonistic nationalist discourse, and the material support that is provided by the majority of the memorials and commemoration sites in the south of Cyprus. Three de-naturalization strategies were used in the photography exhibitions: Firstly, (photographs of) the memorials that are spatially dispersed (all over the south of Cyprus) were placed in one and the same location, which allowed to demonstrate their strong similarities. This, in turn, made it clear that they were particular, in inviting identification with a particular discourse, namely antagonistic nationalism. In some cases, humor was used to magnify the repetitive nature of particular tropes. Secondly, the photographs also represented the contradictions between the memorials’ invitations and their everyday life usages, contrasting the demand for respect with the obliviousness they are subjected to. And thirdly, the exhibition also included a series of photographs of memorials that extended alternative or counter-hegemonic invitations, demonstrating the discursive-material struggle that was going on in Cyprus and the diversity of positions that could be taken.

The combined use of the photography and exhibition communicational genres also allowed for a much broader reach than academic written texts often have. Moreover, because of the different affiliations of both locations – H4C is connected to the Cyprus bi-communal movement, and NeMe is firmly embedded in the field of the arts – different societal groups could be reached. These communicational efforts were further strengthened by the organization of in total three seminars, organized by NeMe, the AHDR and the Cyprus Community Media Centre (CCMC), on exhibition-related topics. The collaboration with CCMC (and its webradio station MYCYradio) and with CUT-
dio, a Limassol-based university community radio station, produced recordings of the seminars and a series of additional interviews and reportages (see Appendix 1). These recordings were broadcast on the respective community radio stations, but could also be listened to at the second exhibition, at the NeMe Arts Centre, where a series of listening posts were created for the duration of the exhibition.

Figure 2 - Two of the eight listening posts at the NeMe Arts Centre

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4. THE RECEPTION OF THE EXHIBITIONS

If the exhibitions aimed to de-normalize (post-)antagonistic nationalism, the question remains how these exhibitions were received in Cyprus. In order to analyze the exhibitions’ reception, a case study method was used35, collecting different types of material: The exhibitions’ press coverage, by Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot news media (print and online); other online publications (e.g., blog postings) about the exhibitions; the texts generated during the exhibitions (the guest books, the recordings of the seminars and photographic documentation); the interviews and reportages that were produced and broadcast by MYCYradio and CUT-radio; and finally, the (self-)ethnographic field notes36 and informal interviews that were collected before, during and after the

exhibitions. An open textual analysis, closely related to grounded theory\textsuperscript{37}, was used for the analysis of all the material, focusing on evaluative statements, taking both positive and negative positions into account. This was complemented by a time dimension, incorporating also future-related practices that encompassed an evaluation. To enhance the quality of the analysis, a peer debriefing strategy was used, both internally (in the project team) and externally (outside the team). One important limitation to mention here is that the project team decided against organizing additional focus groups or interviews after the exhibitions, as these methods were difficult to reconcile with the interventionist nature of the exhibitions.

4.1. Reach

The (self-)ethnography produced data on the exhibition attendance, as at least one of the team members was present during the opening hours of the exhibitions and the events. Especially the events generated a considerable number of visitors, who in the case of the two H4C seminars, directly entered the exhibition space, as this was the space where the seminars also took place. In the case of the NeMe-organized seminar, which took place before the exhibition opening, the majority of its participants walked to the exhibition venue for the opening. About 250 people attended these events (which could be established through their photographic documentation\textsuperscript{38}). These numbers are contrasted by the scarce visitors during non-event times, although these visitors were often keen to engage in long conversations with the organizers. The conversations with the visitors showed their considerable diversity, even though these groups were still specific. They were, for instance, academics, students, NGO members, politicians or artists.

A second indicator of the exhibitions’ reach is the media attention they provoked. In total 51 media publications were identified (excluding those created by the project partners – see Appendix 2). As the table below shows, while the attention from Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot media was balanced, there was more attention from Turkish Cypriot media for the first exhibition, while the second exhibition (in Limassol, in the south) attracted mostly Greek-Cypriot attention. This does not necessarily mean that the information about the exhibitions circulated throughout the island. As a matter of fact, informal discussions with visitors during the exhibitions indicated that many of them were informed on the events by the social media and not by news media.

Figure 3 - Media publications on the two exhibitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>#first exhibition</th>
<th>#second exhibition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greek Cypriot</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish Cypriot</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cypriot</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Total          | 51               | 34                 | 17


\textsuperscript{38} Corroborative information is provided by the count on the Facebook page of the first exhibition, which had 879 people, 93 indicated interest and 168 were under the category ‘went’ (count on 20 July 2016).
Even though the majority of the media publications briefly announced the exhibition, or published (part of) the press releases (which were made available in Greek, Turkish and English), almost half of the media publications included one (or more) photographs of the exhibitions (see Figure 4), which had been made available together with the press releases. This allowed for a considerable distribution, in particular of the photograph of one of the female figures of the Latsia monument, which was also used for the poster of the first exhibition (see Figure 1). While the media focused more on the announcement of the exhibitions, relying mostly on the promotional material, there are some differences that are worth mentioning. The Greek Cypriot media, when referring to the event, largely reprinted the female figure of the Latsia monument, which is expressive of the suffering caused by the 1974 Turkish invasion. However, some of the Turkish Cypriot media did not focus on the content of the first exhibition, but rather on its buffer-zone based venue (H4C), or the related seminars, publishing photos of the venue or of the people attending the opening, and not of the ‘suffering mother’.

4.2. Reception

When analyzing the reception, or, in other words, the signifying practices of the visitors in relation to the exhibitions, three main clusters of signifying practices were identified, namely these of relevance, problematizations and triggers. In the first case, the visitors argued for the analytical and critical relevance of the exhibitions. Still, many of the visitors also problematized (part(s) of) the exhibitions, at a wide variety of levels, which will be discussed afterwards. Finally, the triggers refer to the moments where the exhibitions contributed to the generation of new signifying practices, that built on the meanings communicated by the exhibitions.

One example regarding the relevance of the exhibitions can be found during one of the MYCYradio broadcasts, where the guest says: “I think it is very important that a conversation emerges through this exhibition about the role of these monuments in our perception towards history, towards memory […]” (Andreas Papallas – MYCYradio broadcast 22 December 2015). This relevance is grounded in two types of argumentation, namely the importance of analysis and the importance of critique. One of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photo of ‘mother’ included</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Greek Cypriot</th>
<th>Turkish Cypriot</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other photo of exhibition included (as well)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other photo(s)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other visual element (flyer, map …)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No photo or visual element</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>51</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

39 As in the Cypriot (antagonistic) nationalist discourses, the emphasis is often on the “own” casualties and suffering, the Greek Cypriot mother was an obvious (and simultaneously problematic) choice for (many of) the Greek Cypriot media, and a less desired choice for (many of) the Turkish Cypriot media.
entries in the guest books\textsuperscript{40} illustrates the former: “Very interesting exhibition. Creating the language to things in a clear view. I would imagine it to be difficult. You manage to make it easy for us. Thanks” (Guest book exhibition 2). In many cases, Cypriot visitors expressed their surprise about their own lack of knowledge about the statues, explaining that they had never seen or noticed some (or many) of them. The latter type of argumentation, based on the importance of critique and de-naturalization, can be found in the following fragment from one of the MYCY radio broadcasts:

I remember one of the photographs of the exhibition. I think someone was entering the safe house, I’m not sure it was Afentiou’s, and it was a lady, and they took a picture [...] she was, she bent over to get in so that also you could see her butt. That was what you can see. And for me [laughs] that was an interesting aspect, I mean, choosing to take that photo and not some school or someone putting flowers or something. It could happen anywhere. I mean […] and actually, it takes off that magic, let’s say, and all that heroism, out of the picture (Christos Mais – AHDR – MYCY radio broadcast 22 December 2015).

The relevance of analysis and critique is also shown in the following example, again from one of the MYCY radio broadcasts, explicitly bringing the de-naturalization process to the fore:

Most of the people did not like the pictures themselves. What they [would] see in them. That for me was a positive reaction. I mean that: We’re done with this. We have to move forward. The grand narratives of the past that lead us [...] gradually led us to the situation we are in today, the segregation of the island, belong to the past. And that was actually the main thing for me, I mean the positive, the reaction of most of the people that they didn’t like what they saw, not because the pictures weren’t nice, but because of what they saw in the pictures (Christos Mais – AHDR – MYCY radio broadcast 22 December 2015).

Nevertheless, the reception study does indicate a number of problematizations, which first of all concerned three specific areas of politicization, namely the exhibitions’ relevance, the exhibitions’ space and the use of specific ‘sensitive’ signifiers. Firstly, the signifying practice of critique towards the nationalist “grand narrative” (or discourse, as we prefer to call it here), is not shared by all visitors. When a group of Greek Cypriot students visited the second exhibition, a few of them, for instance, expressed their dissatisfaction and claimed that they expected “a different form of respect”. Also, the (academic) analysis was labeled as “too political”, as was the case with photographer Pavlos Vrionides, a guest in the CUT-radio broadcast of 1 February 2016.

Moreover, we should also here keep in mind that the two exhibition spaces were specific, with the H4C very clearly connected to the bi-communal (peace) movement, and the NAC affiliated with the progressive arts scene. This might have produced its own exclusions, which disallowed some voices to be captured by the reception study. The politicization of space creates also another level of exclusions. For example, the only Turkish Cypriot newspaper that published an article on the second exhibition, that took place in Limassol, was Afrika (a newspaper with a radical left-wing political ideology). Communication with newspapers in the north indicated that they usually do not cover cultural events in the south. Even if this does not concern a policy decision, it is an indication of their criteria of (geographical and cultural) relevance. On the other hand, the selection of the first exhibition’s venue (H4C), being located within the buffer zone, not

\textsuperscript{40} Guest book entries and interview citations are rendered ad verbatim in this article.
‘belonging’ to either side of the divide, was seen as an invitation to both communities to attend. This space escapes from being politicized (at least with these visitors) (or can be related to an alternative type of politicization), functioning as a silent ambassador for reconciliation.

Particular signifiers, used in the signifying practices about the exhibitions, also become politicized, as words do matter in the Cyprus Problem (as they often do in conflicts). One example concerns which exact signifier is used to refer to the south of the island: the Republic of Cyprus, the Greek-Cypriot part of Cyprus, South-Cyprus, south-Cyprus, the Southern part or southern parts of Cyprus... For a number of reasons, almost every label is potentially problematic, and the choices made by the curator (and the organizing teams) did lead to polite but critical inquiries from visitors. It also led to concerns expressed by one of the exhibition locations, eventually resulting in a change of the subtitle when the exhibition moved from the Buffer Zone to the south of the island (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 - The subtitles of the two exhibitions on the posters

A second area of problematization is related to the articulation of the photographer as a (non-Cypriot) outsider. In some cases, this positioning was gentle, and did not impede on the acceptance of the exhibitions’ analysis, as the following entry (using ‘us’ in a particular way) in the second exhibition’s guest book shows: “Life is what you make of it. Thanks for making it clearer for us” (Guest book exhibition 2). But in other cases, the outsider position is used to discredit the analysis, for instance, by equating it with colonialism: “[...] it is as if someone says: ‘hey guys, your monuments are rusty, you need someone to fix’em up?’ this makes me feel awkward / as if we are being examined by our colonialists”. (Pavlos Vrionides – CUT-radio broadcast 1 February 2016).

A third problematization relates to the aesthetics of the exhibition, which in some cases draws away the attention from the analysis. For example, one of the students visiting the exhibition referred to the “odd shots” that were used, and some other visitors expressed concerns that the “use of specific shots, or just showing a part of the statues” would impact on the (other) visitors’ reception. This call for a more “neutral” representation of the statues, that implicitly rejected the (principle of the) analysis, could also be found in one of the broadcasts, where the particular aesthetic choices (driven by the analysis) were critiqued. At the same time, the aesthetic dimension of the exhibition was structurally questioned, in the following terms: “there is not an aesthetic intention other than a ‘snapshot’ style” (Pavlos Vrionides – CUT-radio broadcast 1 February 2016).

Fourthly, the issue of context also produced comments and critique. The 20 photographs were combined with seven title panels and 15 text panels to provide more context and structure, and offer a second layer of academic analysis, without explicitly suggesting a particular reading of one photograph. This difficult balance between photographs and written text produced in some cases critiques, as could be observed in one of the guestbook entries: “I would prefer less texts and more photos! Nevertheless great concept and well executed. Keep going and good luck” (Guest book exhibition 1). But on the other hand, a number of visitors found the combination of text with the photographs
to be effective. In one of the conversations with a visitor, the need for (even) more context was expressed, as she exclaimed to have “[n]ever seen emotion in Grivas’s eyes”, while the picture she was referring to did not portray the eyes of EOKA (and EOKA-B) leader Grivas, but of the Turkish Cypriot pacifist Ihsan Ali.41

The final problematization referred to the incompleteness of the exhibition, and, from a broader perspective, to the impossibility of full representation. One of the most frequent recurring comments was about the focus on the south, and the absence of an analysis of the north, as the following (still constructive) guest book annotation shows:

A challenging invitation for questioning, interpreting, analysing, reflecting on memory and forgetting (ΜNΗΜΗ και ΛΗΘΗ)! Thoughts and emotions raised through the photographs! I would love to be initiated in a 2nd part of this exhibition: A dialogue South-North Cyprus, representations and hegemony. A powerful challenge (Guest book exhibition 2).

In other variations of this problematization, the choice behind the 20 photographs is questioned, and ‘missing’ (photographs of) statues and commemoration sites were mentioned, with the suggestion that they should be included. A number of conversations with visitors were centered on the one ‘missing’ picture that should have been included. A more general comment in the guestbook of the first exhibition, refers to this problematization and captures it nicely: “A small yet full of meaning exhibition […] an extended version would be great” (Guest book exhibition 1). Relatedly, some visitors suggested that the existence of an exhibition catalogue would create space for additional photographs, while allowing for less written text being used in the exhibitions.

Despite these problematizations, the photographs, the exhibitions and the organized discussions have acted as triggers for debate, or fed into existing debates, in relation to future commemoration practices in Cyprus, the educational role of statues and the Cyprus Problem in general. In response to the exhibitions, visitors reflect(ed) about how to deal with the statues and commemoration sites in contemporary Cyprus, but also in a post-solution Cyprus, as, for instance, the Irish ambassador, interviewed at the opening of the first exhibition, refers to:

It is important to keep the statues, not necessarily so that they would become a place of pilgrimage and be encouraging extremism or particular attitudes, but in a museum park, or somewhere else, where they can be acknowledged as a historical dimension […] newer monuments will reflect reconciliation between conflicting parties (Nicholas Twist – Irish Ambassador to Cyprus – MYCY radio broadcast 22 December 2015).

A similar comment is made in a blog posting, by a Cypriot journalist, posted almost one year after the first exhibition:

An exhibition entitled “Iconoclastic Controversies: A Visual Sociology of Statues and Commemoration Sites in the Southern Part of Cyprus” by Prof. Dr. Nico Carpentier at the Home for Cooperation, almost a year ago now, has had me thinking about monuments in Cyprus ever since. In a reunified Cyprus, should we erect new monuments? Should we get rid of the

41 Whose role in bridging the two communities is described in Carpentier, “Deconstructing Nationalist Assemblages”, which is included in this special issue.

42 This was also interpreted as one of the reasons for the poor level of attention by the media in the north.
old ones? And what narrative should we attach to them? How we remember is important. (Natalie Hami – my Cyprus, my Κύπρος, my Kıbrıs blog – 2 September 2016).

Also the educational potential of the statues and commemoration sites is mentioned. The exhibition here allows for a discussion about the possible re-articulation and re-signification of these material components of the antagonistic nationalist discourse, embedding them in a different set of discourses, as this interview citation from an AHDR collaborator illustrates:

It help[s] us [to] look at these monuments with different eyes. Sometimes, because we are used to see these monuments, or not even see them, because they are taken for granted, we don’t have the chance to make them an instrument for learning (Marios Epaminondas – AHDR – MYCY radio broadcast 22 December 2015).

In other cases, the exhibition is incorporated to support existing counter-hegemonic discourses. One example is the article that Sevgül Uludağ, a Turkish Cypriot peace and gender activist (and also one of the speakers at one of the exhibition seminars) published in the Turkish Cypriot newspaper Yenidüzen. Here the exhibition becomes articulated with the issue of the missing Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots from 1963-1974, which is one of the main areas of Uludağ’s activism.

Figure 6 - Sevgül Uludağ’s article on the exhibition in Yenidüzen


This blog posting was not included in the analysis of the media publications, discussed in part 4.1.
Finally, the exhibition had also an impact on the project partners, who, in the case of CCMC, NeMe and CUT-radio, translated the initial interest in particular actions (e.g., radio programmes and projects with relevant content and focus), or, who, in the case of AHDR, became more attentive towards statues and commemoration sites as materializations of historical and political discourses, as the following citation from a MYCYradio broadcast shows: “[…] it is still interesting to us, but like […] the first feeling we had was like: Wow […] We never thought of all this behind the statues we come by everyday” (Nadia Kornioti – AHDR – MYCYradio broadcast 22 December 2015 – opening speech at exhibition 1).

5. IN CONCLUSION

It is important that research that is relevant for communities is also communicated to these communities, in ways that they can appreciate, relate to, and interact with. It is equally important for society at large to be engaged in the analyses, discussions and debates generated by academic research, especially for issues that immediately concern these communities and that have an impact on the lives of their members, as it is the case with the Cyprus conflict. But even if there is little disagreement with this position in academia, academics often remain stuck in paying lip service to these ideas, limit themselves to an occasional op-ed in a mainstream newspaper, or – if they are truly courageous – produce a short science communication video that can be uploaded on YouTube (or a similar platform).

Arguably, projects such as the one discussed in this article allow for more complex and intense forms of community engagement and, at least potentially, community empowerment, despite the limitations these projects undoubtedly always have. Even if audience attendance of the photo exhibitions was low during the non-event periods, the openings and the seminars generated substantial levels of interest. Visitors frequently confirmed the exhibitions’ relevance, both at the analytical and the critical level, and there is material evidence that the exhibitions fed into broader debates in Cyprus. In this sense, the decision to organize an academic-artistic intervention, combining the logics of these two fields – inspired by, for instance, action research and the work on the articulation of the arts with agonization – seems to have been fruitful.

Still, we should not remain blind to the problems encountered in this project, and its limitations. The project was complex in nature, as it used a broad variety of analytical and communicative methods, and it had a sensitive nature, because it was addressing issues of antagonistic conflict and the Greek Cypriot nationalist assemblage, connecting them to the everyday environment of the Cypriot landscape. The reception analysis clearly shows these complexities and sensitivities, with the different visitor problematizations discussed in this article. The Cyprus conflict often works like a vortex, pulling all academic analyses into it, rendering them part of the conflict politics. This process makes them significantly easier to reject as ‘just’ one of the many political signifying practices that circulate on the island, or as the perspective of an ignorant outsider. But also the genres of photography and exhibition generated (signifying practices about the) problematizations, with, for instance, the aesthetics sometimes covering the analysis instead of carrying it forwards.

But these challenges and limitations should not be univocally problematized. They can also be seen as creative translations of the confusion and discomfort that some visitors experienced. This has a positive side to it (from our perspective), because these
affects indicate a certain degree of success of our de-naturalization and empowerment strategies (even if there is a need for more research into this). Showing the repetition and pervasiveness of hegemony, also in its materializations, shedding light on the counter-hegemonic assemblage through the statues that invite for agonistic readings of the Cypriot histories, and showing the first signs of the re-articulation of antagonist nationalism through everyday life practices (which aligns well with the current post-antagonist setting) matters very much. The photograph of the mother of the Latsia monument, which early on in the exhibition project became its icon, exemplifies these changing times, as her stone face is slowly fading away, because of environmental exposure. In a way, the process of erosion signifies her pain even more, but it also heralds the new times that await Cyprus.

Even if times are a changin’ for Cyprus, there is still much work to be done, and the de-naturalization of antagonist nationalism remains a crucial activity for critical academics that are committed to the transformation of this antagonistic conflict into one of its agonistic versions.

APPENDIX 1

Interviews about the Exhibition by Project Partners

• Interview with Nico Carpentier, by Eva Giannoukou on 8 October 2015
• Interview with Nico Carpentier and Vaia Doudaki, by Orestis Tringides on 12 November 2015 in Downtown Choris Bakira on MYCYradio
• Interview with Nico Carpentier and Andreas Papallas, by Orestis Tringides on 16 November 2015 in Downtown Choris Bakira on MYCYradio
• Interview with Yiorgos Kakouris, by Orestis Tringides on 18 November 2015 in Downtown Choris Bakira on MYCYradio
• Exhibition report, by Orestis Tringides on 22 December 2015 in Downtown Choris Bakira on MYCYradio. See also the MYCYradio website (part 1 and part 2) – and the rebroadcasts on 29 December 2015 (part 1 and part 2) and on 5 January 2016 (part 1 and part 2)
• Seminar 1 “Monuments and Memories”, organized by AHDR. Recording by Orestis Tringides, broadcast on 23 December 2015 in Downtown Choris Bakira on MYCYradio. See also the MYCYradio website (part 1 and part 2) – and the rebroadcasts on 30 December 2015 (part 1 and part 2) and on 6 January 2016 (part 1 and part 2)
• Seminar 2 “Covering the Cyprus Conflict”, organized by CCMC. Recording by Orestis Tringides, broadcast on 24 December 2015 in Downtown Choris Bakira on MYCYradio. See also the MYCYradio website (part 1 and part 2) – and the rebroadcasts on 31 December 2015 (part 1 and part 2) and on 7 January 2016 (part 1 and part 2)
• Exhibition review, by Orestis Tringides on 28 December 2015 in Downtown Choris Bakira on MYCYradio. See also the MYCYradio website – and the rebroadcasts on 4 January 2016 and on 12 January 2016
• Seminar “Monuments and Memorials as Rhetoric /Objectivity as Male”, organized by NeMe on 23 January 2016. Recording by Yiannis Christidis and CUT-Radio. Interventions by Vayia Karaiskou, Aysu Arsoy and Chrystalleni Loizidou, followed by a discussion
• Interview with Nico Carpentier, by Yiannis Christidis on 23 January 2016 on CUT-Radio. An edited transcript of this interview can be found at the NeMe-imca website
• Interview with Pavlos Vrionides, by Yiannis Christidis on 1 February 2016 on CUT-Radio
APPENDIX 2
Media that Covered the Exhibition

*arts website*
www.rhizome.org

*blog*
www.allonan.com
www.michalbrzezinski.org

*events website*
AngloInfo Cyprus
www.callupcontact.com
www.cyprusevents.net
www.roundtown.com
www.timeoutcyprus.com

*facebook*
Embassy of Belgium in Greece and Cyprus
Open University of Cyprus

*linkedin*
Open University of Cyprus

*newspaper*
Afrika
Halkin Sesi
Haravgi
Havadis
I Mahi
Kibris
Phileleftheros
Politis
Star Kibris
Yenidüzen

*online medium*
I foni tis Lemesou
www.betweencut.com
www.cyprus-mail.com
www.dialogos.com.cy
www.gazete360.com
www.gundemkibris.com
www.haberalkibrisli.net
www.in-cyprus.com
www.paideia-news.com
www.parathyro.com
www.turkajansikibris.net