

ALTERNATIVE IMAGINARIES OF CYPRUS:

Space and Narrative Re/construction in Local Music Video Production¹

[Received April 4th 2024; accepted June 27th 2024 – DOI: 10.21463/shima.227]

Costas Constandinides

University of Cyprus <constandinides.costas@ucy.ac.cy>

Maria Kouvarou

Cyprus University of Technology <maria.kouvarou@cut.ac.cy>

ABSTRACT: The article offers a close reading of music videos created in the Republic of Cyprus during the past two decades, focusing specifically on the ways the audiovisual texts represent space and (re)construct narratives in/of the Greek Cypriot context. Building on existing work in the area of lens-based media studies, namely cinema and photography, the article firstly examines how music videos co-exist and converse with other types of audiovisual representations of the island of Cyprus. Secondly, it presents a classification of local music videos, based on how such creative outputs represent Cyprus as a locale. In doing so, it highlights the ways in which alternative visual treatments might, consciously or otherwise, speak back to and rewrite narratives associated with specific places. The videos are also examined in relation to the lyrical content of the songs and the music genres they belong to. Our work contributes to the expanding body of research on the popular music scape of the island, particularly concentrating on the transgressive dynamic of strands of the Greek Cypriot independent music scene. This is the first study that offers a close examination of local music video production, which we place in the growing scholarly debates about how recent artistic expression in the Republic of Cyprus destabilises dominant representations of space and identity and produces new aesthetics of the Cypriot experience.

KEYWORDS: Republic of Cyprus, music videos, independent music scene, Greek Cypriot Cinema, alternative imaginaries, identity.

Introduction

As these words are being written, we are well into the year 2024. The Republic of Cyprus (henceforth RoC) proceeds with its daily course of life, much like last year and the year before and the year before and so on. What is different in 2024, though, is that the omnipresence of the trauma that defines everything on the island of Cyprus is now accompanied with the gravity of a number: 50. Half a century since the conflict-ridden year of 1974. Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea and sits (un)comfortably at the crossroads between Europe, Africa and Asia, geographically close to Türkiye, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt and Greece (Figure 1). In its history that spans multiple centuries, Cyprus has had many

¹ The two identified authors have contributed equally to this article.

colonisers: Phoenician, Assyrian, Egyptian, Persian, Macedonian, Roman, Frankish, Venetian, Ottoman and British. The island was proclaimed an independent country in 1960, at which point the RoC was founded, which was mainly composed of Greek Cypriots (78%) and Turkish Cypriots (18%), along with smaller minorities of Armenian, Maronite and Roman Catholic Cypriots. By the early 1960s, inter-ethnic strife between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities initiated the process of their separation. A 1974 coup supported by the Greek junta against Archbishop Makarios III, the island's elected leader, was followed by a Turkish military offensive that culminated to the *de facto* division of the island into the Greek Cypriot controlled RoC,² and a Turkish and Turkish Cypriot-controlled north side (unrecognised, except by Türkiye) known as the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus'. The checkpoints along the buffer zone were partially opened by the Turkish Cypriot leadership in 2003, allowing the visitation of residents of each part to the 'other side', but the separation is still there, and the island is still divided by what is known as the 'Green Line'. The described events and the unresolved condition that is internationally referred to as the 'Cyprus Problem', affect every aspect of life in the island, and play a central role in the way the two populations constantly (re)negotiate and (re)interpret their relationship with themselves, each other, their 'motherlands' (Greece and Türkiye), and the world. In this, the creative industries and, especially, the visual representation of the RoC, play a special role.

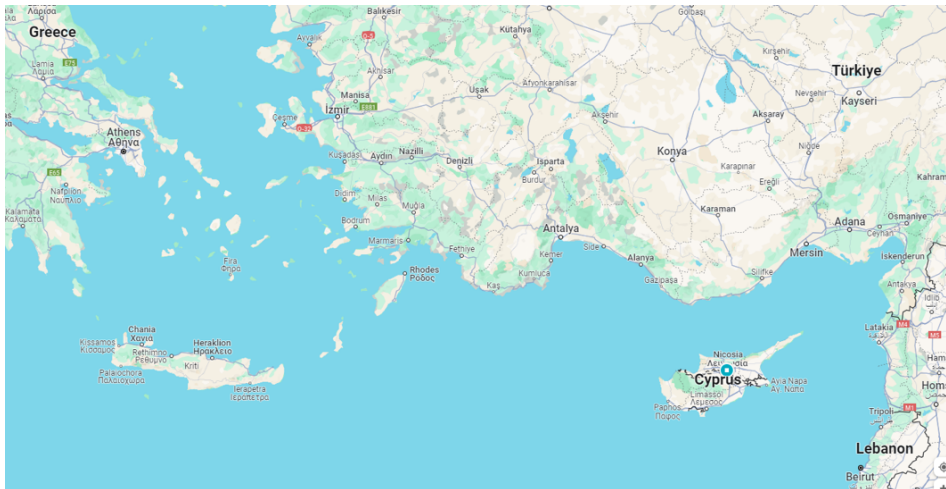


Figure 1 – The position of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean (Map data ©2024 Google, Mapa GISrael)

Seven years after the *de facto* division of the island, in 1981, the RoC celebrated its first entry in the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) with the song 'Monika', written by Doros Georgiadis (music), Stavros Sideras (lyrics) and performed by the group Island. The track has an upbeat, driving pace and prominent piano and saxophone. The lyrics, in Standard Modern Greek (SMG) speak of a love that remains strong throughout the times and despite any challenges. "You live for me/I live for you/And everything is in harmony" – "harmony" itself being echoed in the harmonisations of the female and male vocalists. In the chorus we can also identify a

² According to the preliminary results of the 2021 Census of Population, the total population living in the Government controlled areas of Cyprus on October 1st 2021 was 923,272 persons.

wordplay with the word *moni* (which means alone) and the name Monika, underlying the cheerful and playful vibe of the song.

In 1981 the American MTV channel made its debut and became key in formulating the category of music video, defined by Vernallis (2023, p.9) as a short audiovisual form “designed to sell the song... draw attention to the lyrics, and underscore the music” and prioritise the artist’s presence. Vernallis specifies that:

the visual track might point to one or two musical features at a time, like a tour guide. For while the music envelops us, visual features more often momentarily focus our attention, especially if they’re working in service of the song. (2023, p.188)

The music video for ‘Monika’ (produced and directed by the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation)³ however, appears to be promoting the island of Cyprus, rather than supporting the song itself. The song’s cheery vibe seems to be the backdrop to a destination branding video emphasising the island’s natural beauties, cultural heritage and carefree life. Even the singers are presented as visitors and/or happy members of the communities depicted, rather than as performers. This was, after all, a time when the RoC’s tourism industry was experiencing a rapid expansion after the standstill caused by the devastating events of 1974 and their aftermath. The growing popularity of ESC amongst European and non-European television audiences, and the absence of a wide range of references that the music video creators for *Monika* could have drawn inspiration from, are also aspects that played a key role in foregrounding Cyprus⁴ in the video rather than the performers of the song. As shown by existing literature on visual representations of the RoC (Stylianou-Lambert & Philippou, 2015; Stylianou & Philippou, 2019), the use of enticing locations, carefree lifestyle, and unspoiled rural environment is directly connected to the political and economic factors that shaped conventional imaginaries of Cypriot topography. In fact, the showcasing of the RoC’s natural beauties and cultural heritage has been a recurring theme in music videos of ESC entries up to the late 1990s. In this sense, *Monika* could be seen both as a proto-music video in the Greek Cypriot context, as well as an example of “overused, mainstream national and cultural understandings of Cypriotness” (Stylianou & Philippou, 2019, p. 102). As we will see, it is against these overarching, dominant, and mainstream visual narratives of Cyprus and Cypriotness, and their associated politics, that the contemporary local music videos we discuss in this article create alternative imaginaries. These videos use space in ways that digress from the conventional visual representations of the country, allowing reimaginings and reconstructions that put emphasis on a current experience and understanding of Cypriotness, in a manner that echoes in other creative practices as well.

Our reading of local music videos converses with and contributes to recent studies on the representation of the Cypriot landscape that aim to investigate how new directions in photography, cinema, music and other arts challenge past and mainstream paradigms through alternative constructions of Cypriot topography. Bearing in mind that music videos seek to create atmospheres linked to particular geographical sites,⁵ we argue that the music videos discussed here appear to re-narrate the visual stories attached to the geographical site

³ The music videos of ESC entries produced between 1981 and 1989 are available for viewing on Digital Herodotus, the online archive of the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation: <https://www.digital-herodotus.eu/archive/video/items/4958/giourobizion-philmakia-kuprou-1981-1989/?page=>

⁴ Here particularly referring to the Greek Cypriot controlled south side (the Republic of Cyprus).

⁵ We are grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for making this comment.

of Cyprus in ways that indicate an internal shift that transgresses the boundaries of different creative practices. Let us return to the ESC. As has been mentioned above, the music video for the RoC's first entry in the contest reflects what Stylianou and Philippou (2019) call the "official visual narrative" of the Cypriot landscape (p. 103), an iconology "not far from the one that had been established by the colonial gaze of the previous century" (p. 103), which followed Cypriot ESC entries for years to come. Fast forward to 2016 and the RoC enters the ESC with 'Alter Ego', by the hard rock band Minus One, co-written with Swedish composer, Thomas G:son. This is a powerful rock song with a driving pace performed with the classic rock instrumentation of two electric guitars, electric bass, drums, and a dynamic frontman. Its sound cannot be connected to one single place as it follows the conventions of the globally dominant Anglo-American rock style, to the extent of having English language lyrics. The lyrics speak again of love, and its power to make life better, even if one is going through challenging times: "I'm caught in the middle of the dawn and the sunrise/Life is a miracle/I saw it in your eyes". The accompanying video diverts from the established visualisation of Cyprus and employs a different visual style, aligned with the music video production already growing in the country, that forms the main focus of our article. Beyond showcasing the song and performers, the *Alter Ego* video (directed by Emilios Avraam) deviates from previous representations of the Cypriot landscape in ESC entries. Its location alludes to the Hollywood Road Movie genre and exhibits Western gothic aesthetics. We recurrently see the lead vocalist François Micheletto driving a vintage Ford Mustang car through uninhabited plains, and a wolf making returning appearances (Figures 2 & 3). Therefore, *Alter Ego* exhibits some of the key features Vernallis observes in today's music videos: the increasing sophistication of the form's cinematic address, the camera's assertiveness, and the co-existence of real and otherworldly spaces (2023).

Alter Ego's director, Emilios Avraam, studied Media Technology and received further training in digital compositing in the UK. He worked as junior compositor in the VFX departments for the feature films *Run Fatboy Run* (David Schwimmer, 2007) and *Mutant Chronicles* (Simon Hunter, 2008). His return to Cyprus coincided with the emergence of a dynamic short film scene and an equally energetic music scene, both populated by creatives with similar educational backgrounds. The experiences of Avraam and other local film directors as students and young professionals in the field of media production were shaped by a broader shift in which, as Vernallis claims (2023), the music video has a central role. The author maintains that today's media content carries an "intensified audiovisuality" (2023, p.83), and identifies a "richer back-and-forth across forms and genres" (2023, p.15). She sees the making of music videos as a "training ground in its own right: a director could be responsible for all phases of production, including conception, props, and editing" (2023, p.84). Vernallis (2023) adds that music video's migration from television to online platforms (predominantly YouTube) and the current possibilities of creating attractive content with affordable tools has enabled aspiring filmmakers and musicians to support themselves financially, and thus further explore the music video form. This observation is shared by other key studies on music videos (Burns & Hawkins, 2019; Korsgaard & Korsgaard, 2019) and ethnographically supported by our research in the RoC, where many unfunded musicians and filmmakers use music video as a form of stylistic and technical discovery and experimentation.



Figure 2 - Frame grab from Minus One's *Alter Ego* (2016)



Figure 3 - Frame grab from Minus One's *Alter Ego* (2016)

Alter Ego is arguably a product of the time described by Vernallis, and also of internal shifts that enabled the emergence of a local music video scene informed by universal trends and practices. In the following sections we provide an account of key developments in the music and audiovisual sectors of the RoC, highlighting connecting points between them. The remainder of the article discusses music videos from four main categories of audiovisual representation of the island, which we selected after closely viewing more than 100 locally produced music videos that feature outdoor locations we could identify as Cypriot topographies. These categories are:

- 1) Urban locales;
- 2) The '4S's' (an expression often associated with mass tourism that refers to the 'Sun, Sand, Sea and Sex' offerings of seaside destinations);

- 3) Escapist Re-Inscriptions: and
- 4) Conflict-torn sites.

As will be discussed, while these music videos attempt to speak to a wider audience beyond Cyprus, they also speak back to conventional visual representations of Cypriot topographies in ways attuned to other artistic forms in the RoC (e.g. photography, short and feature films) that are exploring new directions as well. As such, they often challenge the sociopolitical connotations that certain locations carry. This study belongs to the growing literature on the music video production in various national settings, small states, and islands. For example, research on Icelandic and Faroese music video production (Gaini, Hayward & Hill, forthcoming; Størvold, 2023; Dibben, 2009) has been especially useful in helping us formulate an understanding of the richness of the field as well as the functions music video production serves in different contexts. Interestingly, the examination of music video production in the aforementioned settings reads the treatment of natural landscapes as enhancements or elaborations of national identity, whereas a number of music videos we discuss here, as in the case of other local art forms, appear to challenge fixed visual representations of Cyprus as well as notions of identity by (consciously or otherwise) negotiating elements that, according to Parpa, “conjure a sense of national cohesion or discord” (2022, p. 16). Given the fact that treatments of the Cypriot landscape in locally produced music videos is a largely unexplored subject, we believe that our discussion particularly benefits from scholarly work that focuses on how recent artistic output disrupts the meanings Cypriot topographies carry. Even though our analysis exclusively looks at how Cyprus is visually (re)written via music videos, we hope to set the ground for further studies on local music video production that could also engage with other cultural settings in a comparative manner. Still, our discussion follows a similar approach to Duda’s (2019) examination of the relationship between film and music video production in the Polish context. Duda also uses Vernallis’ work to exemplify that music video does not only perform the function of promoting a song, but it is an audiovisual form through which filmmakers can further engage with various visual repertoires, while in the case of Cyprus, also disturbing stereotypical visual portraits of the island.

Turn up the music

With regard to the musical element of music videos, this topic and specifically popular music, comes with certain complexities in the RoC.⁶ In fact, the popular musicscape of the RoC reflects dynamics of hegemony evident in the social, political, and cultural spheres; hegemonies formulated since its independence from Britain in 1960 and, probably more significantly, since the events of 1974 that culminated in the division of the island and the separation of the two major populations (the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot). Although scholarly attention to the popular music of the country has been, until recently, quite sparse, the tendency has been shifting (Stylianou, 2010; Pieridou-Skoutella, 2011; Hajimichael, 2014, 2015, 2016; Demetriou, 2015; Kouvarou, 2022, 2024). Nonetheless, no study yet exists that considers domestic music video production, despite a significant number of music videos having been created in the RoC during the past years. The number of videos we have watched for the purposes of this research, which exceeds 100 and covers only a part of material

⁶ Acknowledging the perennial discussion surrounding the definition of popular music (Jones & Rahn, 1977; Stratton, 1983; Middleton, 1990; Shuker, 2005; Fabbri, 2010 etc.) we use the term here heuristically, to indicate any music that does not belong to the categories of classical music, traditional/folk music, and musical, and which is chronologically placed in the post-WWII years.

produced, is only an indication of its totality. The scarcity of scholarly attention to popular music created in the RoC can be connected to a general attitude that, until recently, treated it as almost non-existent. However, amidst – or, against – the impression that the RoC does not produce music of its own (Pieridou-Skoutella, 2011), a look into the local discography tells a different story. From alternative rock (Abettor, Arcadian Child) to metal (Blynd, En Psycho), from indie (Freedom Candlemaker) to hip hop (Barco Pirata), from pop (Eleni Era) to fusion (Antonis Antoniou), to mention but a few genres and practitioners, songs are being released in the RoC constantly. Indicatively, we can mention that there are currently at least 150 musicians (either solo or bands) that systematically create and record original music within the RoC. In this number we do not include musicians or bands who are not currently active (although many do exist who have contributed significantly in the RoC's popular music output with prior original work). We also do not include cover acts, nor the Cypriot musicians whose music career takes place as part of the Greek recording industry. It is important to specify here that we do not equate the specific scene with the totality of popular music life in RoC, since the latter is still dominated by music that is not created domestically, as the discussion below will showcase. To differentiate the category we are concerned with here, we refer to it as the 'independent RoC music scene'. Scholarly attention has been particularly directed toward parts of the scene with distinct elements of Cypriotness, whether in the use of Cypriot Greek lyrics (Stylianou, 2010; Hajimichael, 2014; Kouvarou, 2022), or of elements from the wider local cultural heritage (Kouvarou, 2024), as creative output that is also speaking back to mainstream, hegemonic, and stereotypical views of Cypriotness. Although our present enquiries do not have stylistic limitations in terms of music, we find a parallel between the Cypriot-centric music scene and the music videos discussed later, in that both foreground a contemporary approach to Cypriotness, speaking back to 'canonic' narratives.

We define music produced in the independent RoC music scene as having lyrics in Cypriot Greek, or/and Greek, or/and English, created or/and performed by musicians who are either Cypriot citizens, or who live and create in the RoC and who do not have a prior relationship with the Greek music industry. The latter is very important, since it is the parameter that provides the popular music life of the RoC with a complexity that has affected its creation, development and reception. In order to understand this complexity, it is necessary to acknowledge the close-knit relationship that RoC has with Greece (as its 'motherland'); the dependence of the RoC on material from the Greek recording industry; and a media structure, dating back to the advent of private broadcasting in the country in 1990, when Greek radio and television stations opened local branches in the RoC that only broadcast Greek music (from Greece) and Anglo-American popular music (Pieridou-Skoutella, 2011). Also fuelling this dependence is the fact that, from the 1980s, Greek Cypriot singers and songwriters started relocating to Greece, aiming to have larger, 'pan-hellenic' careers (Hajimichael, 2016). In fact, some of the biggest mainstream stars of the Greek music industry, such as singers Anna Vissi and Evidiki and composer-producer George Theofanous belong to this category.⁷ This not only strengthened the ties of the RoC with the Greek music industry but has often led to the impression that the two are interconnected to such an extent that the RoC is part of the Greek music industry. To some, this might be the result of a persistent domestic attachment to the 'motherland' that connects to various other

⁷ All three artists reside in Greece, have successful careers, and participated in the ESC either as representatives of Greece or the RoC.

hegemonies that have affected the island (here deliberately speaking about the entirety of Cyprus) for many decades.⁸

Nonetheless, there have been past attempts at creating a recording industry in Cyprus. Hajimichael (2016) makes a succinct contribution to this knowledge, with his case study of Keravnophone Records, one of the earliest record companies in the island that functioned between the 1960s and late 1980s and released multiple records from local bands like Isadoras (other record companies, active in the 1970s, were E.F.I. and Lambousa). Identifying the reasons why the company did not survive, Hajimichael cites the advent of cassette piracy, the abovementioned migration of artists to Greece and, unsurprisingly, the lack of supporting infrastructure in the RoC regarding domestically produced popular music (copyright laws, record sales monitoring agencies etc.). All this, and the miniscule market that the RoC constitutes, made it impossible for local artists to make a living from their music. Still, Hajimichael is careful to show that Keravnophone Records also held relationships with record companies in Greece, therefore increasing our understanding that, until recently, there was probably never a complete independence between the music production of the two countries. Nonetheless, as our knowledge of the music field shows, the RoC never lacked music creativity. What it lacked was the platform for such creativity: media presence. For years, then, it appeared that music production in the RoC was nonexistent outside the boundaries of its institutionalised version: traditional songs, entries in the annual competition for original songs in Cypriot Greek (organised by the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation), and ESC entries. Although the ESC entries of past years are not necessarily songs composed – or, even, performed – by local artists, they are the songs that represent the RoC on an international platform, along with their music videos, like *Monika* and *Alter Ego*. Hence, we find it important to keep them into account as we explore contemporary local music video production.

The musical life of the RoC grew independently from the mainstream media and hegemonic structures described above, mostly within local scenes and live music networks (Kouvarou, 2018). The past two decades have seen an explosion of popular music output, with new forms and experimentations, and cases of local musicians who are receiving international acclaim beyond the borders of the RoC and Greece, such as the world music/fusion group Monsieur Doumani. This is not surprising, given the possibilities presented by social and technological changes: DIY technologies, social media, music-sharing platforms, international collaboration, increased know-how, increased social acceptance of music as an area of study and profession, not to mention the numerous musicians who have studied abroad and followed trajectories similar to filmmaker Avraam (mentioned above). In the face of these developments, and the establishment of local record labels like Louvana Records and music festivals like Fengaros, more musicians started producing and promoting their music, with this proliferation also encouraging knowledge exchange, mutual influence, and an element of competition that allows for constant improvement.

As expected, the contemporary music video production we discuss here sprang out of this scene. Our focus on the representation of place and space is a conscious decision, bearing in

⁸ Such hegemonies include the language ideologies attached to the relationship between the Cypriot Greek linguistic idiom and Standard Modern Greek (SMG), the latter being one of the two official languages of the state (along with Turkish), and the one used exclusively in education, jurisdiction and any formal communication; the aforementioned close-knit relationship between the media of the RoC with those of Greece; the perennial alignment of the curricula of Greek Cypriot schools with those of Greece, and more.

mind the historical and socio-political framework that underlines the official visual representations of the RoC: an emphasis on the Greekness of Greek Cypriots, an attachment to the trauma of division and occupation, and a neo-colonial gaze on Cyprus as an unspoiled heaven. Stylianou and Philippou write that the romanticised representations of the island suggested by the colonial photographic discourse “remained the dominant visual narrative on the island even after the Greek Cypriot rebellion against the British in the 1950s led to Cyprus’ eventual independence from British colonial rule in 1960” (2019, p. 103). Both the music production per se, as well as the accompanying music videos, show signs of divergence from this paradigm, seen here as ‘alternative imaginaries’, by creatively exploring elements of ‘Cypriotness’ and/or emphasising a cosmopolitan, transnational and globalised creativity.

New directions in cinema

Filmmakers presently active in the cinema sector and associated with local music video production belong to a younger generation of practitioners with similar experiences to Avraam’s. Indicative names include – but are by no means limited to – Myrsini Aristidou, Svas Stavrou and Savvas Christou. The latter is also the founder of Cult Experiences, an events production venture that organises the Cyprus Music Video Festival (CMVF), first launched in 2023, in which Avraam participated as a jury member for its competition section. This section attempts to describe the major shifts that took place in the local cinema sector that gradually led to its outward orientation (Constandinides, 2022a and 2022b). These shifts, we argue, are interconnected with the visual depictions of Cyprus in the music videos examined below.

In the 1990s, the Cyprus Cinema Advisory Committee (CCAC) was founded (now operating under the Department of Modern and Contemporary Culture of the newly instituted Deputy Ministry of Culture of the RoC) as a response to the need for the creation of a public film fund informed by European practices. Prior to CCAC’s introduction, films were independently made, or funded by the Film Production Council (FPC) as the RoC’s initial effort to financially support Greek Cypriot cinema. In 1984 this was seen as a political rather than an artistic urgency, since it was introduced after the unilateral declaration of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in 1983. The films funded by FPC have shaped what has been described as the ‘Cinemas of the Cyprus Problem’ (Constandinides & Papadakis, 2015). The Cinemas of the Cyprus Problem unfold in two main categories: i) films employing strong political viewpoints based on the opposing official historiographies adopted by the two sides (the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot) and ii) films, including collaborations between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, attempting to communicate a message of peace and reconciliation.

During the period of FPC and the early years of the CCAC only a handful of film directors were active in cinema, with others predominantly absorbed by the growth of private TV stations and the thriving sector of TV commercials production. With the arrival of a younger generation of filmmakers who contributed to the formation of a dynamic short film scene during the first decade of the 21st century, the gradual introduction of media production programs by local universities, the harmonisation of state film funding policy with EU procedures, and the opportunities offered by EU membership and digital technologies, the broader creative audiovisual sector began to grow and explore other thematic, stylistic/generic and visibility avenues. The 2012-2013 financial crisis, which plunged Cyprus into a period of economic austerity, led to a shift towards online advertising and a preference

across business sectors for low-rate video production services by freelancers or less established media production houses to market products via social media (something that intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic). This transition, together with the positive outlook associated with the 2018 government's incentives scheme to attract international film productions, and the notable international festival journey of Greek Cypriot films like *Smuggling Hendrix* (Marios Piperides, 2018) and *Pause* (Tonia Mishiali, 2018) beyond Cyprus the same year (Constandinides, 2022b) has driven both well-established and young media professionals to develop a versatile set of skills in order to adapt to different roles and budgets, music video essentially becoming the ideal experimental ground for honing such skills.

Recent forms of Greek Cypriot cinema not only offer a revisionist narrative of the previously dominant theme of the Cyprus Problem, but also explore revamped perceptions of the place, its people, its mythologies in ways that negotiate their position within a transnational context. Feature length and short films produced in the last decade seem to be addressing the international festival audiences; however, a closer reading reveals that they are also addressing the context they started their journeys in, in ways that are empowering and aesthetically enriching (Constandinides, 2022a, 2022b). Other media creation, including music videos, also contributes to the changing landscape of the broader creative audiovisual production, as it equally looks for inspiration elsewhere, with online media being both a readily available source and distribution channel. As Korsgaard & Korsgaard write: "YouTube has become a music video *dispositif* in its own right, meaning that besides archiving, stocking, curating, and allowing this audiovisual content to circulate, it enables, conditions, solicits, and informs music video practices and aesthetics" (2019, p. 116). Concurrently, there are filmmakers who appear to consciously resist the pull towards transnationalisation as they wish to raise questions about Cypriot identity in a more impactful manner.

In a chapter titled 'Greek-Cypriot locality: (Re) Defining our understanding of European modernity', Stylianou and Philippou (2018) identify the current period as an intensely revisionist one marked by a flood of artistic projects which attempt to renegotiate Cypriotness and Cyprus' post-colonial trajectory. The authors argue that the RoC's accession to the EU in 2004 and many young people's weariness with the Cyprus Problem have created the conditions for a renewed fluidity in the arts sector. The authors further argue that EU membership lessened the suppression of "any voices or trends that were perceived as pointing away from Greekness and/or European-ness" (Stylianou & Philippou, 2018, p. 354) increasingly leaving room for alternative perspectives. Similarly, Wells, Stylianou-Lambert and Philippou write that Cyprus is "experiencing a 'push and pull' between the old and new, between modernity and tradition as well as between East and West" (2014, p.2). Hence, they remark that "it is a place and culture that often renders straightforward cultural classification exercises futile" (2014, p. 2). The above positions resonate with Kouvarou's (2024) work on trends in the local music scene. Using the phrase "a step back, a leap forward" to describe the examples discussed, Kouvarou maintains that current musical trends show a renewed creative approach to the decolonisation process and can be seen as attempts by Greek Cypriot creatives "to disrupt historical narratives and challenge multiple boundaries" (2024, p. 287).

Until recently, collaboration with Greece was the main type of cinematic transnationalism informing Greek Cypriot cinema (Constandinides & Papadakis, 2020). This can be linked to what Hjort calls "affinitive transnationalism", defined as the "collaboration across national borders with 'people like us,' the perception of similarity being based in many cases on ethnicity, culture, and language, although commonality may center on core attitudes,

interests, concerns and problems” (2010, p. 49). Stylianos-Lambert and Philippou (2015) note that in the mid 1960s and early 1970s, Greek Cypriot cinema turned to Greece for inspiration. Moreover, they argue that the exclusion of Turkish Cypriots (who during that time started living in enclaves after events of intercommunal strife) and an overemphasis on the Greek heritage of the island were implicit political decisions pertinent to (and suggestive of) the perceptions and aspirations of Greek Cypriots. However, the key difference between past and present examples of the affinitive transnationalism paradigm is that the latter are no longer exclusively predicated on ideologically driven terms, but on a cultural and geographical closeness to a bigger market. Still, recent examples of Greek Cypriot co-productions with other countries besides Greece, such as Germany, France and the US, and a sense of solidarity among local creatives, attributed to the country's small size and the shared imperative to challenge existing paradigms, have begun to weaken the province-metropolitan centre hierarchy between the RoC and Greece. For example, Mishiali's 2022 short film *Daphne* received prestigious international visibility (officially selected by top-tier European festivals such as Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival) without major financial backing by the state, and with the contribution of cast and crew members who responded positively to a 'let's do it ourselves' idea about a female character whose struggle to release trapped emotions is exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Equally crucial, albeit in a reverse logic, is that just as music videos require music, films rely on music to stir an emotional connection or set a tone, and Mishiali uses songs by local band Delirium Elephants to enhance *Daphne* – another instance emphasising the synergy between the local music and film-making sectors.

Representations of the Cypriot landscape in local music videos

Urban Locales

In stark contrast to the opulence of Limassol's Marina (a superyacht destination), the central location of the 2020 video (directed by filmmaker Myrsini Aristidou) for the song 'Listen, See, Feel (Akou, Thore, Niose)' by Julio (aka JUAIO) is an abandoned shipyard. The song and music video, both with a powerful anti-racist character, were commissioned by Athlitiki Enosi Lemesou (Limassol Sports Union). JUAIO, probably the most popular hip hop artist in the RoC, shares effective rhymes concerning socio-political and humanitarian nature in Cypriot Greek, criticising injustice of any kind and standing against racism and fascism (Kouvarou, 2022). He is based in Limassol, the second largest urban area after the capital of the RoC, Nicosia. Limassol, situated on the southern coast of the island, is a popular holiday destination, and has recently experienced a property development boom in the form of luxurious high-rise buildings fuelled by factors such as Russian wealth, Israeli investors, and the now-suspended (following corruption allegations) citizenship-by-investment government scheme. The glossy new face of Limassol's seafront presently holds a central position in videos that promote Cyprus as a vacationing and investment destination. 'Listen, See, Feel' begins with a slow, atmospheric, synth sample, introduced before Julio's voice enters. The beat enters when the rapper's flow starts unfolding and, while his words have a faster rhythm, indicating his eagerness to get the message across, the beat remains at a moderate tempo, with the electronic sounds preserving the atmospheric, slightly melancholic, undertone. The *Listen, See, Feel* video (Figure 4) shows a different side of the city to raise awareness about the growing phenomenon of racist attacks, contrary to the 'modern', 'hospitable', and 'vibrant' environment highlighted in various official

representations of the RoC, including the latest promotional video featured on the official YouTube channel of the Deputy Ministry of Tourism⁹.



Figure 4 - Frame grab from JUAIO's *Listen, See, Feel* (2020).



Figure 5 - Frame grab from JUAIO's *Listen, See, Feel* (2020).

Aristidou is no stranger to treatments of undesirable spaces, which she uses as backdrops to filmic narratives of thoughtlessness, as seen from her short films *Semele* (2015) and *Aria* (2017), both showcased at prestigious international events such as Sundance and Berlin International Film Festival. The central character of the music video is a Black boy with a migrant background, hesitantly walking towards a group of boys playing football. A young man, made to look like a neo-Nazi, seemingly the leader of a gang hanging out in the shipyard, instructs one of the local children to kick the ball hard to deliberately hit the Black boy (Figure 5). The video cuts to a new scene depicting another racist attack against an Asian

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjzjPgixLUo>

man, simultaneously drawing attention to the lyrics: “they did not only discriminate against Black people, they found other cursed people regardless of colour because they simply had another religion.” Aristidou’s approach fittingly reflects Vernallis’s understanding of the relationship between imagery and song, since here “the imagery can help us find a way into a song, and conversely the song can help us connect with the imagery” (2013, p. 10). Still, *Listen, See, Feel* is not structured around the recurring elements of the song, and rather attempts to tell a story, with JUAIO making appearances throughout the video to underline the absurdity of these racist episodes through his lyrics.

The emphasis on abandoned buildings, graffiti art and spaces claimed by youth form the visual repertoire of music videos produced for other local hip hop artists, such as Gentara, Agrafos Vivlos and RUFK (see Figures 6-8). Their imagery does not always signify a straightforward sociopolitical commentary, but uses the visual aesthetics associated with hip hop to speak to the followers of the genre inside and outside Cyprus since hip hop is from its birth, an urban, street culture, linked to the ruins of social and political failures. The fact that the lyrics of a considerable number of Greek Cypriot rap songs are in Cypriot Greek, and not SMG (the official language of education, law, and the media in the RoC), adds important revisionist and oppositional dimensions (see Kouvarou 2022) and may be read as a form of resistance, or a process of re-negotiating identity politics by emphasising the Cypriot experience of Greek Cypriot creatives. The visuals in the above music videos enhance this tendency as they complement, or work as proof of, the authenticity and veracity of the artists’ experiences in the margins; and, considering the abovementioned presence-absence of the musicians of the Greek Cypriot independent music scene from the mainstream public sphere of the RoC, we can argue that, in a way, they are still, indeed, in the margins.



Figure 6 - Frame grab from Gentara’s *Klemmenos Thronos* [‘Stolen Throne’] (2023).



Figure 7 - Frame grab from Gentara's *Klemmenos Thronos* ['Stolen Throne'] (2023).

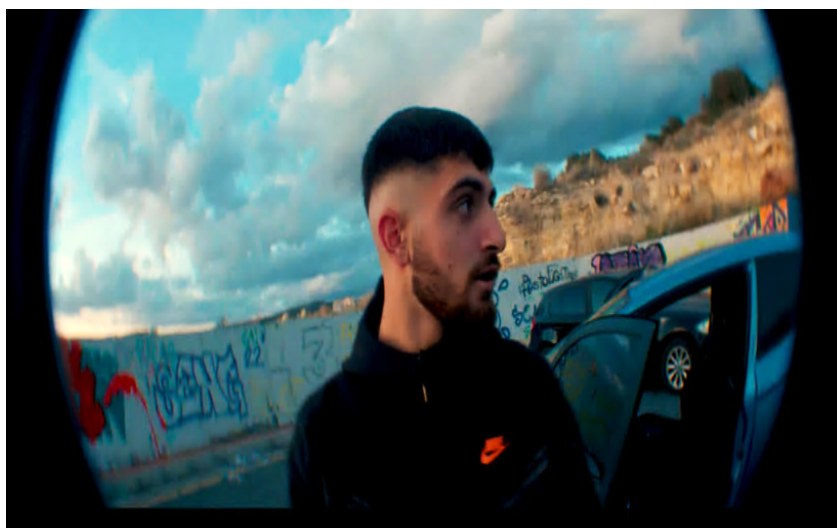


Figure 8 - Frame grab from RUFK's *Kalash* (2023).

It is not only in hip hop music videos, however, that the cityscape of the RoC is represented in ways that diverge from the official visual narrative. In fact, there is an abundance of instances where the urban environment is depicted as exactly what it is: the space where people experience their daily lives, their personal struggles and their moments of joy, where they focus on their own experience rather than any socio-political extensions of that experience. One telling example is NWAINA's 'You were a banana man (Antras Isouna Banana)', a humorous Latin dance song with SMG lyrics and a strongly exotic, Brazilian-themed visual and sound (resulting from NWAINA's visit to and music-making in Brazil). The video, directed by Savvas Christou, is in line with the Brazilian theme, emphasising it further by bringing the exotic musicians' and dancers' attire to the fore, with a carnivalesque feel that creates an interesting dynamic. We are again located in Limassol, the Cypriot city

that is most associated with the Carnival, with its annual celebrations and, especially, its parade, to be attracting many visitors and participants who prepare for months in advance and go to lengths to create costumes and installations that will stand out. The *You were a banana man* video is set in various locations, some unspecified, and has no particular storyline. What is interesting for our purposes are the two first locations: the video opens with close ups of NAINA on a brightly lit stage making a dramatic, slow, but humorous introduction to the song, about a betraying boyfriend. After the slow introduction, the performer, still in her exotic costume, exits the club and locks the door. It is daytime (probably early morning), and we are in the Old City of Limassol. Now the singer, accompanied by two dancers/friends that she meets outside the club, are walking in the empty streets. The contrast, in this case, of the deserted roads (even if one is not familiar with the exact location), with the image of three women in playful, carnivalesque costumes, walking and looking at the camera (Figure 9) to the Brazilian rhythms of this humorous song speaks to the viewer in various ways. Firstly, it emphasises the multi-dimensionality of the international influences of the local creators who, while located in the RoC, are, at the same time, connected with the world and converse with various cultural influences. Secondly, for those who are familiar with the urban context of Limassol, it creates a tongue-in-cheek reference to the relationship of the city with Carnival. And, thirdly, and most importantly for our purposes, it assigns local females a power that is not necessarily aligned with the dominant visual narratives as to the role and place of women in society and the public space, roles pertaining to heteronormative family structures, with females expected to have a more passive presence (see also Parpa, 2022). The protagonists of this video create the impression that, at that point, they 'own' the city, they can choose how to behave in it, with NAINA claiming it as a stage to narrate her story (Figure 10).



Figure 9 - Frame grab from NAINA's *You were a banana man* (2022)



Figure 10 - Frame grab from NAINA's *You were a banana man* (2022).

As is the case with JUAIO's *Listen, See, Feel* video, *You were a banana man* turns the usual narrative surrounding the city on its head, showing that these streets, beyond investment and touristic havens, are also places where people live, love, have fun, and enjoy their experiences with a cosmopolitan flair (including creating, singing and dancing to Latin rhythms).

The 4Ss: Sand, Sea, Sun and Sex

Lightly dressed modern Aphrodites and their Mediterranean *inamoratos* (male consorts) often guide viewers through the beauties of Cyprus in official promotional campaigns, promising unforgettable memories under the sun. Legend has it that the birthplace of Aphrodite, the ancient goddess of love, is a sea stack known as Aphrodite's Rock, located offshore from the main road from Limassol to Paphos. Stylianou-Lambert observes that "thousands of tourists visit and photograph the location of the Aphrodite's Rock in Paphos... [and] seem to claim the location and engage in their own photographic performances" (2013, p. 66). Aphrodite holds a central position in local cinematic production as she has been imagined as Cyprus itself, desired and ravished by many conquerors in the ancient past; narrated as attestation of the island's Greekness (Papadakis, 2006); her enchanting spirit poisoned by nationalist aspirations in the previous century. Constandinides and Papadakis note that "the legacy of Aphrodite has been extensively mined, from films like Andreas Pantzis' *The Rape of Aphrodite* (*O Viasmos tis Aphrodites*, 1985) where all Cypriot women are called Aphrodite" to early 1980s, co-produced sexploitation films shot in Cyprus as part of the *Black Emanuelle* cycle (2015, p. 3). Furthermore, Stylianou-Lambert and Philippou write that the "the space of the beach and the myth of Aphrodite became increasingly important when promoting Cyprus as a tourist destination and this is reflected in some of the films of the period" (2015, p. 75).

Many Cypriot songs are, essentially, soundtracks for the Cypriot summer. The visual material of such songs often frames overtly sexualised bodies enjoying the sea, sand and sun, while performing titillating choreographies. The locations in these videos are those usually encountered in official imaginings of the island as a relaxing and carefree sanctuary. Thus, the atmosphere that they create is equally inviting, but also activates a mode of escape into sexual fantasies. One such example is the video for 'Daydreaming' by Vatti x PolinaVeronica x Mc Stan, directed by Lily Zachariou. The song begins with the sound of waves and a male voice singing a cheerful tune as "la la la" vocables, joined by the female voice when the beat enters. The song, performed to an electronic backing track with a strong dance vibe, keeps introducing sounds that resemble above- and under-water sonic experiences. Zachariou creates a dreamy look throughout the *Daydreaming* video, where the female protagonist oscillates between reality and fantasy, having a milk and flower bath (Figure 11) and diving into crystal clear waters. Other female participants share erotic kisses or suggestively enjoy a phallic ice-lolly. The protagonist, like a contemporary Aphrodite, may implicitly 'orchestrate' this sexual tension while striking playful poses on the sand. Similar scenarios are found in the videos for the upbeat dance tunes 'Aventura' and 'My Reason' performed by Christina Matsa. Interestingly, other music videos offer alternative re-imaginings of Aphrodite, like the lethal seductress performed by Blackbird in the video for the song 'Aphrodite' (directed by Savvas Christou), a slow electronic/pop ballad, with the addition of local sounds like the bouzouki intro, and the recurrent appearance of the instrument in later parts of the song, especially the chorus. In *Aphrodite*, the singer first appears unconscious on the sand while a man comes to her rescue. Another example is the role Daniella plays in the video for the electronic dance song 'Nothing Else but Love' by Solo & Seagate (directed by Evgenios Zosimov). Wearing an angelic-like dress, the singer finally returns to the sea after love has been restored between the heterosexual couple in the video.



Figure 11 - Frame grab from Vatti x PolinaVeronica x Mc Stan's *Daydreaming* (2021).

The usual imagery associated with the 4S's narrative is disrupted elsewhere, as in the *I hit the body on the water (Ktipao to Soma sto Nero)* video for queer artist Krista Papista (ft. Spivak), directed by Alexandros Pissourios, in which the protagonists, wearing flowy dresses, enjoy the sea and play in the water. Here the idea of summer holidays takes a different

direction, as no other person is present, and the video is not aimed for a specific gaze. This is in line with Krista Papista's artistic persona and her art-electro, indie-synth orientation. The song's lyrics, in SMG, start with the words "I hit the body on the water/ it thinks it's 8 years old." After this, the percussion section enters, which gradually becomes more complex, resembling a ritualistic accompaniment. The two protagonists seem to be reclaiming the sea, enjoying the water without interfering with the male gaze, or without fitting any stereotypes in terms of what it is like to be a sea-goer in the Cypriot summer. A striking element of the video is the allusion to visual tropes from Greek Cypriot tradition: the girls present a ceramic amphora, a traditional basket with a type of Cypriot bread, and a species of Cypriot pumpkin that Krista Papista hits on the water to underline the rhythm of the song (Figure 12). These same activities also have strong ritualistic undertones, an element that is not foreign to Krista Papista's work, as Parpa's (2022, p. 12) discussion of Papista's video *Caravaggio* (which we also discuss in the next section) also shows.



Figure 12 - Frame grab from Krista Papista's *I hit the body on the water* (2021).

In *I hit the body on the water*, the two protagonists enjoy the sea, reconnect and reclaim it, putting emphasis on the Cypriot rather than the tourist-associated experience, and declare it as a space of freedom away from the 4S's stereotype. The rituals that seem to be taking place are in honour of the sea as a natural space of the island and carry no sinister undertones.

Escapist re-inscriptions

Numerous local music videos, however, treat natural spaces of the island as transformative and/or dark settings. For example, the video for 'Super Bad Man' by Vatti & PolinaVeronica (directed by Savvas Christou), playfully replicates images from films that explore mythologies of witchcraft and dress their stories with familiar Gothic trappings, like Robert Eggers' *The Witch* (2015). The ecstatic and ritual-like choreographies performed by the female singer and dancers take place in the woods. The camera skilfully complements the dark techno soundtrack, while distorting the image to strengthen the element of the

uncanny, already visible in the costume design through a mixture of gothic and S&M elements (Figure 13). Christou's credits as a film director include the no-budget found footage mystery film *The Monster (To Teras)*, shot in 2020 and released in 2023. The film is set in the pine forest of Prodromos village, located on Troodos mountain, and follows a community of people who found refuge there amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Monster* is indicative of a growing tendency in Greek Cypriot cinema to explore genre conventions, evident predominantly in short films (Constandinides, 2022a), and low-budget feature scenes. Again, this shows how brief media, like short film and music video, are recurrently a testing ground for mastering generic tropes and technical skills and for re-imagining places normally associated with romantic depictions of Cyprus. This stylistic approach meets Westrup's key observation that "music video's essential combination of music and image – its audiovisuality – and its recombination of material from film, television, and musical recordings make it an inherently hybrid, but also an inherently adaptable form" (2023, p. 574). Or, as Korsgaard & Korsgaard note, "the music videos of today are also characterised by being aesthetically heterogeneous" (2019, p. 114). Vernallis points out that in music videos "both a real world and a heightened, phantasmagoric audiovisual world can exist at once" (2023, p. 11). The *Super Bad Man* video includes imagery which does not necessarily represent the song's lyrics but attempts to express the songs' emotions or mood in a visually appealing way. This interaction between visual and music styles often produces interesting re-articulations of the Cypriot landscape as potentially uncanny and unpredictable. Unpredictability in this case may stem from the plasticity of the imagery which renders the locations unidentifiable, thus freeing them from place branding campaigns or "the repetitive narrative of an archetypal Mediterranean *topos*" (Stylianou & Philippou, 2019, p. 102). Correspondingly, Stylianou and Philippou's (2019) reading of the latter's *Sharqi* (a collection of 27 photos) shows "that the inability to identify the depicted locations and their symbols as familiar or inherently Cypriot can be seen as an indirect act of freeing the space from prescribed political and ideological forces that have strictly defined it in the past" (p. 113).



Figure 13 - Frame grab from Vatti & PolinaVeronica's *Super Bad Man* (2021).

A different kind of escapism into Cypriot nature is visually performed by Krista Papista in her video *Caravaggio*, particularly in the opening shots. As is the case with most of Papista's

work, the song itself defies genres, and centres on art-singer-songwriter synth techniques. The instrumentation is minimalistic, with the sounds of synthesisers and keyboards prevailing and emphasising the slowness of the tempo, while the voice is often multiplied. Musical tension is added when the vocal part is over, with the addition of faster, trill-like notes in the later part that lead again to a minimalistic slow ending with synth and keyboard sounds. In the opening scene of *Caravaggio*, we see the performer sitting on two plastic chairs placed in a stream. She is leaning comfortably back, wearing a modern version of the Greek Cypriot female traditional attire, which is – contrary to everything the traditional dress stood for – very revealing (Figure 14). As Parpa (2022) acutely states in her discussion of *Caravaggio*, in this attire Papista speaks back to the conventional, and dominant narrative as to “the kind of visions of womanhood required – chaste, unsophisticated, removed from the charged context of history and sex – in constructions of nationhood” in Cyprus (2022, pp. 8-9). This scene alternates with shots of the performer in a dry urban environment, giving the impression that the urban persona is mentally escaping to nature. We return to both of these settings often in the video, whereas the artist is also positioned in other locations of Cyprus, thus creating more places of escapism to underline the enigmatic lyrics. Interestingly, one of the locations shown in *Caravaggio* is the now-deserted Ayios Sozomenos, a village that features in numerous local music videos.



Figure 14 - Frame grab from Krista Papista's *Caravaggio* (2019).

Re-imagination of sites of conflict

Close-ups of parts of a derelict place edited together with shots of a female body walking through a green field complement the pulsating introduction to the video for the electronic dance song ‘Bring Me Home’ by Solo & Seagate featuring Daniela. The directors of the music video, Emiliios Avraam and Daina Papadaki, gradually offer wider shots of the sites that the female protagonist seems to be trapped in (Figures 15 & 16). The locations, likely to be unfamiliar to viewers outside Cyprus, are the UN-controlled Nicosia International Airport, the main airport of Cyprus prior to the 1974 events, and Ayios Sozomenos, a village abandoned in 1974, after events of intense intercommunal violence. According to Davis, the village “with a majority Turkish Cypriot population, had seen two incidents of violent

conflict... one in 1958, during the Greek Cypriot independence campaign in which Turkish Cypriots were targeted; and another in 1964, during episodes of violence between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots that forced many of the latter into enclaves” (2015, p. 51). The village has been the subject of numerous documentaries, the most important being *A Detail in Cyprus* (1987) by Panicos Chrysanthou, whose work attempts to emphasise a past of peaceful co-existence and propagate a culture of reconciliation between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. The film belongs to the category of the Cinema of the Cyprus Problem, however, as Davis points out, it mobilises “archival materials for anti-nationalist visions of history, and explicitly experiment with the relationship between the present and the past” (2015, p. 43). During the last decade the village, especially the ruins of Saint Mama’s gothic church, has been used as the setting for many audiovisual productions, including fiction films such as *Block 12* (Kyriacos Tofarides, 2013) and even wedding videos. Other music videos use Ayios Sozomenos or Saint Mamas as a location that is open to interpretation, such as the video for heavy metal track ‘Gabriel is Rising’ by Arrayan Path (directed by Bob Katsionis) (Figure 17), and the videos for two ESC entries, namely ‘Don’t Stop (Mi Stamatas)’ (1993) performed by Kyriakos Zymboulakis and Demos Beke, and ‘If You Remember Me (An me Thimase)’ (2013) performed by Despina Olympiou. In the *Bring Me Home* video, images of the Nicosia International Airport and Ayios Sozomenos serve as mirrors of the protagonist’s feeling of loss away from her lover. Thus, the directors use both locations to create a barren imagery or a ‘nowhere space’, which can be seen as an obstacle to her journey towards romantic fulfillment.



Figure 15 - Frame grab from Solo & Seagate’s *Bring me Home* (2013).



Figure 16 - Frame grab from Solo & Seagate's *Bring me Home* (2013).



Figure 17 - Frame grab from Arrayan Path's *Gabriel is Rising* (2016).

The above treatment of conflict-torn sites does not aim to address the thematic canon of the island's division; it instead uses these locations as visually appealing settings that can potentially generate meanings to accompany the feelings created by the songs. The videos for Antonis Antoniou's electronic fusion with musical elements from the Greek Cypriot and wider Middle Eastern tradition song 'Work (Doulia)' (directed by Panayiotis Achiotis), and Savvas Chrysostomou's (aka ΣαίΣ) slow rock track with melodic passages by keyboards, trumpets and oud, 'It's in the Soul (En mes tin Psyshin),' however, do have radical potential as they communicate messages of resistance and/or reconciliation (both songs' lyrics being in Cypriot Greek). The location of the videos is the old city of Nicosia, where the buffer zone, otherwise known as 'Dead Zone' and 'Green Line' is, with its steel army barrels, military guard

posts and check points, a constant reminder of the division¹⁰ (Figures 18 & 19). Antoniou's song calls for the need to "Roll them [the barrels] over, roll them down, get them out of the way", describing this act as *work* and not a game. In the *It's in the Soul* video, young local artists join in with ΣαίΣ, passing a red carnation from one to another, and finally reach a man who stands in front of a wall of white steel army barrels, holding a protest placard which reads 'This Wall is Made Up of Cypriots' Tears'. The amateurish look of the video strengthens its political dimension and the shared ideological beliefs of the artists involved, often associated with music festivals organised by left-wing youth groups, who endorse the political vision of the island's reunification and peaceful co-existence between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. The powerful paradox associated with borders, that is particularly relevant to our discussion here, has been succinctly relayed by Yiannis Papadakis (2017), who describes them as sites of division and contact, conflict and cooperation, security and anxiety, oppression and creativity, expressions of nationalism and its contestation.

In the face of the ethnic nationalisms from both sides that have historically defined both the events that led to the current situation, as well as the narratives that have predominated since, such creative uses of the sites associated with the buffer zone create what can probably be seen as the most significant, and most challenging, alternative imaginary for the Cypriot identity.



Figure 18 - Frame grab from Antonis Antoniou's *Doulia* (2021).

¹⁰ The buffer zone is often used by artists from various creative disciplines as a site where alternative imaginaries of Cyprus can be evoked. Parpa (2022) discusses Krista Papista's video *Cypriot Requiem* and its visual response to the sites of old Nicosia in terms of gender politics and queer identities, whereas Christofidou and Milioni (2022) discuss how, buffer-zone-located and -inspired dance performances create heterotopias that re-narrate the Cypriot trauma.



Figure 19 - Frame grab from ΣαίΣ's *It's in the Soul* (2021).

Conclusion

A 2024 press release by the International Festival of Nicosia, belatedly identifies the “Spring” of Cypriot music production. An informed listener, however, would counter-argue that the “Spring” is not of the local music production but of the level of support provided by major local events to local musicians, and of their own contribution towards audience building initiatives for Cypriot cultural production. The local art scene in general is experiencing a renaissance period, which simultaneously offers opportunities for collaboration across art subsectors such as the one we attempted to outline above. Our article’s particular focus on the audiovisual representation of the island aims to highlight what seems to be a significant turn in the use – and the combination of – the music, lyrics, and images, as tools employed by contemporary creatives during a time of re-walking the decolonisation route and possibly re-envisioning a new, Cypriot-centred, identity (Kouvarou, 2024). Either serving the music and lyrics or creating different visual connotations by adding new elements of meaning to the sonic universe of the songs, the videos discussed above have one thing in common: they are set in the spaces and places of the RoC. Bearing in mind that place and space (and their representation) have an important relationship with identit(ies), the way these audiovisual tracks work, creating alternative imaginaries of the island of Cyprus, re-narrate and reconstruct the dominant visual narratives of Cypriotness (in this particular case, Greek Cypriotness) that prevailed during the past decades. These involve the depiction of enticing locations, a carefree lifestyle, and an unspoiled rural environment; the historical and cultural connection with the Hellenic world and the ‘motherland’ Greece; the conflict, trauma and loss associated with the Cyprus Problem; and the current state of the RoC as an investment haven. Also important here are the gender roles associated with (Greek) Cypriot nationhood and identity that are based on the heteronormative family prototype: the male as guardian, the female as bearer. As Kamenou writes, “real” Cypriot identity and “right” Cypriot citizenship are equated with performing a specific religious, gender and sexual identity (2011, p. 28; also cited in Parpa 2022, p. 4).

In the examples we discussed, music videos seem to be speaking back to the common narratives associated with the RoC, narrating stories that depict:

- i) The living subjects of contemporary RoC cities, experiencing and criticising current challenges of life (JUAIO), and expressing their personal dramas while defying societal norms and expectations as to their gender role, by taking ownership of the city, actively rejecting the male gaze or presence (NWAINA);
- ii) People who either enjoy Cyprus's '4Ss' (Vatti x PolinaVeronica x Mc Stan), use it in combination with their cosmopolitan influences, or turn it on its head (Krista Papista ft Spivak);
- iii) Creatives who use location in escapist ways to narrate non-location-specific stories influenced by cinema and other arts (Vatti & PolinaVeronica); and
- iv) 'Owners' of contested and conflict-ridden sites (the deserted village Ayios Sozomenos, the buffer zone) which they either use creatively and/or to make a political point.

In all these examples, we see a strong ethos of collaboration between artists of various media (cinema, music, etc.) and an urge to produce, and communicate in a context that is not yet fully supportive of this creative Spring. The resulting output narrates different stories than the ones usually associated with the RoC (based on the Cyprus Problem and romanticised portrayals of the island) and puts RoC creativity on the map of the country and the world. Our article has opened up the discussion in relation to the music videos that are produced in the island as extensions of the vibrant creative disciplines of the local cinema and the RoC's independent music scene. Further research can enhance this conversation with regard to both these media and their interaction. We also believe that the inclusion of the creators themselves, as well as of the viewers of these works, in the dialogue, could further illuminate aspects of both the incentives and inspiration underlying such creative decisions, as well as their possible impact and how they are experienced by the audiences of the RoC.

In the context of Cyprus, where landscape, history and sites of division are deeply intertwined, our reading of the music videos identifies a re-articulation of stories of place, space, identity and belonging. In most cases, they do so by speaking back to the dominant narratives with regard to citizenship, gender roles and national and individual identities, all of which have been and keep being affected and prescribed by the narratives of division intensified after the 1974 events. Fifty years after those events, when these words are being written, we see these videos expressing another paradox, this time sitting at a different kind of 'border' (to give Papadakis' conception a metaphorical dimension): that between the dominant visual portrait of the RoC and its alternative imaginaries.

REFERENCES

- Burns, L. A. & Hawkins, S. (Eds.). (2022). *The Bloomsbury handbook of popular music video analysis*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Christofidou, A., & Milioni, D. L. (2023). Art heterotopias against hegemonic discourses: Dancing the Cyprus conflict. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 26(4), 534-553.
- Constandinides, C. & Papadakis, Y. (2015). Tormenting history: the cinemas of the Cyprus Problem. In C. Constandinides & Y. Papadakis (Eds.), *Cypriot Cinemas: Memory, Conflict and Identity in the Margins of Europe* (pp. 117-150). Bloomsbury Academic.

- Constandinides, C. & Papadakis, Y. (2020). Cyprus: Transnational challenges, opportunities and compromises. In L. Papadimitriou, & A. Grgic (Eds.), *Contemporary Balkan cinema: Transnational exchanges and global circuits* (pp. 87-99). Edinburgh University Press.
- Constandinides, C. (2022a). Darker worlds come in small packages: Neo-Noir sensibility in Greek Cypriot short films. In A. Poupou, N. Fessas and M. Chalkou (Eds.), *Greek Film Noir* (pp. 232-246). Edinburgh University Press.
- Constandinides, C. (2022b). Towards a transnational turn(?): success stories, transgressive politics, and artistic initiative in recent Greek Cypriot cinema. *Transnational Screens*, 13(1), 48-63.
- Davis, E. A. (2015). Archive, evidence, memory, dream: Documentary films on Cyprus. In C. Constandinides & Y. Papadakis (Eds.), *Cypriot Cinemas: Memory, Conflict and Identity in the Margins of Europe* (pp. 31-59). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Demetriou, N. (2015). Our land is the whole world: Monsieur Doumani and reinventing Cypriot traditional music. *Mousikos Logos* 2, 63-77.
- Dibben, N. (2009). Nature and nation: National identity and environmentalism in Icelandic popular music video and music documentary. *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 18(1), 131-151.
- Duda, P. (2019). Transgressing boundaries between film and music videos: Smarzowski, Kolski, and music videos in Poland. *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, 10(2), 146-160.
- Fabbri, F. (2010). What is popular music? And what isn't? An assessment, after 30 years of popular music studies. *Musiikki*, 2, pp.72-92.
- Gaini, F., Hayward, P. & Hill, M. (forthcoming 2024). Landscape and cultural heritage in Faroese music videos.
- Hajimichael, M. (2014). Hip hop and Cyprus: Language, motivation, unity, and division. In S.A. Nietzsche & W. Grunzweig (Eds.), *Hip-Hop in Europe: Cultural identities and transnational flows* (pp. 37-55). Lit-Verlag.
- Hajimichael, M. (2015). Critiquing the crisis through music: Three songs about life in Cyprus before and after the 'haircut' of March 2013. *Cyprus Review*, 27(1), 233-47.
- Hajimichael, M. (2016). Keravnophone records: In pursuit of the Cypriot groove. In J. Samson & N. Demetriou (Eds.), *Music in Cyprus* (pp. 175-187). Routledge.
- Hjort, M. (2010). Affinitive and milieu-building transnationalism: The Advance Party initiative. In D. Jordanova, D. Martin-Jones & B. Vidal (Eds.), *Cinema at the periphery* (pp. 46-66). Wayne State University Press.
- Jirsa T. & Korsgaard, M.B. (2019). The music video in transformation: Notes on a hybrid audiovisual configuration. *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*, 13(2), 111-122.
- Jones, K. & Rahn, J. (1977). Definitions of popular music: Recycled. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 11(4), 79-92.
- Kamenou, N. (2011). Queer in Cyprus: National identity and the construction of gender and sexuality. In L. Downing & R. Gillet (Eds.), *Queer in Europe* (pp. 25-40). Ashgate.
- Kouvarou, M. (2018). Live music network in Larnaca, Cyprus: From musicians to audience and back (to the venue) again. *Popular Music*, 37(2), 193-211.
- Kouvarou, M. (2022). (Re)claiming the public sphere: Greek Cypriot dialect Hip-Hop and the right to say it in one's own language. *Popular Music and Society*, 45(2), 221-238.
- Kouvarou, M. (2024). A step back, a leap forward: Tradition, heritage, and visions of a new postcolonial self in the Greek Cypriot popular music of the 21st Century. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 30(3), 285-297.
- Middleton, R. (1990). *Studying popular music*. Open University Press.
- Music Corner. (2022). Nwaina - "Wish you were a banana man."
<https://www.musiccorner.gr/noaina-antras-isoy-na-mpanana-173562/>
- Papadakis, Y. (2006). Aphrodite delights. *Postcolonial Studies*, 9(3), 237-250.
- Papadakis, Y. (2017). Borders, paradox and power. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41(2), 285-302.

- Parpa, E. (2022). Queering the soil: Reimagining landscape and identity in queer artistic practices in Cyprus. *Image & Text*, 36, 1-20.
- Philenews. (2024). I anixi tis kipriakis mousikis paragogis. https://www.philenews.com/politismos/kipros-politismos/article/1437758/i-anixi-tis-kipriakis-mousikis-paragogis/?fbclid=IwAR1zQkJ91weoAAnhyKa7dDgPvFoVyXMbu8pmIY4uXYv5lCSHn80d6wkhXzA_aem_AeSdGUhIBAd9DSnJgYSoYbIBCZL4Si7XRnqCHJnUd51h_ntokTa7tYyoWhR7zSS7YQ8OWd2M2VESZdrT29uZ8ciD
- Pieridou-Skoutella, A. (2011). Greek popular music and the construction of musical identities by Greek Cypriot school children. In L. Green (Ed.), *Learning, teaching and musical identity: Voices across cultures* (pp. 128-141). Indiana University Press.
- Shuker, R. (2005). *Understanding Popular Music*, 2nd Ed. Routledge.
- Størvold, T. (2023). *Dissonant landscapes: Music, nature and the performance of Iceland*. Wesleyan University Press.
- Stratton, J. (1983). What is 'popular music'? *The Sociological Review*, 31(2), 293-309.
- Stylianou, E. & Philippou, N. (2018). Greek-Cypriot locality: (Re)Defining our understanding of European modernity. In P. Meecham (Ed.), *A companion to modern art* (pp. 339-358). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Stylianou, E. & Philippou, N. (2019). Miniature landscapes: Sharqi, the instant photograph, and the re-invention of Cyprus. *Photographies*, 12(1), 99-116.
- Stylianou, E. (2010). Keeping it native (?): The conflicts and contradictions of Cypriot hip hop. In M. Terkourafi (Ed.), *The languages of global Hip Hop* (pp. 194-222). Continuum.
- Stylianou-Lambert, T. (2010). *Tourists who shoot*. Armida Publications.
- Stylianou-Lambert, T. & Philippou, N. (2015). Aesthetics, narratives, and politics in Greek-Cypriot films: 1960-1974. In C. Constandinides & Y. Papadakis (Eds.), *Cypriot cinemas: Memory, conflict, and identity in the margins of Europe* (pp. 61-89). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Vernallis, C. (2023). *The media swirl*. Duke University Press.
- Wells, L., Stylianou-Lambert, T. & Philippou, N. (Eds.) (2014). *Photography and Cyprus: Time, place and identity*. I.B. Tauris.
- Westrup, L. (2023). Music video, remediation, and generic recombination. *Television & New Media*, 24(5), 571-583.

VIDEOGRAPHY

- Antonis Antoniou. (2021). *Doulia*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKLAEj4AnAU&list=PL3lmc3wIy8HALodC2OVFW68tVf2BpEoFf&index=77>
- Arrayan Path (2016). *Gabriel is Rising*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIMePXY4xp8&list=PL3lmc3wIy8HALodC2OVFW68tVf2BpEoFf&index=80>
- Agrafos & Chopo. (2022) *Rap Kiproakpo* (scratches by two DJs).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfpkPvLewHU&list=PL3lmc3wIy8HALodC2OVFW68tVf2BpEoFf&index=17>
- Blackbird. (2023). *Aphrodite*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_P5HsP1y1o&list=PL3lmc3wIy8HALodC2OVFW68tVf2BpEoFf&index=49
- Christina Matsa (2011). *My Reason*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oyi67NoCRLc>
- Christina Matsa. (2024). *Aventura*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Jo8UDTA7XI>

- Evgenios. (2012, August 23). Solo & Seagate featuring Daniella. (2012). *Nothing else but love*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-q-kuyD2zQ&list=PL3lmc3wly8HALodC2OVFW68tVf2BpEoFf&index=36>
- Gentara. (2023). *Klemmenos Thronos* (featuring Agrafos Vivlos).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIKdTYagD1Y&list=PL3lmc3wly8HALodC2OVFW68tVf2BpEoFf&index=2>
- Julio Kompoloi. (2020). *Akou, Thore, Niose* (Eversor).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEFNGEjFVPc&list=PL3lmc3wly8HALodC2OVFW68tVf2BpEoFf&index=19>
- Krista Papista (2021). *Caravaggio*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBkImpdNjyQ&list=PL3lmc3wly8HALodC2OVFW68tVf2BpEoFf&index=40>
- Krista Papista. (2019). *Cypriot Requiem*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilt75ICLpF4>
- Krista Papista. (2021). *Ktipao to Soma sto Nero featuring Spivak (Kamixlo remix)*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6n6oDYqejE&list=PL3lmc3wly8HALodC2OVFW68tVf2BpEoFf&index=42>
- Minus One TV. (2016). *Minus One: Alter Ego* (Eurovision Cyprus)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQMSPkGoQrY&list=PL3lmc3wly8HALodC2OVFW68tVf2BpEoFf&index=14>
- Nwaina. (2022). *Antras Isouna Banana*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6E1R7YATHI&list=PL3lmc3wly8HALodC2OVFW68tVf2BpEoFf&index=58>
- RUFK (2023). *Kalash*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gnFFCgW19Pc>
- Savvas Chrysostomou. (2021). *En mes tin Psyshin*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbwg7gajlq8&list=PL3lmc3wly8HALodC2OVFW68tVf2BpEoFf&index=61>
- Solo & Seagate feat. Daniela (2013). *Bring Me Home*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hhDGwNhUWwo&list=PL3lmc3wly8HALodC2OVFW68tVf2BpEoFf&index=12>
- Vatti & Polina Veronica (2021). *Super Bad Man*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxw5Fiil8RY&list=PL3lmc3wly8HALodC2OVFW68tVf2BpEoFf&index=6>
- Vatti x Polina Veronica x Mc Stan. (2021). *Daydreaming*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Klf3w3mce48&list=PL3lmc3wly8HALodC2OVFW68tVf2BpEoFf&index=5>
- Visit Cyprus. (2020). *Cyprus*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YzjPgixLUo>