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CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION ART

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**RE APHRODITE  
MEETS ALICE  
WANG  
2011**

EVANTHIA TSELIKA

This booklet includes text and photographs that have been produced from the documentation of the actions and happenings of this project that dealt with the experience of female South East Asian Migrants in Cyprus.

Please watch the 'Made in China' Video on the Conflict transformation art DVD before reading the rest of this booklet. You can also refer to the website of the collaboration Re Aphrodite - [www.reaphrodite.org](http://www.reaphrodite.org)

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**INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECTS**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECTS

The series of these three Booklets documents the projects that have been carried out within my practice led PhD process that examines conflict transformation art, as a facet of socially engaged practice within segregated urban landscapes (2010-2012). The booklets present an overview of the projects that I have been involved in developing and act as the documentation of practice which is analyzed in the written thesis. The booklets demonstrate information on the project, describe what took place, provide visual evidence and an in depth presentation of the situations that were manifested through the practice. It is the practice that allowed the understanding of conflict transformation art to emerge and which also enabled a testing of different methods so as to negotiate and critically reflect on the function of social art practices within the context of socio-spatial divisions that exist within urban environments.

Conflict transformation art is thus presented as an interpretation of a practice that emerged through the examination of the role of socially engaged art within the context of urban segregation through the case study of the divided city of Nicosia, Cyprus. Through this process what was demonstrated are the ties of art to conflict resolution which are presented in Nicosia. This local narrative of social art practice was then used to develop a way of working that combines these two methodological frameworks and which creates new narratives as to how conflict is reshaping the way that we view our cities. Conflict transformation art focuses on the elements of conflict, dialogue, challenging dominant hegemony and bringing different social groups together through formats such as the exhibition, the workshop, the public dialogue and public performance.

These booklets map this practice led research that focuses on how conflict has shaped socially engaged

art production within divided cities and also explore the processes of development of the projects. Due to the collaborative element that all the projects portray in their development and the involvement of different social groups in their manifestation, a large emphasis is placed on reflecting all the different voices that have been heard through these projects.

The 'Public Works' booklet documents a project from 2010 that examined Nicosia as a divided city and which focused on the landscape of the old city that is characterized by this ethno-national separation and which at the time was largely inhabited by migrant groups and which depicted the initial steps of a regeneration process. This project was carried out in public and semi public spaces and it tried to reflect on how different social groups interpret the conflicted landscape of the city. The 'Re Aphrodite meets Alice Wang' booklet focuses on the experience of a Chinese American in Cyprus and on informal social research that was carried out with female Asian migrants due to this unique position of access and which demonstrated elements of abuse by Cypriot men to migrant women, the lack of civic representation of migrants in Cypriot society and the limited interaction between Cypriots and migrants. The 'Sinikismoi' (refugee neighbourhoods in Greek) booklet looks at two different projects that took place within the state social housing projects that exist in Nicosia and which were developed to rehouse Greek Cypriot displaced people after the 1974 conflict. The projects within the 'Sinikismoi' umbrella included a public performance, a residency, an exhibition, an intervention in the space of the displaced housing, workshops and a public dialogue in relation to how these social spaces have been utilized by politicians within their ethno-nationalist discourse and how they exist in the periphery of social and urban life in the city.

A DVD accompanies the booklets and this includes video documentation from all three projects. The booklets also act as documentation of the projects.

An overview of each project is provided, the people who were involved in each one are presented, the funders are mentioned, the locations are explained and what actually took place within each one. What these booklets demonstrate is how these projects were produced. Due to the collaborative nature that I had decided to use from the beginning of this research, each project was produced through collaboration with other people. Because of my focus on dialogical practice many voices can be heard through the documentation process. These are the voices of the collaborators, the contributors, the participants and of the members of chance audiences. This documentation process allowed for particular facets of the projects to rise to the surface and this in turn shaped the critical analysis of how art can be used to facilitate social change within the framework of segregated urban landscapes. The element of collectivity and the creation of contexts that bring together different social groups allowed for an understanding of how social art practices can provide contexts where radical forms of democracy can be demonstrated.

As stated above the projects have all been the result of collaborations with different individuals and in the booklets different voices can be heard- of collaborators, participants and of audiences. However I have produced the content of these booklets and they are an integral part of this PhD research project, as they provide the evidence of practice through the documentation process. Even though these booklets present the voices, art work and research of collaborators and participants, they are still authored by me and thus demonstrate these projects through my own lens and interpretation.

I would like to thank everyone that made these projects possible: collaborators, participants and funders alike. Particularly I would like to thank Demetris Taliotis- 'Public Works', Chrystalleni Loizidou- 'Re Aphrodite meets Alice Wang', Natalie Heller and Orestis Lambrou- 'Sinikismoi' projects.

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**INTRODUCTION - OVERVIEW OF RE APHRODITE MEETS  
ALICE WANG**

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## 2. INTRODUCTION - OVERVIEW OF RE APHRODITE MEETS ALICE WANG

This project was a collaboration between Re Aphrodite (Evanthia Tselika and Chrystalleni Loizidou) and Alice Wang during the Spring of 2011 in Nicosia. The project included a privately filmed interview and a public interview and dialogue at Apotheke Contemporary Arts. The Private film interview was presented in the form of a video installation and was exhibited in 'Common Reflections', Nicosia 2011. It was also exhibited in 'Entralinguas', Brazil 2011 and 'Entralinguas', Mexico 2011 (the installation for the video was interpreted by local artists). You can watch a clip from the 16 minute long video exhibited in the DVD provided as part of this logbook compilation.

The second part of the project was a public presentation by Alice Wang, a public dialogue and a party at the Apotheke Contemporary Arts. The presentation was an interview by Re Aphrodite with Alice Wang which was attended by US embassy representants (as Alice came to Cyprus as a Fullbright scholar), local legal/NGO representatives, migrants (Alice's friends) and other interested parties.

The Video interview (own footage) was shown as part of installations at:

'Common Reflections'- Artos Cultural Foundation- Nicosia 2011

And interpreted in video installations in 'Entralinguas'- Mexico 2011 by Rogelio Gómez Jimeno

'Entralinguas'- Brazil 2011 by Francisca Silva

The Re Aphrodite Project started with Chrystalleni Loizidou following 'Public Works' in 2010. We met through Demetris Taliotis and soon begun to discuss the possibility of collaborating as Loizidou's PhD research and my own demonstrated particular overlaps. We shared many concerns about the structures that

have defined public art in Cyprus and how Cypriot art has evolved through the bi-communal art structures. We started to reflect on various issues around the notion of Cypriot art, how it has been shaped by ethnic division and bi-communal international funding and soon this evolved into a project that came to reflect on various social issues through art practices. Originally Re Aphrodite was initiated as a research project to explore how bi-communal<sup>1</sup> frameworks have shaped cultural production in Cyprus, as this was also my main area of focus before carrying out 'Public Works'.

The current description of the Re Aphrodite (Ρε Αφροδίτη) project states that it "is an on-going collaborative project that explores Cypriot social realities as ideas or metaphors that are embraced, denied, exploited and abused, and as they are involved in deeply rooted political and other paradoxes. The project brings together multidisciplinary academic and educational concerns with artistic practice". (Re Aphrodite, 2013). Projects carried out by the collective to date include: 'Re Aphrodite meets Alice Wang'; '1st of November: Re Aphrodite Exhibition' at Apotheke Contemporary Arts', 'At Maroudia's' Exhibition in the Cyprus Ethnological Museum, a one year long exhibition under the umbrella of the 'In Crisis: Terra Mediterranea' programme of the Nicosia Municipal Art Centre and under the auspices of the European Presidency of Cyprus; Educational programme for the 'In Crisis Terra Mediterranea' project of the Municipal Art Centre of Nicosia.

### FOOTNOTES

1. Bi-communal art in Cyprus description (history of this and use of art in it is important). Bi-communal involves the active participation from members of two ethnic communities; in this case Greek and Turkish Cypriots. Art is taken to mean the production of artistic work that addresses issues that encourage contact and exchange. This can take the form of workshops, collaborations, exhibitions, conferences etc. (UNDP-ACT, 2013; CCMC, 2013).



The Re Aphrodite project focuses on exploring to explore different social realities and their presentation through art projects and through art spaces. This is a contested element in the trajectory of socially engaged art manifestations and a particular concern is how art galleries and institutions have been utilized as sites for activism and social collective action and reflection. This platform/ collaboration has resulted in variant manifestations and explorations (as outlined above) but ones that largely aim for intercultural dialogue on social issues and a diversification of audience within art and museum institutions in Nicosia. I will only be presenting one aspect of this collaboration: 'Re Aphrodite meets Alice Wang'. This project largely focuses on the position of cultural practitioner as facilitator, the layering of voices that became evident through the practice, the diversification of audiences within cultural spaces and on the gender and racial facets of urban segregation.

This project is particularly interesting as I did not get involved in it with the purpose of including it as part of my analysis for the purposes of this research project. The decision to analyse it as part of my practice based enquiry into the role of socially engaged art in the urban context of segregated cities came at a later date after the project had finished. This is different to the other projects that are presented in Booklets #1 and #2. Whilst I was working on this project I was also collaborating to develop a public performance in a traditional coffee house (kafene) within the state housing estates<sup>2</sup> for the displaced in Nicosia and which will be presented in the third booklet which deals with my work within these housing estates. This parallel performance 'Presence in Absence' dealt with the absence of women from male dominated public spaces in Cyprus. Gender segregation directly influenced my practice during this period and this was a direct result from the experience of 'Public Works'. Due to the fact that this facet of my practice had not

been pre planned to be included in the process of my PhD research, I find that by including it an alternative form of interpretation is provided.

#### FOOTNOTES

2. The state/ displaced persons' housing estates in the Southern part of Cyprus were constructed in the period from 1976 to 2000, to house the displaced Greek Cypriot from the North following the 1974 conflict.

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**WELCOME TO CYPRUS ALICE WANG**

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### 3. WELCOME TO CYPRUS ALICE WANG

Alice (a computer engineer of Chinese American descent) had come to Cyprus to develop an online software application for peace building purposes. Up until this point Re Aphrodite had also been focusing on exploring bi-communal art structures and how creativity can facilitate ethnic contact. Loizidou met Alice at the Cyprus University of Technology (TEPAK) in Limassol. She writes in relevance to this experience

“I met Alice while working at TEPAK. She was on a Fulbright scholarship. She was pretty isolated there but I think she had extra trouble making friends. When I realised how difficult she was finding her stay, my “Cypriot hospitality” / lone female empathy and protective sense kicked in. I tried to help her in any way I could, accompanied her on trips and interviews, she came to stay with me a few times both in Lefkara and Nicosia etc. I wanted to introduce her to Evanthia not only as an interesting person, but also as a friend. We all met for dinner and things developed from there. It was a very open project (if it can be called that) very loose, but with great potential. We made great plans and talked of a documentary but a lot of it (and a lot of the material) was lost when Alice left” (2012).

Talking with her, discussing and seeing how lonely and suspicious Alice was Loizidou decided for us all to have dinner. We met several times after that and agreed on a film interview. Alice was suspicious of locals but had managed to form relationships with migrant workers in Cyprus, particularly Asian females migrants living on the island. She had decided to conduct (besides her software development programme) an informal social research project on the stories of Asian women living in Cyprus. She assumed the role of the story teller, of the facilitator of invisible voices coming to the surface, and Re Aphrodite continued that metaphor. Shortly after meeting her and through contacts at the newspaper ‘Cyprus mail’,

Alice wrote a letter to the paper- that was widely read and which caused much online debate. This is an English newspaper and we thought it would be a good idea for this to also be presented in the Greek speaking press. I approached a friend and he did an article about Alice also for Alitheia newspaper in April 2011. Both these articles were released with the assistance of Re Aphrodite in an effort to raise issues such as these in the public sphere and instigate dialogue in regards to social behaviour relating to migrant women.

In the Cyprus Mail opinion piece published on the 13th of March 2011, Wang presented ‘Aphrodite’s home as a cruel place’. I am including the article that Alice wrote below. I had saved the article but not the comments and they can no longer be seen as the newspaper removes items over six months old from their website.

#### **“APHRODITE’S HOME IS A CRUEL PLACE”**

*BY ALICE WANG PUBLISHED ON MARCH 13, 2011. CYPRUS MAIL*

MY FIRST Greek lesson started with a proud explanation of the famous Cypriot hospitality as my teacher showed slide after slide of honey-drenched delicacies and sunny villages on carob tree-dotted slopes. I smiled in agreement, knowingly. I had just arrived in Limassol from the United States on a research fellowship the previous week and had already experienced the famous Cypriot hospitality. My landlady and landlord are the loving grandparents of the Cypriot family house I had moved into, and they had declared me a part of the family over freshly baked Cypriot fish during family lunch on Sunday. I resolved to learn all about the culture of this pretty little island during my nine months’ stay.

I grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, having immigrated from China with my family at age nine. In Atlanta we pride ourselves on Southern hospitality, and I was determined to show Cypriots the famous Southern

warmth from the other side of the world. As I walked to my office on one of my first mornings in Cyprus, I smiled and said “Kalimera” to neighbours and shop owners I met in the streets, proud of my newly learned Greek greetings. Most people looked surprised at first, and I thought to myself that perhaps they are not used to seeing an American here. A car drove by with a back seat full of children, and the driver yelled out “Nihao Chingchong!” I turned and stared in bewilderment, and a smiling grandfatherly figure came up to me and asked “Are you OK?” I smiled and greeted him, and he grabbed my shoulder and said “Come with me, I pay! Twenty euros one hour, two hours, we look, together!” “Excuse me?” I stared at him in confusion, and my eyes widened in shock as I realised his meaning. I flung his hand away from my shoulder and ran across the street. I was outraged as I had never encountered anything like this, and my hands trembled as I crossed the next intersection, where a car swung by to block my path. The driver waved for me to get into the car. In my panicked state, I thought that he was my landlord, with his white hair and grandfatherly face, because I could not imagine why any stranger would stop his car for me. As I ran to the car for protection, the grandfatherly face turned into an ugly grin as he threw open the car door from the driver’s seat. I stared in nightmarish disbelief, slammed the car door in his face, and ran all the way to my office.

By three weeks after arriving in Cyprus, I no longer raised my head when walking outside. When anyone called to me on the streets, it was no longer a friendly greeting but a painful reminder of the complex ills of society. I had learned to avoid being outside during the hour of 1pm to 2pm on weekdays, because the actions of school children are magnified projections of the opinions of the society. My heart broke when a grandfather propositioned me when picking up his grandson from school. On my daily 15 minute walk to and from my office, I was propositioned about

once every five minutes, with chilling regularity. With my eyes glued to the sidewalk for fear of making any eye contact with the men lounging around the streets, the sound of each approaching car made my heart beat faster with fear that this will be the one to honk, slow down, and follow me down the road in an attempt to bargain a price, which inevitably happened. I armoured myself with large sunglasses which covered half of my face and a large hat whenever I went outside, not for protection against the blinding sun, but against the humanity on the street.

By six weeks after my arrival in Cyprus, I was no longer using any of my Greek greetings I was so proud of. I had discovered that my perfect American English was now my only identification as anything except a Chinese street worker. Curious but good natured inquiries into which Madam I work for at the neighbourhood vegetable market made it painfully obvious how concretely I was defined by my Chinese face in Cyprus. I felt stripped bare of my country, denied by society, and my heritage, forced to hide under sunglasses and hats. My attempts to meld into and experience Cypriot society had run into intangible walls, and I felt loneliness like never before under the burning Mediterranean sun. My eyes met the kindly face of the grandfather of the neighbouring house at the neighbourhood vegetable market, and I gave him a rare smile and nod in a moment of yearning for human kindness. He waved me aside and said, “You want to come with me? To my bed?” My landlady is disappointed in my slow progress in Greek, but how can I explain to her this lesson of Cypriot hospitality?

Now it has been almost six months since I arrived in Cyprus. I have taken to riding in taxis to and from my office everyday even though it’s less than a five minute drive. The taxi drivers have assumed that I must be a very important American since I require taxi pickup every day for such a short distance. I am addressed as “Madam” when the driver bows and opens the taxi

door for me. As I looked out the taxi window at the beautiful Limassol seaside and the society I can only watch through glass, I wondered where I can find:

“O Cyprus, set in the sea,  
Aphrodite’s home  
In the soft sea-foam,  
Would I could wend to thee;  
Where the wings of the Loves are furled,  
And faint the heart of the world.”

*(Cyprus Mail, March 13 2011)*



Alice Wang

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**PRIVATE INTERVIEW AND 'MADE IN CHINA'**

#### 4. PRIVATE INTERVIEW AND 'MADE IN CHINA'

After Alice realized that Loizidou and I wanted to assist in getting her story publicized and her research with these women known to the Cypriot public she agreed to collaborate creatively. Following informal meetings and interviews we eventually filmed Alice speaking with the help of filmmaker Christina Tryphonos. We conducted this first interview in private. Re Aphrodite, Alice and the filmmaker discussed Alice's experience. This was during the process of Alice's own interviews with migrant women. She was still in the process of collecting these social experiences. What resulted from this private interview were two films. One was filmed as a portrait documentary by the filmmaker. The other was filmed by me and it focused on Alice's mouth. The reason why I decided to film only the mouth was because Alice was scared to speak with her face showing and I had already asked her if I could use this footage as part of an art exhibit. Alice had become very afraid of Cypriot men due to her personal experiences and accounts that she had been told by the migrant women. I used the film of the mouth and produced a sixteen minute cut from the sixty minute interview. It focused on Wang's comments about Cypriot society and the reasons for embarking on a recording of all these hidden histories.

What Wang said on this video is a direct and honest commentary on Cypriot social reality. This project happened following 'Public Works' and exploring facets of segregation through a gender and race (migrant) had become very important to me; as well as focusing on dialogue and discursive exchange, which was something I felt that 'Public Works' had failed in.

I am adding some of the commentary that can be seen on the video here for better demonstration of what Alice said due to the different context that textual documentation presents. In the first interview Alice started off by describing her experience and

what pushed her into looking into these issues. It followed the line of the article that Alice wrote but it demonstrated also the sheltered life of an affluent Chinese American young woman, who came to Cyprus and discovered a whole other reality in comparison with what she had been used to.

"It was just a general assumption I must be a prostitute because I am Asian. A lot was just all around racism. They assumed I must be a house maid or they asked me which madam I work for, or which house in the vegetable market or by the bus drivers" (Wang, 'Made in China', 2011).

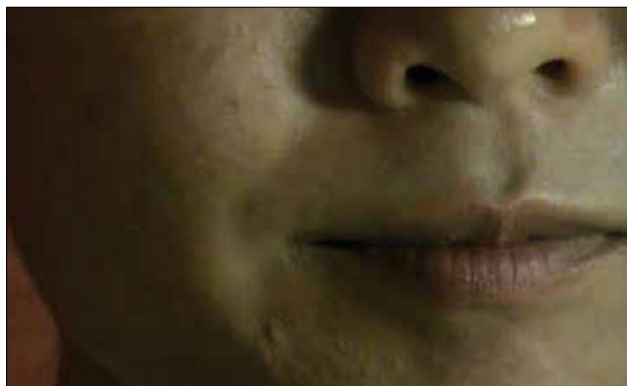


Image from the Interview: Loizidou, Wang and Tryphonos  
Photograph: Evanthia Tselika

This shocked Alice and pushed her to delve deeper into the issues and stop blaming the migrant workers (which was her initial reaction) for this treatment that she was subjected to by Cypriot men. She started to collect stories and record what these women felt and experienced. Particularly interesting was to be able to see through the position of Alice as a narrator migrant women's opinions, what they thought of Cypriot people.

"I have this direct quote from one Chinese Woman who works (as she run away) as a part time cleaner and a part time sex worker on the street. She says that she is sure that every Cypriot man would sleep with her if she agreed or would actually proposition her. And one Philippino house maid who does not work as a sex worker says that most Cypriot men will proposition her. So it's just this low view point of Cypriot men in terms of morality. No moral, no family values at all. In terms of Cypriot women they think they are insanely demanding. Their theory is that they are jealous that their men are so morally depraved and chasing after foreign women that they really treat their workers subhuman. They insist to be called madams; in some cases the madam will insist that the worker will not look her in the eye. They will not allow her to answer her cell phone or start talking with any of her friends. She must ask for permission first. And you know of course when the worker girl goes through this kind of experience she will have a very low opinion of her so called madam, which is her only view of Cypriot women since she is not allowed out... It's a world that unless you are experiencing it, it is hard to believe. And that again comes back to how Cyprus is so two-faced you know. It's really a world of contrasts" (Wang, *Made in China*, 2011).

This is of particular interest as in Cyprus it is a rare occurrence to be told the real opinion of what the migrant workers who live here think of the local people. It acts as a social mirror, which is very important in small societies that demonstrate high levels of racism and racial segregation.



Video still from 'Made in China'

Photograph: Evanthia Tselika

The path of this 16 minute cut was translated into 3 different video installations. One was set up by me as part of the 'Common Reflections' exhibition<sup>3</sup> and it was the first point of dissemination to an audience. Then it was shown as part of the 'EntreLínguas' project in Brazil and Mexico. I had initially worked with the 'EntreLínguas' project in 2010. This is a project that brings together international practitioners from different fields through the concept of inter-language. *EntreLínguas* (Among-Tongues) was conceived by Brazilian artist Francisca Silva and it is described as demonstrated below:

"*EntreLínguas* is a group art show that is organized as an unusual form of cultural exchange. This alternative art space is peculiar, occurring in old houses, galleries, garages, abandoned places and uses contemporary and modern art to contrast with the historical and architectural heritage of Pelotas, Brazil. This proposal has the objective to expand the dialogue between artists and the relationships between art and thought, giving priority to the artwork's creative process." (*EntreLínguas*, 2011).

In the 2011 interpretation of 'EntreLínguas' artists from different geographical places were invited to



propose a piece, which was then executed by a local artist. This exchange and reflection further adds to the concept of story-telling that surfaced through the 'Re Aphrodite meets Alice Wang' project. I proposed a video installation using the video I made of the private interview of Alice and for the local artist to construct an installation which would respond to issues related to the movement of goods and people, the social facet of trafficking and the position of women in this context. The collaboration for the Mexico exhibition was with artist Rogélio Gómez Jimeno and in Pelotas Brazil with Francica Silva (ibid). I sent the initial proposal for the video installation, communicated with the local artists who were to execute it and then they realized it. It was interesting to see the new layer that was added to this story when it was told through a Latin American interpretation.

#### FOOTNOTES

3. 'Common Reflections: Parrhesia', Artos Foundation, 2011. This was a collaborative art project and it directly aimed to question whether art can in fact create a problematization in art audiences in regards to social issues and inspire them to act. This process did not use the artworks as instruments to create an overarching thematic statement but more as different interpretations of how art approaches the social and makes us question social behaviours and norms.

#### THE 'MADE IN CHINA' JOURNEY



Evanthia Tselika - Made in China, May 2011, Artos Foundation, Nicosia  
Photograph: Evanthia Tselika

The video was set up with Cypriot tourist objects that were never the less produced in China and indicated so on the label and Cypriot army trousers which are also produced in China. The idea was to juxtapose objects and situations that are not what they appear to be. Alice appeared Chinese but in fact had come to Cyprus as an American. These objects appeared Cypriot but they were in fact produced in China.

For the interpretations in the 'EntreLinguas' project I communicated the following ideas to the artists- "I would like to propose the following for a video installation. A table, with a monitor, DVD and earphones.

You will be able to hear the narration of the story of a Chinese girl who moved to Cyprus for research purposes and where everyone here thought she was working as a prostitute. The above is a stereotype that exists heavily in Cyprus as there are a lot of Chinese women who have moved here and for variant reasons have turned to prostitution. The narration is in English, and so I imagine Spanish/ Portuguese subtitles need to be added. Further to this I would like for this to be an act that symbolises the idea of 'Entrelenguas' (in between languages) as the global consumption of people and goods. The movement of capitalism and the abuse of people by the sex industry and also in the production of goods. It would be interesting to see maybe through collecting from the press, clippings that are relevant to sex working in the area that the artist lives. What are the social groups that are abused in each place? Also it would be great to see material that question this notion of global movement of goods and people..." (Tselika, 2011).

I translated this statement from Spanish, which was the language that I had initially written the proposal and which was sent to the artists in Brazil and Mexico.



Evanthia Tselika Video. Rogélio Goméz Jimeno Installation. Mexico, Autumn 2011. Photograph: Rogélio Goméz Jimeno

The artists that interpreted the pieces received the information through the communication but then after that they were free to interpret the installation through their understanding of what I indicated as they liked.



Installation- Francisca Silva. Video - Evanthia Tselika. Brazil, Autumn 2011. Photographs: Francisca Silva

By sending this video to places far away I was not painting an idealistic picture of Cyprus but portraying it as a "cruel place" as Wang terms it. This in itself was a strange experience for me. I was highlighting and showcasing an interpretation of the island and its people, as cruel, unwelcoming and with double standards in terms of racial equality. As Wang also says in the interview, European and American visitors to Cyprus do not share the same experiences.

## BETWEEN THE FIRST AND THE SECOND INTERVIEW

I did not interact with Alice as much as Loizidou who worked with her in the same University. On the whole and having previously worked with marginalized social groups (El Salvador Marginalized children and ex guerrilla organisation 2008, Crisis Vulnerably Housed Organisation 2007-2008, 2010) I have learned to keep a distance when becoming involved in projects that involve dealing with at times tough social issues. Loizidou indicates “Evanthia had more distance which is why I think she was able to present the piece. Evanthia’s presentation did, however, fit into my own agenda (in as much as it coincided with Alice’s<sup>4</sup>) regarding what was important to do with Alice’s story and access, which had to do with giving exposure to the issues she was talking about” (2012).

I interacted with Alice, discussed with her and took photographs with her. We visited international churches that migrants attend, school yards and talked about the possibility of making a documentary in relation to migration issues in Cyprus.

### FOOTNOTES

4. Who was unfortunately but perhaps inevitably, also driven by personal anger and indignation.



Photographs: Evanthia Tselika

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**'ALICE IN OTHERLAND' - PUBLIC INTERVIEW, DIALOGUE  
AND PARTY**

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## 5. 'ALICE IN OTHERLAND' - PUBLIC INTERVIEW, DIALOGUE AND PARTY

The public interview combined with a Goodbye Party was called 'Alice in Otherland: A Re Aphrodite Interview and Goodbye Party'. This was held in the evening of the 30/05/2011 at Apotheke Contemporary Arts in Nicosia, Cyprus. This event took place with the assistance of Apotheke Contemporary Arts, Praktoreio Non Cultural Space and The Association for the protection of Philipinos in Cyprus. The below was the information announcement used to advertise the happening.

"A Chinese-American software engineer walks into Solomou Square OR Alice Wang came to Cyprus on a research fellowship intent to address issues of conflict resolution through technology, and found herself facing difference... differently. The night before she flies back to the USA, she enters a conversation about her experience being a κοπέλλα (working girl) in Cyprus, her friendship with a harrowed underground of migrant workers, her project to document the islands within Cyprus and interface between various groups, as well as the dangers of popular binarisms. The event is open to all and will be documented. Keywords: trafficking, racism, illegal immigration, labour, consent, power, Cofinou, corruption, isolation, human rights." (Re Aphrodite, 2011).

Alice produced this semi-formal piece of social research and Re Aphrodite believed that it was appropriate for this to be shared and not lost after she left Cyprus. This was what enabled this event to take place. Wang in her short stay in Cyprus gained access into a world where Cypriots are regarded with mistrust and at times disgust as her work portrays. Apotheke Contemporary Arts provided the space and the public presentation and discussion took place in the gallery and the street in front of it. The street also hosted the goodbye party for Alice where different migrant groups (Asian, African, Middle Eastern) brought food and together

with other Cypriot and international participants wished Alice farewell. I participated in the organization of this due to the Re Aphrodite collaboration and collaborated for both interviews but Loizidou did a lot of the organization for this event due to the fact that I had rehearsals for the performance 'Presence in Absence' which is part of my work for the 'Sinikismoi' projects.

The following extracts are based on Wang's findings and it was part of what she presented in this public interview and dialogue. Wang conducted interviews with Asian migrant workers through her unique position of being considered as belonging to the 'migrant community'. She managed to collect a lot of social data which was mostly lost due to the theft of her laptop and camera. In addition her inexperience in social research meant that the data itself should have been overlooked by a sociologist to avoid any academic discrepancies. What Alice presented was an account as her documentation was lost. And through this account other stories became visible. Everyday stories that we overlook or resist to look at.



Image of Alice Wang at the public interview and dialogue at Apotheke Contemporary Arts. Video Still: Christina Tryfonos

## **AN OVERVIEW OF WANG'S PRESENTATION THROUGH THE RE APHRODITE PUBLIC INTERVIEW**

Alice began her presentation by explaining the situation, which led to her study of Asian female migrants in Cyprus. In Nicosia Asian female migrants have a strong presence in the urban public space due to the fact that most Cypriots drive cars and do not walk or use public transport. In addition at this time period in the centre of Nicosia many Asian female migrants worked as sex workers in the street and in the many bars 'cabarets' that exist in the city. Their presence in the urban landscape demonstrates Cypriot patterns of gender and racial segregation. Through Alice's personal interviews, a mapping of this social territory occurred. This was by no means an academic sociological approach but it did present an insight into a world that mostly continues to not be recorded or studied. This manifestation falls into a wider framework of mapping urban forms of segregation in Nicosia through socially engaged practices. Alice presented how her own exposure to racist behaviour turned into a study with female Asian migrant workers as the subject demographic so as to limit the scope of the study. She portrayed the feminization of entire sectors of the labour market such as domestic help, cleaners, attendees, and other traditionally "feminine" jobs and how that has shaped social structures of behaviour towards female migrants by Greek Cypriots. She looked at how migrants are treated in the domestic workers industry (where by foreign nationals are lured in to the country by the promise of working in Europe but end up working an excessive amount of hours, harassed by their bosses and often abused), at the part time students, the rural workers and the informal sex industry.

The following are excerpts from Alice's presentation at the public interview.

### **ZOOM IN I**

#### **LOOKING INTO THE LIVES OF FEMALE ASIAN MIGRANT WORKERS**

"Besides personal experience, female Asian migrant workers were chosen as the subject demographic to limit the scope of the study and due to the multiplier effects of the treatment of women in society beyond the labour market. The feminization of entire sectors of the labour market such as domestic help, cleaners, attendees, and other traditionally "feminine" jobs is clear to see and it likely leads to the enforcement of sexist ideology just as the racialization of low-status, manual jobs has led to the enforcement of racist ideology. Sexual harassment of female migrant workers also leads to reverberating societal instability. We've all come across talk of how foreign workers are breaking up Cypriot marriages... The widespread employment of Asian women as house maids and in child care means that migrant women are closer to the core Cypriot family structure than male migrant workers who tend to dominate more remote fields such as construction. Asian migrant women also dominate the sex industry of Cyprus, which plays a significant role in the establishment of sexism and racism in Cyprus. Female Asian migrant women dominate almost completely the domestic help sector, which is the largest sector of migrant labour, numbering at approximately 16000 (Stavrou)".

"Once the women arrive in Cyprus, they find that "the contract is never followed" (amazingly frequent interview quote). The majority of the women I've spoken with, and especially those who live in the house of the employer, are on-call 24 hours a day, 6-7 days a week with little or no pay increase/ overtime. This makes their average wage approximately 50 cents per hour. Many report sexual abuse by the men of

the family, and every migrant worker woman I have talked to has confirmed that sexual harassment is an inevitable and common experience on the streets of Cyprus. It is standard practice for the employer to keep any official document of the worker such as passport and residence permit to ensure she does not run away; for the employee to address the lady of the house as Madame and to take their workers to clean the houses of their relatives and to work additionally on their farms or in their stores. Also, a number of the women I've spoken with report that employers enforce dehumanizing household rules such as that the employee should not look the Madame in the eye, or that employee is forbidden to leave the house or answer the phone or talk to friends except with explicit permission from the Madame. A typical story from a Filipina hospital nurse tells of working from 7am to 3pm in the clinic and then going home with the doctor to work as his housemaid until 9 or 10pm. It also seems to be standard practice for the employers to never grant the promised yearly holidays or sick leave to their workers. It is easy to conclude that these workers are powerless and voiceless in an insular society and live at the whim of their employers. Out of those who have gone to complain to their employment agencies, many report sexual abuse and one reported rape by the agents, and it becomes quickly understood that most agents would rather work for the deportation of the worker since the import of a new worker means thousands more euros in fees and no loss. The question of "where can you go if your employer is abusive" is always met with a cynical smile as the answer is usually nowhere meaningful. Complaints to the Labour Department or the Migration Department mean risking deportation without having paid off ones debt."

## ZOOM IN II

### MOVING ON TO BECOMING ILLEGAL

"Due to the abusive nature of their employment, many women run away from their employer households and

become illegal residents, citing emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse. Notably many women I've spoken with also give 'being given rotten or inadequate food' as a reason. The women also say that they are advised to keep this reason out of their reports to the Labour department, because it is considered laughable. I believe that there is more to this but I am not sure how to approach it. Now returning to the women who escape their employers. Those who can find part-time jobs cleaning houses or restaurants end up earning more than their previous monthly salary since they are paid hourly instead of monthly. However, jobs are becoming more and more scarce with the economic crisis, and also due to the preference for European migrant workers, whose numbers have increased since Cyprus joined the EU in 2004, many Asian women enter into prostitution, thus increasing the racism and sexism against Asian women in Cyprus, creating something of a vicious cycle."

## ZOOM IN III

### BEING A MIGRANT IN CYPRUS

"Cyprus presents unfavourable legal conditions for labour market mobility, also scoring an absolute zero on civic access. The law severely limits non-EU residents' long-term economic integration. Newcomers are often refused work permits. Those granted one still cannot access numerous professions. The public sector is completely closed off. Non-EU migrant workers cannot access public employment services. They have the least favourable rights as migrant workers of all 31 MIPEX countries, with Cyprus alone denying them both equal working conditions and social security. Even as taxpayers, they cannot claim unemployment benefits or public allowances. It is forbidden for migrant workers to change sectors of employment regardless of their educational level and very difficult to even change employers. While all migrants have legal access to compulsory education, a Circular from the Ministry

of Education (2004) questions this right for undocumented migrant children. Cyprus excludes non-EU residents from democratic life as they cannot vote or join Cypriot labour unions. It explicitly states in the domestic workers' employment contract that they do not have the right to organize, assemble or participate in social/ civic life. Migrants' children and grandchildren are not considered Cypriot at birth despite mounting parallel international trends. Foreigners must wait at least 8 years to apply for citizenship, passing a long, costly and discretionary procedure during which they can be refused citizenship at any time for 'lack of good character'. If they succeed, they can lose their citizenship status on wide grounds, regardless of time."

— I decided to include in this booklet the dialogue that took place after the public interview with Alice. Not the whole dialogue is included here, however I wanted to emphasize the discursive contact and exchange as this was something that I felt lacked in 'Public Works'. This time the contact was even more interesting as it brought together different social groups. Cypriots, migrant workers from Asia, Africa and the Middle East and other international workers in Cyprus, who hold positions of authority and do not experience racism by Cypriots. I believe it is important to include this dialogue as this project has to do with the function of socially engaged projects allowing other voices to be heard through the manifestation. The below dialogue provides further insight into the research and this booklet allows for all this work done by Alice and which has not been utilized by anyone to live on and exist. In this case the practice of socially engaged art and an open art space allow a piece of interesting social commentary to be publicized and have a life. Alice has done nothing with her research since she left. I think she wanted to put this intense experience behind her.

## **PUBLIC DIALOGUE WITH ALICE WANG**

I have not edited the dialogue below so as not to manipulate the documentation itself. As I was not planning to examine this project as part of the PhD process I was not obsessed with the documentation process as in the other projects. This meant that I had a different experience of the event.

### **Alice Wang**

I started going to a Filipino, well the majority are Filipino, Christian fellowship and I started interviewing the women and they were all legally working in houses at the time. The interviews though had a snowballing process. They would refer me to their friends and I would get their friends' impressions and experiences. Eventually they led me to a sort of shelter for abused runaway domestic workers, called the 'Association for the protection of Filipinos in Cyprus' and I talked to some other girls there and they were women who due to the abusive nature at the employer's house had actually run away.

### **Participant 1**

Sorry to interrupt. What is the final interview sample?

### **Alice Wang**

Around 30.

### **Participant 1**

And was it a specific region of Cyprus?

### **Alice Wang**

Like I mentioned before most of the migrants interviewed come from Nicosia or Limassol because they are the areas I have more access to but I have also spoken to ones in Larnaka and Cofinou and some surrounding villages.

### **Participant 2**

Did you talk to any of the lawyers or the agents?

### **Alice Wang**

I have not and that is for future work.



## **Participant 2**

Yes, definitely.

## **Alice Wang**

I feel the story portrayed by the Cypriot media is usually from the employer's point of view and so I feel that that side of the story is better covered. My research's main purpose is to see, to find the other side of the story and to talk to the migrant workers and get their view.

## **Participant 3**

It would be interesting to talk to the employers because you might get the defensiveness and the standard answer but then it will give a clearer picture of what is going on.

## **Participant 4**

I am the president of The Association for the protection of Filipinos in Cyprus and we have a number of members and I go to their neighbourhoods, places of residence and I meet these employers. Now I have seen employers where the employee gets married and they say I will pay all your expenses and buy all your furniture. And I see the other extreme which is the 15% of our population who mistreat these girls, who think we live at the time of Nero. And they clean 2/3 houses. I have seen personal harassment and I know how they react. They think by paying 200, 300 euro which is the standard net (the gross is about 425 now); they think that they own these people. And I am so shocked sometimes when I see this thing. I see the employers and I wonder as some of them are well educated and they behave like animals. They think that they own these people. They are people.

## **Participant 5**

What I would like to know is if you (addressing the last speaker) have spoken to the people at the labour ministry committee. But since you have been to some of these meetings have you heard that the government officers, the people who hear these complaints are

very sympathetic to the vulnerable, to the workers who complain? What is your experience? Because I think that this is where they should complain. That is the only place that they can complain and under the law and according to the regulations that the government has set up they have to have somewhere to complain. This is the labour ministry committee. Is what I have heard wrong? You think that they do not take into account what these vulnerable people complain about?

## **Participant 4**

When I see the government employees that take the complaints from the labour ministry, I see they take it while there is no evidence from either side. It's just what one says against the other. And the member of staff writes all this down and then makes his/her own decision at the end and he/she gives that decision to the committee. But usually it depends on their personal viewpoint. And the committee takes it from there and decides for this girl. Now I have put some suggestions recently in one of my letters dated the 17th of March and I stated that they have to have categories which clarify the situation. If a woman, a house maid is proven to be stealing then yes ok deport her. If she has contagious diseases deport her. If she is selling or taking drugs then deport her. If she is a prostitute then do that. But for any other reason the government have no right to throw somebody out. Because the pay that Alice Wang has mentioned approximately, because I am dealing with Filipinos myself, in Philip-pines they pay 2000 euro to come into this country. Now the purchasing power of what they pay there in our country is 20,000 euro. For the right to come to this country they pay and who benefits from this money? The agents! The big chunk is taken by the agents. Our agents! I know staff from agencies and I have complained to them. One typical example was one case which stuck to my mind. This doctor asked the agent to send two girls to work for him. The two girls came along and they worked for two months. Then all of a sudden

they decided that they had a complaint to make. And they both came to my office. The agent looked at me and said can you send one back please? And the wife of this doctor said to me please send one back. So I decided to send Grace back because they promised her they would pay her 450 euro per month and she works I found out 7 days a week with unlimited hours for that money.

### **Alice Wang**

I am not saying that all experiences with migrant workers are bad. In fact there are interviews that say they are very happy in Cyprus because their employer provides them with a private suite, buys them a laptop with internet access and so they are very happy in Cyprus. But my point is that the experience here in Cyprus depends entirely on the employer and when you put someone entirely at the mercy of someone else of course there is going to be a proportion of the population that are not good people and will mistreat the migrant workers. And the point is that these girls have very little protection or power. They are very vulnerable.

So to sort of explain the complaint process that Mr Kyprianou mentioned. So the employee's contract says that she has no right to quit her job while she is in Cyprus. If the employer is abusive she cannot quit her job. She cannot change employer unless she is abused. If she is abused she can submit a complaint to the labour department and then how the process works is that then the labour department calls the employee and the employer together for a thirty minute interview meeting where it is the word of the employee against the word of the employer to this Cypriot inspector of the labour department. And sometimes the conversation becomes Greek and sometimes it all depends on personal judgement of the labour department official.

### **Participant 6**

In the labour department if you come in and say I have been sexually abused are they by law obliged to bring in someone who is you know going to examine the girl?

### **Alice Wang**

No not that I know of. None of the girls who had been sexually abused talked about having police involvement. And to give you an idea of how the labour department meetings can go wrong and how it is not completely a fair trial by the one officer who has no background training in being a judge. One interviewee I talked to was working for an old couple and the old man repeatedly tried to rape her and the old woman beat her until her hand broke and she was kept in horrible conditions and when the old woman talked to the interviewer she claimed that she did not mistreat the girl and the migrant worker was given a deportation order. So in a way you just have a single inspection based on no evidence and on just the word of the Cypriot employer versus the word of the foreign worker. It can very easily become biased, especially in Cyprus where the country is so small that people may very easily know each other and it is very possible that the employer's family has connections with the inspector also.

### **Chrystalleni Loizidou**

There is one thing I want to talk about. Since you have been here in Cyprus you have created little ripples in two specific cases that translate into formal documents in some way or another. There is the formal complaint to the American embassy.

### **Alice Wang**

So for the first five months of my stay here I didn't tell anyone except friends about my experiences of daily harassment and racism. Until then I talked to the director of the Fulbright programme about what I have been going through and then he actually went so far to decide to hire me a taxi to transport me from my home to my office, every day and back. So that got rid of all my daily annoyances and psychological trauma. But then I thought it would have really helped if I had been given warning about the situation here because I remember my first week in Cyprus I had no

idea that this existed and I was walking along for my lunch break from my office and this car comes along. It was this old male driver, saying come here, come here. So I went and I asked what he wanted and he grabbed me and tried to pull me into his car. So it was actually quite a dangerous situation. Including situations where I am alone with a taxi driver who proposes we go to a prostitution place. So then I talked to the American embassy, the consul and the consul talked to the officers about putting in a warning for other Asian American travellers. And now there is an extra consular sheet from the American Embassy saying that we have other cases of harassment of non-Europeans especially Asian Americans in Cyprus<sup>5</sup>. And when I tell people that I am harassed on the streets I have been asked why I haven't submitted a complaint to the Ombudsman office, which is the European body monitoring discrimination in countries and in Cyprus. So finally last week I went to Ombudsman office and the only reason I hadn't gone earlier was really because earlier in my stay here when men called out to me saying very sexual explicit obscene things, I would get afraid and always my initial reaction is to run away. Before even logically getting the license number or the picture.

## FOOTNOTES

5. I am inserting here the relevant extract from the Website"- THREATS TO SAFETY AND SECURITY: Do not, under any circumstances, attempt to enter the U.N. buffer zone at any place other than a designated crossing point. This area is mined and militarized. Never photograph military installations or anything that could be perceived as being of security interest (especially in the areas not under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus). Pay particular attention to areas marked with "no photography" signs. Police on both sides strictly enforce these restrictions.

The Embassy has received reports of instances of discrimination and sexual harassment against U.S. citizens of Eastern European or non-European descent, particularly against U.S. citizens of Asian descent." (US Department Office Travel Threats for Cyprus, 2011)

So I have rehearsed speeches in my mind of what I want to ask them. Do you have families? Why are you doing this? And finally last week I was in a taxi going from the American embassy to the Fulbright office and then this taxi driver proposed that I sleep with him right there and then he said I should not be afraid because he will pay me and then I started to ask him all the questions I wanted to ask about these people. Whether he thought it was ok, do you do this to everyone and I got no meaningful answer of course but I got his name and the taxi company he works for so I went and made a complaint and since then I have recorded license plate numbers and locations at times like this.

### Participant 1

The Ombudsman office deals with cases related to the service itself not to private people.

### Alice Wang

Well I told them that I wanted to complain about a private person they said that it is ok.

### Participant 1

The Ombudsman is for the service itself and the relationship of the individual to the service, be that the city service, and be that a governmental organization or something like that. So I find he might not be the right man. It would be the police...

### Participant 8

The Ombudsman is actually a woman...

### Participant 1

In other words if a civilian wants to make a complaint against the service or the government, or institutions.

### Alice Wang

But that was not the problem when I went to the Ombudsman Office. I did not have enough evidence for filling a sexual harassment case. It was not the private person's part that was the problem.

### Participant 9

Did they tell you what specifically you needed?

### **Alice Wang**

Well I specifically needed the license plate which I did not have. And then I went back to the taxi office and they told me that that person had stopped working for them so it was a try.

### **Participant 10**

Speaking of taxis. This is a question related to the companies and the agents and so on. A friend the other day was in a taxi and her driver was saying I used to work in an agency in Vietnam but you know they cut out work permits now for Vietnamese. So the government is trying to make some actions I guess with Vietnam and Dominican republic so I mean it seems like they are having a pretty hard time figuring out how to regulate, because it's pretty draconian saying stop, no work permits for anyone from Vietnam because we have had too much abuse. But on the other hand you realize there is an issue and maybe this is a temporary measure and you are trying to figure out how to regulate. But have you given thought to some policy recommendations or how the oversight of the agencies might be undertaken? I mean that would be a great paper too.

### **Alice Wang**

I can't pretend I would know how to fix this whole problem which is very complicated. But I know one observation I have heard from friends and that I agree with. It is that maybe the best tool is more integration policy rather than migration policy. I mean from what I know in the US most Chinese workers first came in the US to build railroads and many were labourers. But they were able to save money and send their children to the best schools and work hard and save money and become now very influential and highly educated. So market mobility is something that is very important to how a people or a country perceive a specific race or country. I mean in Cyprus labour mobility is actually limited. It is actually illegal for migrant workers to change employment sector, which means if you

came in as a domestic worker you are not allowed to work as anything else ever. And if you came with an employer you are not allowed to change employer but of course the employers are allowed to fire you. So in this case then Cyprus has a high demand for migrant workers, domestic and labour workers. These people may be educated and very skilled but they are not able and allowed by Cypriot policies to climb up the socio economic ladder so they are forever restricted to the lower under class and exploited over and over again. And unless this policy changes this perception by Cypriots of how other races are might not change.

### **Participant 11**

During the composition of your reporting and interviewing and so on, were you able to find out the exact percentage of females who come over here with knowing the truth that they would be working as a prostitute?

### **Alice Wang**

I don't know the exact percentage but there are some and if we start talking about prostitution I can tell you that no, not every prostitute has been forced into it after they come to Cyprus. Some do come to Cyprus knowing that they are going to be prostitutes. Although knowing and willing are relative terms when it comes to prostitution. I mean what does it mean when you say a willing prostitute? She may be forced to be willing by the circumstances. But some do come knowing. I have talked to many Chinese women who are around Ledra Street (Central Street in the old town of Nicosia) and they do come knowing this. But the majority, the large majority don't know. They have come into the position of public prostitution. Because they do try and paint a very positive picture of Cyprus outside of the island so as to lure people to come. And how people become prostitutes is either because they came as domestic workers and they run away from the employers and discovered they could earn more from part time work as prostitutes. Or they were trafficked

over by the mafia or some agent.

#### **Participant 5**

I don't believe there is mafia in Cyprus number one and I believe that prostitution is not a representative figure of all the migrant workers who work in this country. We are talking about a small minority of people which is insignificant. And if there are three hundred girls working down in Ledra doing prostitution, it does not represent thirty thousand people who are migrant workers. I was on television and I tried to tell these people that this is irrelevant if three hundred girls want to do that. We have Cypriot girls that do that anyway. So all over the world is the same thing. This is not representative.

#### **Alice Wang**

It's true. It's not representative. It is only a minority of migrant workers who do that. But however they do affect the image of migrant workers and Asian women in Cyprus because they are the most visible ones. They are standing in the public space in the city centre while the migrant, domestic workers who are working honestly are stuck in the houses of the employers and maybe only allowed to come out every Sunday or something. However prostitution is a very visible problem. I am sure everyone has seen them on Ledra Street and around. And there are also women who work a second job as a cover. It's usually a cover for their prostitution because many of them are brought over, if not by the mafia then by individual agents to work as prostitutes. This agent may or may not tell them that they will be prostitutes before they come but once they come they realize that they are going to be prostitutes and they have a second job to cover them. So they work as prostitutes from 6pm to 9am and then work their regular jobs for the rest of the day. That way they have a bit more status in Cyprus. And there are also ones that work as domestic workers and others who work as prostitutes part time illegally, or Sundays when they are off. I have seen Chinese

girls in Larnaca standing around the city centre selling themselves for 3 euro an hour. And maybe no one is putting a gun to their head forcing them to sell for 3 euro an hour but I do not believe that this is willing. It is due to the circumstances. You know the amount of illegal immigrants and prostitutes in Cyprus in my opinion can be traced back to or is more closely related to the migration policies and how migrant workers are treated here. If they feel powerless and at the mercy of their employer they will not have the confidence that their complaint will be taken seriously and they will run away. As they do that they might not speak good English or Greek and have no other means of supporting themselves except from prostitution. This is exacerbated also by the fact that they have to work twenty four, seven their whole life taken up with their house hold work for this very low wage of 300 euro a month. They are forced due to the low wage to want to work on the side and support their families more back home.

#### **Evanthia Tselika**

Sorry you had a question earlier.

**Participant 12** (one of the 2 Asian migrant workers that spoke)

Oh yeah on the contract. I wanted to ask for example about housemaids. The Chinese embassy or the Cypriot embassy in China or the Cypriot embassy in the Philippines that know that the contract of the house maids is for working for seven hours as you say... They know they have this contract that says 7 hours but the Cypriot government understands that when the house maid comes here they don't work seven hours. They understand this.

#### **Alice Wang**

I do believe that the consuls and embassies from there, these women's home countries know pretty much what is going on in Cyprus. They are just deciding not to do much about it. In my interviews with Chinese migrant workers they say that they have gone to the embassy.

Most Filipino migrant workers think that the Filipino consul is not useful at all. One girl told me that this girl was wrongfully arrested due to the fault of the employer and not her own. And right before she was arrested she called the honorary consul of the Philippines and the consul pretty much told her that if you came from the Philippines to work in Cyprus you are stupid and it's your own fault that you didn't get your papers straightened out. So this sort of attitude is common among the embassies, the representatives here. I don't know what the diplomatic motives are. But that is just the reality.

#### **Participant 5**

They don't represent the people after all. And I am amazed sometimes with the way they behave. Both the consulate of China and of the Philippines.

#### **Alice Wang**

I have not seen any actions done by the Chinese embassy. I have attended one seminar run by the Filipino consul where she invited a human rights lawyer to come talk to migrant workers about what rights they have and what actions they should take. But in terms of any real change or going for help there is very little action from the representatives of the countries.

#### **Participant 13 (2nd migrant worker)**

I have a question. I was wondering, a lot of Chinese people who are illegal and their passports are expired, have been to the Chinese embassy to renew their passport but the officer in the Chinese embassy said that if you are illegal then you can do nothing. Actually they can do something such as deporting them, or something along those lines. Do you know that I mean. Because that is... I don't know.

#### **Alice Wang**

Yes it seems to be the general way it goes.

#### **Participant 14**

They will not give you a passport you say?

#### **Participant 13 (2nd migrant worker)**

They will give you. But you have to fill a form. What you do after the passport expires is join no state and they will give you a passport. You can do that but you cannot keep your job.

An important element of this second part of the project is the dialogue and contact that were initiated amongst the participants. This took the form of contact amongst individuals and social groups that are ordinarily removed from one another- Cypriots, migrant workers and international professionals of big organizations and embassies.

### **THE PARTY**

During the party that was held after the event the different social groups which attended interacted and conversed in a more relaxed atmosphere, and without the hierarchical structures that were demonstrated in the structured dialogue. I chose to not document this part of the event and to allow the evening to flow without needing to record the moments of inter-action. During the structured public dialogue what happened is that inside were the people who came to hear Alice speak, so people from Cypriot NGOs, people from the US Embassy, from the Fulbright organization etc. And outside there were Alice's migrant friends who had come for the party with huge amounts of food. This repeated pattern of segregation that played out was also reflected in the dialogue as only two Asian migrant workers spoke and this was after I specifically asked one of them directly as I could see that people were speaking over her. We created the situation but we did not manage to break the pattern of segregation through the dialogue. It was only through the food and party.

This is brought up in Loizidou's textual analysis below which followed many conversations that we had as collaborators on this topic and project.

"The set-up of the space could have been better, considering the heat, and the bigger-than-expect-

ed turnout, and the fact that a lot of people stood outside where they couldn't hear very well. A participant commented that it was ironic that it was the 'immigrants' who stayed outside, thus perpetuating the exclusions that we were trying to reflect upon (a valuable result in itself). Yet there were numerous other factors. It could be said that the people who stayed outside were those who were there for the party (Alice's friends from China, Philippines, Cameroon, etc) rather than those who came to attend the presentation (Cypriots, Americans), thus revealing another type of difference. And during the presentation the questions and comments from the audience were all very different from each other, each phrased in a different vernacular and to a different end. The fact that after the presentation these groups stayed to eat and mingle in a party atmosphere was wonderful to me. The food component I loved, especially." (Loizidou, 2012).

## **REFLECTIONS ON THE PUBLIC INTERVIEW**

This happening took place in an art space and that is an important note as art spaces provide easier access for the presentation of semi-formal social research. I think all three parties involved (Alice Wang, Chrystalleni Loizidou, Evanthia Tselika) went into this from different angles and perspectives. Alice overwhelmed by her experience and wanting to explore this social facet, Loizidou who felt that she was exposed to a completely parallel social reality that she would have otherwise not have been 'allowed in' so to speak and me who was particularly interested in the multiple voices that this project acquired, through its different stages. So there was Alice's voice. And the voices of all these other people that could be heard through her research. And then the layers of interpretation and dissemination-through interviews, video, discussions and international artistic interpretations. This came directly after 'Public Works' which had created a need to explore the discursive facet of socially engaged art.

Cyprus presents a condition where the issues of gender segregation become intricately linked with the issues of migration and racial divisionary models. These were two patterns of segregation that I became particularly interested in, following 'Public Works' and what material the later generated. This project directly dealt with gender and racial forms of urban segregation that are very prominent in Nicosia's city landscape. The collaboration with Alice enabled contact with different migrant groups, which are particularly suspicious of Cypriots and also made visible the view migrants have of Greek Cypriots. This was achieved through the two filmed interviews and dialogues, in which Alice spoke not only of her personal experiences with racism but also of how migrant workers are treated by their employers. She became a voice through which to hear stories that take place every day but are lost due to the lack of research in this particular social field and the suspicion that exists between Cypriots and migrant workers. The public interview in specific resulted in a debate on issues related to racism and state policy towards migrants that Alice's research demonstrated.

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**PROCESS, DOCUMENTATION AND THE EXPERIENCE OF RE  
APHRODITE MEETS ALICE PROJECT**



## **6. PROCESS, DOCUMENTATION AND THE EXPERIENCE OF RE APHRODITE MEETS ALICE PROJECT**

This project created a series of questions related to the process of documenting social art practices. The main reason for this was the absence of good documentation at the public interview and dialogue at Apotheke. My few photographs of the night were lost and this meant that I had no images, no evidence of practice from the most interesting and highly dialogical and interactive part of the night where the different publics mixed, the party after the public discussion. Further to this, documentation concerned me in relation to the understanding of the process of how the interpretation of my practice as conflict transformation art and the dialogical exchanges it involves then become translated into an exhibit or the material of an arts based textual publication. In this case the first part of the project, the Re Aphrodite private interview with Alice, was exhibited in the form of a video installation in Cyprus and then in Brazil and Mexico. The second part, the public dialogue, has not been redistributed or recounted. In actual fact it is only through this follow up that the project continues to live on. As only some people witnessed the project it is only through the reinstallation of the documentation that the work reaches wider audiences. The project therefore evolved through the restaging of its documentation and its exposure to other secondary audiences. A particular work according to Suzanne Lacy can demonstrate a continuous affect beyond the documentation process and the first staging process (1995, p.174). This is because the project itself becomes magnified through reports, media coverage and representation through exhibitions. If parts of the audience become affected by this then it can be carried through to other audiences and to other communities through flexible means. This is a form of what Lacy coins as the artist working in the “domain of experience” (ibid)

and like a subjective anthropologist, enters the territory of the ‘Other’ and presents observations on people and places through a report of her own interiority. In this way the artist becomes a conduit for the experience of others, and the work a metaphor for that relationship (ibid).

Artist Pablo Helguera roots the development of documentation as the proof of practice in the legacy of action based art of the 1970s (2010, p. 74). The capturing of documentation usually consists of film/video, photography, word of mouth, written descriptions, interviews, etc. Another facet can be seen in online live recording of the actions and events (a methodology that was used in ‘Public Works’). Photographs and films of the action can and do become artistic evidence of practice, artworks and in a sense products that are connected with a maker and therefore an author. In terms of conflict transformation art however it is important that the documentation of the evidence of practice, its manipulation and its subsequent use, are not only from the author or the artist facilitator but from participants/ collaborators as well. I have found that this is actually the hardest factor and this is where a tricky notion of authorship arises, as it is mostly the artist facilitator that then disseminates and re appropriates the documentation. In a sense the documentation itself becomes another form of practice (in the form of an exhibit or publication). It is exactly this facet which proved to be very interesting about this project- how the process of social contact and documentation then becomes an exhibit or the material of an arts based textual publication.

In this Re Aphrodite Project the concept of the artist/facilitator in socially engaged art projects comes into focus through the fact that he/she becomes the vessel or voice through which grass roots social issues might be raised to a level of more public awareness. Simple observation of social issues does not seem enough. The artist as documentary maker does not present collaborative action, or an idea of multiple

authorship, or discursive contact and communication. In this particular project this becomes of further interest as through the Re Aphrodite project we hear Alice Wang's voice and through her voice we hear multiple stories which might otherwise have gone unnoticed. The cycle and spiral of how art practice brings to the foreground these social issues, needs also to be questioned in terms of whose voice and whose agenda do we actually in the end hear and witness as viewers, participants and collaborators?

The idea of the interview as an element of practice in the context of the role of socially engaged art in the urban segregated setting of Nicosia became very important through this project. I am not using interviews in the main analysis of the thesis with cultural producers and academics. But in the practice I have been using interviews so as to demonstrate dialogical interpretations by different social groups. I decided to not interview artists but instead focus on interviews with women to form an inquiry based method with sections of the population whose voices often go unnoticed. In this project it became interviews of the interviewer who had personal access to a world where Cypriots are mistrusted and disliked.

The interview and the dialogue were two very important facets in the evolution of my practice following 'Public Works'. Organized conversations and dialogues allow for different publics to engage with one another, learn different points of view, exchange stories and by extension participate in "communicative action" (Habermas, 1981). Dialogue, conversation and communicative action were a direct result of this project. The space was created for dialogue to take place in relation to issues of migration, belonging and social behaviours and structures. This was particularly prominent in the public interview and dialogue.

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REFLECTIONS ON THE PROJECT

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## 7. REFLECTIONS ON THE PROJECT

'Re Aphrodite meets Alice Wang' was an all-female collaboration which brought into focus Alice's unique position in having an insight access into the migrant community of the island. Through her experience she decided to become a facilitator of getting stories that are hardly ever brought to public attention in Cyprus to the surface. Re Aphrodite assisted her in bringing these stories to the attention of the Cypriot public. This project was also a catalyst in solidifying the collaboration between Loizidou and I. This collaboration has proved to be the most long standing and equal collaboration I have had to date<sup>6</sup>. Out of anyone I have collaborated with she has been the only one who when asked has given me feedback in terms of the project to use as part of this practice based PhD process.

The two interviews and dialogues each had their own function. The first created international dialogues through the collaboration with the 'EntreLínguas' project and the second created a dialogical exchange between different social groups in Nicosia. It directly dealt with issues of gender and racial segregation in the city and it used the pretext of the art exhibit and the art space to highlight social occurrences and raise dialogue in relation to these. Alice became a voice for the women she interviewed and in turn Re Aphrodite became a voice through which these stories could be heard. In this case the arts practice allowed for these stories to be told. The practitioners in this case become facilitators. We can hear voices through the position of the practitioners. This brings us back to the fact that the recognition and professional benefits lie mostly with the artist facilitator.

This project focused on dialogue and conversation and used the practice of socially engaged art as narrative and the production process as facilitation. It did not aim to be didactic however and pretend to hold the answer for complicated social issues and

structures. As Myles Horton indicated in a conversation with Paulo Freire "my expertise is in knowing not to be an expert" (Horton in ed. Bell, Gaventa & Peters, 1990, p. 128). He continues to indicate that "there's a big difference in giving information and telling people how to use it" (ibid, p. 129). By presenting a series of social occurrences and norms and providing the space for conversation and dialogue to develop perhaps we can manage to "find ways to handle our own weakness of culture" (ibid, p.134). Being didactic and preaching good social practice and political correctness was not the point of carrying these events out. Providing the space or the situation for allowing dialogue to occur was much more important to the project. In addition I have noticed that by not allowing people to clearly see the agenda that is behind one's practice then that problematises the participants and viewers to a greater extent and this encourages further debate. This was clearly demonstrated in this project, where the debates that arose in the public interview that took place had nothing to do with the producers' own views; they arose from the creation of that particular situation and the contact that was facilitated.

This situation was organized to present or enhance a better understanding of social reality in relation to structures of gender and racial segregation in Nicosia. Conversation is an instrumental facet of educative and social art methodologies. When used within socially engaged art, conversation and dialogue lie in between the pedagogical and the artistic function. Exhibitions, biennales, museums and fairs have for a long time included pedagogical models within their methodological frameworks. These often took the form of supporting educational programmes such as discussions, conferences, debates and workshops. Increasingly however rather than these practices playing a supporting role to the display of alternative art forms, they are becoming the main focus and central theme of contemporary art practice and curatorial methodol-

ogy. This educational turn that has been increasingly established within curatorial and artistic practices is particularly highlighted by Paul O' Neill and Mick Wilson<sup>7</sup>. They highlight how these “discursive productions often implement a durational dialogical process” (O'Neill & Wilson, 2010, p.16). This project highlighted the need to introduce dialogical and processual modes of working to a setting where there are limited environments that allow for critical social interaction and civic engagement. This project raised awareness on gender and migrant realities in Cyprus through the creation of situations that focus on dialogue, conversation and exchange.

#### FOOTNOTES

6. This collaboration with Loizidou however has shed much more light in collaboration between practitioners and not between artist and community.

7. In 2010 they co-edited and published the book *Curating and the educational turn*.

## **COLLABORATORS AND PARTICIPANTS**

Alice Wang

Christina Tryphonos

Francisca Silva

Re Aphrodite: Evanthia Tselika & Chrystalleni Loizidou

Rogelio Gómez Jimeno

## **FUNDERS AND SPONSORS**

Apotheke Contemporary Arts

Cyprus Community Media Centre (CCMC)

Praktoreio Non Cultural Space

The Association for the protection of Philipinos in Cyprus

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## **BOOKLET 2**

Published by Evanthia Tselika/Conflict Transformation Art  
Submitted as part of Evanthia Tselika's doctoral thesis in 2014  
Birkbeck, University of London  
Supervisors: Dr Gabriel Koureas & Dr Sophie Hope  
For further information contact: [e\\_tselika@hotmail.com](mailto:e_tselika@hotmail.com)  
[evanthiatselika.com](http://evanthiatselika.com)  
Designed by Polis Demosthenous