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STSM Report on Photography Project

Walking the Green-Lines

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Walking the Green-Lines

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Our project on the visibility of the Green-Line in Nicosia and in Limassol, was conducted with the knowledge that the whole of the island of Cyprus is divided lengthwise in two different national and administrative system, even if there is no international agreement on the formal political status of the northern side of the island. We observed the Green Line and other borders in very short and restricted "stretches". These were from the Old town of the Greek Cypriot side, and even more restricted in time and detail, the Old Town of the Turkish Cypriot side. It was the eastern side of Limassol, for centuries divided among different ethnic, religious, gender and economic groups, but not part of the official Green-Line. And it was from a Nicosian newer living quarter from the Greek Cypriot side.

The aim of my research has been to study migrants and other peoples, like teachers, politicians, business men, family members and inhabitants, and their experiences of the border. Migrants experiences has been related to border crossings practices, everyday transnational life involving work, longings, care, household duties, travels, spending leisure time, socialising, buying and preparing food as it take place at both sides of the Russian-Norwegian border. My focus is developing towards the production of borders and practising borders, even though the experiences of border are still relevant. This project brought to the forefront my own experience of and struggle to understand, make sense of and maybe start to get to some aspects of the "borderliness" (Green) of the borders across Cyprus. Although wanting to grasp what this border consist of, through understanding what it does to people and how people deal with and perceive it, I think that our approach led to a focus on our own experience, also as a team, of the borderliness here.

Our international team approached the border and the visibility of the border by our experience of walking and talking, reflecting and listening at and to the borders. While walking the evacuated, emptied, torned down houses and streets, abandoned,

but slowly and temporarily (re)inhabited the borderliness were more felt than seen or heard. But still produced by visions: the sounds and the texture meeting our feet. The distant but very visible, strong and present supervision of the Greek Cypriot, The Turkish Cypriot and the UN control posts with its young soldiers, actually following the visible life moving close to the border from above, added strongly to the feeling of the border. The impression the border invoked in me being an outsider, a stranger unfamiliar to the history, the people, the language of the island.

The border made us change; we lowered our voices, we moved quicker and smoother, we constantly watched around us and over our shoulders, while the cameras were more hidden and quicker as well. The emptiness, the visible traces of life as well as the visible traces of keeping life away and apart, met in the Green Lines, the borders, but also in our bodily presence in these spaces. And nevertheless, contrary to the silent and unpopulated Russian-Norwegian borderland, the experiences of borderliness were framed by the pulsing city. The ordinary, the noise, the traffic and the viability were only corners away. While the cats, the flowers and weed, the carpenters, graffiti, the new immigrants, the bell-towers and minarets calling, the development projects creeping into the abandoned spaces, were symbols of past and present, new processes and memories, ideologies and new and other divisions among people.

These new divisions produce or perhaps reproduce borders among people, of class and wealth, of who is acknowledged as belonging to this soil, of foreign or not so foreign migrants, of gender, age and generations, of valued refugees and settlers, of political and moral approaches to the "border issues" and "the other side".

We attended six interesting border related gatherings during our stay in Nicosia; a film festival screening a documentary based on two directors interviews with people experiencing 1974 on each side of the border - before it "opened", The Biennale of Young Artists in Skopje 2009, an exhibition open in Nicosia during our stay, The male professor... belly dancing at the "Pink night" at a gay club in northern Nicosia, The gathering of bi-communal people outside Ledra Palace to celebrate the opening... educational centre (please fill me in Olga) by reading poems and music, the street party to mark and celebrate the "critical mass" bike demonstration performing

traditional underground music, border photography and most remarkably: placed in a street with the border control post as the practically back-drop of the scene, and the assembly of immigrants with Asian-background on Sunday.

These were all, except from the Sunday assembly in the park, somehow and among other issues at stake, gatherings around border artwork. But they all, included the immigrant assembly in the park, talked to the feelings and emotions of borders. They made us, the public experience borders in different ways and of different kinds. This gave me some new inspirations and experiences of other and additional complexities of borders.

In a short film at the Skopje Biennale, a young gymnast turn wheels in the border area – somehow jumping the border - in a very physical way –. In another work Maria Costi de Castrillo is showing ways to stitch the border. To me the stitches bear connotations to doctors healing of wounds and highlight women's ability but less valued production of new materials, maintenance and care, to live by. Still new scars, borders and scratches are continually made at the open wound at the border of the Green Line.