

## The memory of objects

### I. Landscape: Cyprus

The Cypriot landscape is deeply etched –both literally and metaphorically– by history in many and diverse ways. The memories of the older as well as the modern history of the country are scattered throughout the island’s territory: Neolithic settlements and cemeteries, ancient theatres and odeons, Hellenistic and Roman villas, Byzantine churches and basilicas, catacombs and baptisteries, Gothic cathedrals, Venetian castles, Ottoman pavilions and aqueducts, roads and fountains of the British colonial rule. On the other hand, the struggles and the drama of the Cypriots –Greek and Turkish Cypriots alike– in modern times have marked the landscape through cenotaphs and war memorials, commemorative columns and statues dedicated to a multitude of heroes and martyrs who gave their lives for the national cause, as that was manifested by each side. These monuments, most of which are of questionable aesthetics, are associated primarily with the struggle of the Greek Cypriots against the British colonialists (1955-1959), the atrocities among the Greek and the Turkish Cypriots (1963-1974), and the military invasion of Cyprus by Turkey in 1974.

Perhaps the most impressive marking on the Cypriot landscape is the flag on the slope of the Pentadaktylos Range just above the Greek Cypriot village of Vouno, which after the Turkish invasion was renamed Yukarı Taşkent (Upper Tochni). The Turkish army has created this huge flag of the so-called “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” (it has an area of 17 football fields) by painting the ground. In fact, to this end, an improvised system of storage and pumping of paint was placed on the site, which is occasionally used to “refresh” the colours of the flag. During the night the flag is illuminated and flashes. Indeed, during the night version, the star is lit first, then the moon followed by the frame and finally two additional parallel horizontal lines are added. In other words, if one looks at its symbolic meaning, the Turkish Cypriot flag seems to be born through the flag of Turkey. This oversized intervention in the natural environment is visible from a great distance even in the southern part of Cyprus, while beside it the Turkish Student Oath is inscribed which reads: “*How happy is the one who says I am a Turk*”. The symbolism and political connotations are more than evident. This huge and vulgar scar, which one could easily describe as an entirely kitsch sample of “nationalist land art”, signifies and seals on the ground, in an absolute and violent manner, the desired sovereignty of Turkey over Cyprus, since it marks the northern territory as that was imposed on the Cypriot ground through the Turkish invasion of 1974.

The most serious consequence of the invasion was the fact that a great number of Cypriots were forced to flee their homes. Over 180,000 Greek Cypriots became, in the nick of time, refugees, leaving all their belongings –mobile and immobile– behind, hurriedly leaving their villages and towns in a desperate effort to escape from the advancing Turkish army, while more than 50,000 Turkish Cypriots were gradually displaced from the south to the north of the island, especially after the so-called Third

Vienna Agreement in August 1975. It should be noted that under this agreement, the Turkish Cypriots were allowed, unlike the Greek Cypriots, to take their belongings with them when leaving their homes.

Around 20,000 Greek Cypriots remained in the northern part of the island, mainly in the Karpas Peninsula, refusing to leave their villages. Many of them were gradually expelled, while most of the others were later forced to head for the south, owing to their isolation, the abuse and deprivation of their basic human rights. The few hundreds, mostly elderly residents, who still remain in some villages, are known as “the enclaved Greek Cypriots”, among whom are the parents of Toula Liasi, Mr. Savvas and Mrs. Maroula Liasi, about whom we will talk further down.

## **II. Journey: Karpas**

The Cypriot landscape is characterised by many pleasant and idyllic vistas. This is particularly evident in the Karpas Peninsula, as a large part of it has, for the time being, been spared of the effects of the continuous urban sprawl in the north, especially as it was manifested after the rejection of the Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriots in April 2004.<sup>1</sup> However, a trip to this area always entails an inexplicable melancholy. The beauty of nature cannot eliminate the recorded facts of history, which, one could say, operate on the traveller subconsciously and inwardly... Perhaps the presence of the enclaved Greek Cypriots, who go on surviving in their homeland (despite the many difficulties), and also the many settlers from Turkey, as well as the Turkish Cypriots who were moved here from their places of origin and now live in the former Greek Cypriot villages, contribute to this. In fact, very often, the remains of the deserted Greek Cypriot buildings –mostly churches and schools– that are exposed to the elements of nature and the destructive rage of the people, still bear the (not so innocent) traces of a period forty years ago.

On 23 April 2003, the Turkish Cypriot side unilaterally decided to open certain checkpoints, thus allowing to a certain extent the movement of persons to the northern part of the island that has been occupied by the Turkish army since 1974. Therefore, many Cypriots –displaced or not– crossed the Green Line after nearly thirty years. In order to be allowed to cross to the north, people were asked by the Turkish Cypriot authorities to produce a valid identity card or passport and to fill out of a document (visa) giving their personal details – procedures which are still enforced to date. This provoked a reaction from a significant part of the Greek Cypriot population, which has since refused to visit the northern part of the island and to follow the procedures set by the Turkish Cypriot authorities, considering these a *de facto* recognition of a separate state. On 24 April 2004, two separate simultaneous referenda were conducted on whether to accept a United Nations proposal for a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem (the so-called Annan Plan). The Turkish Cypriot side accepted the plan with 64.9%, while the Greek Cypriots rejected it by 75.8%. A week later, the Republic of Cyprus joined the European Union with the Cyprus dispute still unresolved. This led to many complaints from countries that had been firmly in favour of the Annan Plan. In fact, in many public statements, their officials did not hesitate to lay the blame entirely on the Greek Cypriots, who had found the United Nations plan unfair for their community

Like, for example, at Taurus, a village on the way to Yialousa and Rizokarpaso, which was renamed Pamuklu by the Turks. On the village square, one can see a very interesting recording on the landscape, the photographic impression of which strikes the viewer as an odd postcard. Within a distance of a few tens of metres, one comes across a concrete fountain bearing the coat of arms of the Republic of Cyprus, an Orthodox church, a school and a mosque. The focal building in this complex is the church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus, now closed, deserted and without crosses on its two bell towers. It appears that the church was used in the past as a mosque by the Turks. This is evidenced by a sign on the facade of the church which states: "Pamuklu Köyü Camii" [Mosque of the Village of Pamuklu]. Right next to it a new mosque has been erected, identical to the ones now rising in most of the former Greek Cypriot and now occupied villages of the north. This mosque is freshly painted and well-kept, and is surrounded by an equally well-maintained wall.

However, this is not true for the former church/former mosque across. When one looks at the interior through the broken windows and the cracks, one sees right away the complete abandonment and desolation. The marble iconostasis is completely stripped from the icons that once adorned it. The same applies to the sanctuary and the marble altar. The floor is covered with droppings of birds that find refuge in the building by entering through the many broken windows of the dome. At one end are the carpets –rolled and wrapped– that were once used in the mosque. The carved wooden orthodox bishop's throne has undergone the necessary conversions and has been painted green in order to be used by the imam. On one of the white walls one can still clearly see vestiges of a Greek inscription, which has been covered with white paint. Surprisingly, some words probably referring to certain donors of the church or to its founders have escaped from the entire whitewashing of the wall. Those that are more clearly distinguished are as follows: "X Yiorkis with wife, from the village of Tripimeni, 22-9-1957." Tripimeni is a village in the occupied Famagusta District. What is really impressive in the interior is the desolation and abandonment (for the second time) of this ecclesiastical monument. As if its most recent tenants used it only out of necessity and got rid of it right away, abandoning it to its fate, as soon as they acquired their new mosque.

Above the church and on a small hill lies the ruined elementary school of Taurus. On the left and right of about thirty steps that lead to the school rise tall palm trees and cypresses which being bushy and unkempt create a striking green screen in front of the school, emphasizing the grandeur of this relatively small albeit elegant building, built in a kind of neo-Doric style. It consists of two classrooms, left and right of the central area of the propylaea. The one on the left-hand side is neglected and dilapidated. One could assume that the dirty and tied in a knot curtains have been hanging on the rusted windows since 1974. The right wing of the building has been renovated by the non-governmental organisation Karpaz Dostlari Derneği/Friends of Karpaz, as one can read on a plaque, and apparently houses the offices of the organisation.

The disparity in the maintenance of the two sides of the building is also visible on its façade. The one half of the building (on the right) is painted and clean while the left part seems as if it hasn't been touched by human hands since 1974. On the bottom right of the left-hand side there is a marble foundation plaque stating: "When President of the Republic of Cyprus / was His Beatitude the Archbishop / and Ethnarch of Cyprus / His Excellency Makarios III / and the Honourable Mr. Constantinos Spyridakis / was President of the Greek Communal Chamber / (the Parliament) of Cyprus / the foundation stone of the Elementary School of Taurus / was laid by his Excellency / the Ambassador of Greece Mr. Miltiades Delivanis / the funds for its construction kindly provided / by the Royal Government of Greece / 28th of June Anno Domini 1962."

Despite the passage of time, it seems that the inscribed marble plaque at some point in the past was covered with thick blue paint. Just over it the word EOKA is written with the same paint.<sup>3</sup>

One could say that this triangle (new mosque – old church – elementary school), on the one hand, represents and, on the other, encompasses the entire modern history of Cyprus within a few square metres of land. The newly formed republic, this "reluctant" republic as was very aptly defined by Stephen G. Xydis,<sup>4</sup> whose imprint can be clearly seen on the cement fountain, bearing the emblem of the Republic of Cyprus and the date 1962. This fountain is one of the hundreds which were constructed in Cyprus after 1960, sealing even through the water supply the identity of the newly established state and the beginning of the modern era. The fountain, which is still operative, was apparently used by the Muslim inhabitants for their ritual washing of feet before entering the former mosque/former church to exercise their religious duties. One is particularly surprised by the fact that no one went into the trouble to eliminate the emblem of the Cyprus Republic, which we will try to explain further down.

At the other end and over the church, lies the elementary school. Moreover, on the slope of the hill which is between the two buildings there are tiers made of concrete. One can imagine that in the past this place functioned as a kind of an open-air amphitheatre for national and religious festivals. For the Greek Cypriots, the notions of religion and fatherland were always intertwined. Besides, the role of the Orthodox religion in the establishment of a national rhetoric, as well as the Greek Cypriot nationalism, was crucial. Additionally, as reflected by the building of the school that alludes to an ancient temple, Greece –the motherland of the Greek-Cypriots– puts Greek-Cypriot education and culture under its protection, obviously intending to emphasise in this way the Greekness of Cyprus since antiquity, which has always been the cornerstone of Greek Cypriot national rhetoric.

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<sup>3</sup> The National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA) was a Greek Cypriot organisation, which fought during the period 1955 to 1959 for the independence of Cyprus from British rule and for union with Greece.

<sup>4</sup> Xydis, S. G. (1973). *Cyprus: Reluctant Republic*. The Hague: Mouton.

On the other hand, one is impressed by the EOKA slogan, which lies forgotten on the front wall of the school. Whether it's there out of oversight, indifference or intentionally is a matter that needs to be examined further. The slogan refers both to the liberation struggle of the Greek Cypriots against British rule (1955-1959) aiming at the union of Cyprus with Greece, and to EOKA B,<sup>5</sup> the illegal paramilitary organisation founded by George Grivas, with the ultimate goal of achieving the union of the island with Greece through armed action, which eventually led to a civil strife among the Greek Cypriots, which, in turn, resulted in a coup d'état attempt backed by the Greek military junta and the Turkish invasion of the island in 1974. The blue paint on the marble foundation plaque of the elementary school may have been intended to cover the name of Archbishop Makarios III, the first president of the Republic of Cyprus and the main target of both EOKA B and the Turks.

All these traces of history found on matter –written, inscribed and etched on human structures– combined with the natural environment compose a strangely charged picture. Even the old, bushy palm-trees as they are tangled with the tall cypress trees that rise in front of the Doric propylaea of the school, lend the place an almost “orientalistic” indolence. On the other hand, however, they contain an intense guilty past.

In his fundamental work *Landscape and Power*, W. J. T. Mitchell writes regarding the depiction of landscapes in disputed areas that seem idyllic: “*We have known since Ruskin that the appreciation of landscape as an aesthetic object cannot be an occasion for complacency or untroubled contemplation, rather it must be the focus of a historical, political and (yes) aesthetic alertness to the violence and evil written on the land, projected there by the gazing eye. We have known at least since Turner – perhaps since Milton– that the violence of this evil eye is inextricably connected with imperialism and nationalism. What we know is that landscape itself is the medium by which this evil is veiled and naturalized. Whether this knowledge gives us any power is another question altogether.*”<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, the Karpas District is a particularly special area. For the occasional tourist or the conscious settler, the landscape can easily be idealised as a pastoral paradise, subconsciously ignoring or consciously going past the marks of history, which often allude to the imposition, the violence and the brutality, and which are scattered everywhere on the ground.

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<sup>5</sup> The National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters B (EOKA B) was an armed paramilitary organisation founded in Cyprus by George Grivas-Digenis in 1971, with the aim of achieving union of the island with Greece. With its armed action, its extreme positions, its illegal practices and the inevitable strife with the legitimate government of Cyprus and with Archbishop Makarios himself, it led Cyprus to the coup d'état in July 1974 and the disastrous Turkish invasion which soon followed.

<sup>6</sup> Mitchell, W. J. T., *Landscape and Power*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002, p. 29.

Today, the north part of the island is full of marks of misappropriation and usurpation. Travelling towards Ayia Triada of Yialousa, an exclusively Greek Cypriot village before 1974, which was renamed Sipahi by the Turks, one finds the village of Ayios Andronikos, which after 1974 was renamed Yeşilköy. Here also the traces of history are inscribed on the landscape. An abandoned orthodox church –of Ayia Fotini or Fotou, as it was called by the locals– stands ruined and plundered next to the magnificent monument of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on horseback. Further back, a newly built mosque with twin minarets. As we saw earlier, this kind of intervention in the landscape is a recurring pattern throughout the Turkish-occupied part of the island. At best, the village church, always without a cross on the dome or the bell tower, has been converted into a mosque. But most churches, monasteries and chapels in the north have been converted into warehouses, stables, or even sheepfolds, after they were stripped of everything that was of value, and their frescoes, floors, doors and windows had been removed from the buildings.

### **III Visit: Memory**

I have visited the village of Ayia Triada (Sipahi) twice for the purposes of my research. About fifty elderly enclaved Greek Cypriots still live in the village, including Mr. Savvas and Mrs. Maroula Liasi, parents of artist Toula Liasi, who was also enclaved in Ayia Triada for one year (1974-1975) before leaving for Greece to study and subsequently to the Netherlands. Before 1974 the Liasi family was among the notables of the area. Mr. Savvas was owner of a large retail store in Yialousa. After 1974 and thanks to his education, he became in a sense the spokesperson of the residents, helping them with their bureaucratic and other procedures for a better life under the new administration. It should be noted that life in the enclaved Karpas is not easy, since even today the locals are denied their basic human rights. Especially during the first thirty years, they lived in a constant state of terror and oppression despite provisions to the contrary in the Third Vienna Agreement.<sup>7</sup> The restrictions on movement, communication, education, religious expression, the right to property, health care, etc. were suffocating. The enclaved suffered daily humiliations, looting and violence. As I was told by Toula Liasi herself, who has lived for years in the Netherlands, for twenty-two years she could communicate with her parents only once a week, through a telephone in a pharmacy in the nearby village of Yialousa, whose Turkish Cypriot owner was kind enough to assist them by allowing them to use his telephone.

The imposing mansion of the Liasi family, built in 1936 as evidenced by the date on the ornate ironing covering the fanlight over the entrance, is perhaps the most beautiful building in the village and is very well preserved. Four large and spacious

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<sup>7</sup> On the issue of the enclaved Greek Cypriots, see the website of the Press and Information Office of the Ministry of Interior of Cyprus:  
<http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/pio/pio.nsf/All/AB033773F7A18AB8C2256D7A003C5C24?OpenDocument>.

rooms on both sides of the central two-chamber hall, storage rooms and a bathroom at the back, overlooking a very large courtyard planted with all sorts of trees.

Coming back inside the house, one can admire, among other things, the living room with its Art Deco furniture, armchairs, ornately curved tables and the large geometrically structured sideboard. The kitchen, the “heart” of every traditional Cypriot house, is also impressive with its dirt floor, as all kitchen floors once were, the chimney, the cupboards. The feeling one gets is that time has really stopped in this room, or rather it has travelled even further back in time, as one gets the impression that he is back in the 1930’s, 1940’s or 1950’s. But what really impresses the visitor is the variety of the objects found in every room of the mansion. One could say that the house is a kind of museum in progress, which aims at safeguarding any object that crossed its threshold from the time it was built.

The other dominant feature of the house is the large number of pictures, photographs, postcards and picture frames, which cover, from end to end, not only the vertical but also the horizontal surfaces. You get the feeling that they are photographic iconostases on tables, under glass surfaces, on the walls, tucked in mirrors’ corners, on the sideboards and other furniture in the hall, the living room, the bedrooms and the kitchen.

You are under the impression that they form a colony of live microorganisms that continuously multiply and occupy every space in the house. Next to the icons of saints are photos of Mr. Savvas with prominent personalities of the United Nations, political and religious leaders of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities, since as we have already mentioned he is somehow the “official spokesperson” of the community of enclaved Cypriots. In addition, among many other photos are those –mostly portraits– of family members, of their daughter Toula, their grandchildren, and their son Yiannis. The photo of young Yiannis is in every nook and cranny of the house; he is the focal figure in each one of these makeshift “iconostases”. Mrs. Maroula calmly explained that Yiannis has been missing since 1974, when he was serving in the Cyprus National Guard near Kythrea.

On my second visit to the house, after a few months, apart from Mr. Savvas and Mrs. Maroula, I met Toula in person, who happened to be in Cyprus to prepare her exhibition and was visiting her parents for a few days. Toula has been living in The Hague, Netherlands, for many years, where she teaches Art and also exhibits her work. Thanks to Toula, I had the opportunity to “search” more the interior of the house and spend quite a lot of time on closely studying every corner of the house. This time I was able to actually confirm my first observation. Savvas and Maroula Liasi, as well as their daughter, have treasured and preserved everything with religious care. Not only objects of value –monetary, emotional or historical– but also almost any other object that found its way into the house over the last forty years. Thus, apart from furniture, china bibelots and other decorative items, glassware and souvenirs, there are hundreds of other articles – made of metal, paper, glass, plastic or wood. Cartons, wooden or plastic cases, glass containers, tins, cans, ropes,

agricultural tools, oil presses, panniers and baskets, bottles, pitchers and water jugs, cooking pots, graters, small glass containers, enamel mugs, bed sheets and other linen and whatever else the human mind can think of. It is mainly these objects that Toula Liasi uses for her work and for which we will talk about further down.

#### **IV. Objects: Energy**

How do objects affect the human condition? How crucial is the energy of matter in the evolution of situations and events and what is the relationship of this energy to the human factor?

From Spinoza to Nietzsche and from Adorno to Deleuze, the concept of “living matter” intensely preoccupied Western philosophy. In her book *Vibrant Matter*, political theorist Jane Bennett develops the theory of “vital materialism” which runs bodies and forces, both human and nonhuman, and interacts with them. Bennett explains how political analyses of public events would be different if we acknowledged that the action always occurs as the result of *ad hoc* groupings of human and nonhuman elements.<sup>8</sup> By vitality of matter, Bennett means “*the capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents of forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own.*”<sup>9</sup>

Regarding the action of matter, Bruno Latour uses the term “actant” to characterise a source of action, which can be either human or nonhuman. This active substance is effective and has sufficient consistency to make a difference, to produce effects, to modify the course of events.<sup>10</sup> In a recent study for politics, Latour says: “*It is not unfair to say that political philosophy has often been the victim of a strong tendency to avoid objects.*”<sup>11</sup>

Also, Levi Bryant in his work *The Democracy of Objects* states that objects are “*dynamic systems that relate to the world under conditions of operational closure, human subjects themselves are simply one variant of objects.*”<sup>12</sup> Bryant takes up Niklas Luhmann’s theory of social systems, and the terms of “autopoiesis” and the concept of “operational closure” that were first introduced by Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela in 1972. According to Luhmann, systems are self-referential and they do not relate to their outside environment. Though, as

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<sup>8</sup> Bennett, J., *Vibrant Matter*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Bennett, J., *Vibrant Matter*, op. cit., p. viii.

<sup>10</sup> Latour, B., *Politics of Nature*, Cambridge (MA) and London: Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 237.

<sup>11</sup> Navaro-Yashin, Y., *The Make-Believe Space*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012, p. 162.

<sup>12</sup> Bryant, L. R., *The Democracy of Objects*, Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2011.



Bryant puts it, a system and environment may perturb or irritate each other, information does not pass from one to another: the system produces its own information in response to irritation.<sup>13</sup>

Focusing our attention once again on the Karpas and the home of the Liasi family, we will try to formulate an interpretation for the system of the thousands of objects found there. In her anthropological, social and ethnographic research, Yael Navarro-Yashin has worked extensively with northern Cyprus, the Turkish Cypriots, their dwellings and the objects they use. Reflecting critically on the object-centred philosophy of ANT (Actor Network Theory) and on the affective turn in the human sciences after the work of Gilles Deleuze, Yashin explored the concepts of spatial and material melancholia.

Yashin distinguishes an intense melancholy in people, which she interprets through the notion of “maraz”, which, as she says, has a special significance in the Cypriot dialect since “it refers to a state of mental depression, deep and inescapable sadness and unease.”<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, the same melancholy is emitted from spaces, especially those which do not belong to their rightful owners. Yashin argues that the main reason for this depression is the usurpation of the loot of the so-called “enemy” community; in other words, that the Turkish Cypriots who moved from the south to the north and settled in the empty villages of the Greek Cypriots appropriated and used properties, spaces and objects that did not belong to them.

Referring to the Turkish Cypriots, Yashin says that this is “*a community significantly made up of refugees who, having been dispossessed of their own belongings and finding themselves in a new spatial zone and political contingency, assumed out of will, circumstance, or coercion, the properties and belongings of another community officially construed as ‘the enemy’.* With the erection of a military border, the Turkish-Cypriots were banned from interacting on a person-to-person or intersubjective level with the Greek-Cypriots. They were able to relate to the other community only through the objects, which the Greeks had left behind. In fact, it could be argued that the Turkish-Cypriot community recreated itself as a ‘community’ by (literally and metaphorically) garbing itself in the other (Greek-Cypriot) community’s clothes, creating an ‘economy’ significantly out of the objects and properties belonging to the Greek-Cypriots, and a political system that would not only gloss over but also explicitly organize, administer, and support such misappropriation and possession.”<sup>15</sup>

We could say that the enclaved of the Karpas District experienced exactly the opposite situation compared with that of the Turkish Cypriots who moved to the north

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<sup>13</sup> Bryant, L. R., *The Democracy of Objects*, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Navaro-Yashin, Y., *The Make-Believe Space*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012, p. 161.

<sup>15</sup> Navaro-Yashin, Y., «Affective Spaces, Melancholic Objects: Ruination and the Production of Anthropological Knowledge», *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.)* 15, 2009, pp. 1-18.

and found themselves using a disproportionate large area of space and quantity of material things. The enclaved, by contrast, were limited to the absolute minimum space required for their survival, almost confined to their homes and with the right to use only a small portion of their land. Apart from the deprivation of basic human rights, they found themselves in communities-prisons, where their dictated daily lives depended to a large extent on the living space of their dwellings and the available objects they had in their possession.

Therefore, one could say that, unlike the Turkish Cypriots who built a political economy based on the loot that they appropriated and usurped and which, it could be said, they subconsciously abhorred or caused them melancholy, the enclaved built their own system attached to spaces and objects that belonged to them, which they had to maintain at all costs if they were to preserve their ownership/power in their own spaces. In other words, the concept of ownership focuses on household objects, each of which is an element of memory, identity and ownership. One could say that, in this case, the concept of “saving like an ant” acts as a means of sustenance, preservation, survival and perhaps resistance.

In this case, things start to acquire a different power, a vital and vibrant energy that operates as a closed system, in parallel with that of humans, and establishes its jurisdiction over space and the evolution of events. It is as if the objects support the Liasi family in their endless struggle for survival in a familiar environment, which however, due to the existing conditions, has become hostile. **Now, the things-objects obey their own rules, interact with people but produce their own information, operate independently and multiply.**

Talking about the relationship between things-objects, W. J. T. Mitchell says: “*The objects are the way things appear to a subject – that is, with a name, an identity, a gestalt or a stereotypical template [...]. Things on the other hand, [...] [signal] the moment when the object becomes the Other, when the sardine can looks back, when the mute idol speaks, when the subject experiences the object as uncanny and feels the need for what Foucault calls a metaphysics of the object, or, more exactly, a metaphysics of that never objectifiable depth from which objects rise up toward our superficial knowledge’.*”<sup>16</sup>

According to Yashin, while the objects and properties of the Greek Cypriots create a feeling of depression and melancholy to the Turkish Cypriot usurpers, to the enclaved Greek Cypriots, by contrast, they transmit the positive energy of the temporal and spatial continuity. The house, the yard, the warehouse, the things, the objects connect people with a long lost universe, projecting the past into the present.

Furthermore, the dozens of photographs lying all over the house connect the past with the present and constitute documents of both memory (of the enclaved parents and

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<sup>16</sup> Mitchell, W. J. T., *What Do Pictures Want?*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005, pp. 156-157.

their missing son) and post-memory (of the daughter who lives abroad, the visitor, the researcher). They are documents of a world that has been left to disappear. According to Arianne Hirsch: “*Postmemory is a very powerful and very particular form of memory, precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. This is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past.*”<sup>17</sup>

## **V. Art: Oblivion**

Toula Liasi has been regularly visiting the Karpas District and her parents since 2003, when the barricades were lifted. Her relationship with the objects of the house is just as close as that of her parents. Every time she is there, she sorts, categorises and classifies the objects –according to type, material, colour– simultaneously attributing them aesthetic values. Much more consciously than her mother and father, Toula creates a monument –both private and public– in which she boxes the memory of her personal past, as well as the post-memory of the collective past of this forsaken group of people, who are left to fade in time and space.

At the same time, she tries to implant this memory into her art, delineating it from the particular spatiality and temporality of the post-1974 Karpas and transferring it to a visual system that attempts to operate autonomously. So, she methodically photographs the various household objects, as well as others which are outdoors both in her own courtyard and in the village. Hives, ironware, tools, even the broken crosses of the desecrated Greek Orthodox cemetery are, as she says, peculiar colours of her personal palette that create a series of complex works, which I would call “pixelized collages of enclaved memory”.

This fragmentary photographic record, which consists of dozens of variations of the details of these objects, is reconstructed to a multiple reality that seeks to converse with the viewer in a peculiar way through purely visual means.

The mugs, crosses, hives, buckets, barrels, tools, the rusty door may, on the one hand, be an impressive array of neo-pop organised formations; on the other hand, however, they envelop a very strong and clear political reality.

I think that, through these “westernized” photographic formations, Liasi is seeking a renegotiation of both memory and oblivion.

In our time, an age when natural, political, social and economic changes and upheavals occur so rapidly, so much so that we are practically powerless to trace, let alone understand, the flow of events, memory –both collective and individual–

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<sup>17</sup> Hirsch, M., *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, Cambridge (MA) and London: Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 22.

acquires a special significance. On the other hand, we often nowadays watch processes of forgiveness and oblivion of the historical past, a recent example in our region being Israel's apologies to Turkey for the victims aboard the ship that was bombed by the Israelis off Gaza in 2010.

Both Jacques Derrida in his work *On Forgiveness* and Paul Ricoeur in *Memory, History, Forgetting* deal in depth with memory, forgetting and forgiveness.<sup>18</sup> Both philosophers deal with the notion of unlimited forgiveness and oblivion through the deletion of all traces, both on a collective and on a personal level. On the other hand, both Derrida and Ricoeur are concerned, especially on the collective level, with whether forgetting should presuppose amnesia and forgiveness the erasure of memory.

With her works, to which she has very appropriately given the general title *Rusted Evidence*, the artist reconstructs the rusted evidence of being enclaved, exorcising it from its natural habitat and transforming it into art.

Her action, however, does not cease to be deeply political, as, although she is not destroying the traces of historical testimony (and hence of memory), she is processing and redefining them in a very unique way, which not only implies but also provides an outlet to oblivion and forgiveness through the memory of objects.

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<sup>18</sup> Derrida, J., "On Forgiveness" in *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, London and New York: Routledge, 2001. Ricoeur, P., *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004. Regarding this issue, see also: Whitehead, A., *Memory*, London and New York: Routledge, 2009.