

Introduction

Looking down from Mula, one of old Nicosia's eleven bastions, a fortification built by the Venetians in 1567, you see the widest point of an open wound-like scar, the partition of northern and southern Nicosia. Within it grows a garden, unlike well nurtured gardens this is an unwatered and unattended wildgreen growth. The garden deviates between a decaying summer green and an autumn winter green, the only constant being that the garden never seems to be in 'spring'. They call this the Green Line, drawn in green on a map in 1963 by British General Yang. It is meant to 'protect' the north from the south and vice-versa, fortifying the city further. It is not a line, really, but a pandesia of green growth among old walls running along, taking sharp turns into deadends. It lives on in anomalous shapes and forms, full of questions. Is it safest within or beyond it, I often wonder. Who is fenced in or out?



The Green Line border

This paper explores the ways in which *Threading Stories*, a co-creative workshop and exhibition space, across from the Green Line, contributes to the understanding, preservation, creation and sharing of heritage and cultural knowledge. Against the backdrop of the Line's heritage of silence and decay, we will dive into works which contain the worldviews of their creators and craftspeople, which precede both the process and the end product. We shall ponder how knowledge is inherited and the relationship between handcrafted processes, in evaluating the cycle of work, reflecting upon preserving the diverse nature of dialogues emanating from historical and cultural sources. In parallel, we address colonisation, the tribes within and beyond academia, all in an attempt to examine how these have shaped communities and cultural identity. Additionally educational aspects and inclusive practices will surface, as work-based activities within *Threading Stories (TS)* are sensitive to the bettering of physical, mental and social aspects of people within their processes. And how learning is engaging across disciplines, through experimenting, research, academic know-how and a reflection on ancestral practices. Lastly we illuminate how meaningful contributions reflect artistic citizenship and activism, where the community becomes the collective and where social action dictates the process.

The cultural subtext of Trikoupi Street

During my walk towards *TS* down Trikoupi street I am struck by the cultural subtext. I bring to mind Trikoupi's stern moustache and gentleman suit, a seven times prime-minister of Greece in the late 19th c. I bring to mind the difference between what I'm walking towards, my admiration of *TS's* delicate approach to beautiful crafts and rituals of heritage, and the mentality of this modernising leader, constructing railways and harbours. Ambitious enough to build the Corinth Canal, organising a new state that would prove to be corrupt enough to immediately go bankrupt. A man who ordered the modern revival of the ancient Olympic

Games, and sealed the country's relationship with heritage revival, as well as with modern alienation and bankruptcy.¹

A warm glow from the workshop's window comes into view; wild clay pots, weaved items, silver jewellery, all set against wooden panels and mosaic tiles. Their door is welcomingly open, emotions, colours and textures flow towards me, but I don't go in yet. Doors in this part of town are no longer open, the community has moved out or slowly passed away, since Nicosia was divided in 1963. This area is now home to immigrants, some elderly craftsmen, several new artists studios, the municipal hall, a new Science Research Centre and mostly coffee shops and tavernas. Mesmerised by the cool afternoon breeze, I keep walking towards the fortified green, to that which keeps me "safe". Narrowed in, I become aware of another layer of protection: two newly asphalted parking-lots nestled and at 'home', adjacent to the Line... Parked cars buffer the area better than the UN. This thought unsettles me: *avoid it if possible, or limit the interaction with it, you do not need to connect with the silence.*

Feeling like the Red Rebel Brigade² I walk this street in silence, without the armour of a costume but with my noisy brain revolting, trying to illuminate something. I walk alone, no impact is created: this stillness and silence disturbs me. We park our cars and leave. Freed from its silence, we slowly accept it.

Tribes and Identities

Teresa, co-owner of *TS*, has talked about her moments of silence during field work. Anticipating an encounter with her, I notice that the awe created in me is both in the objects, the travelling and encounters with tribes. A tribe, as a group of socially similar people who engage and interact, with a sense of purpose amongst them, often with similar cultural, political or

¹Britannica, 'Kharílaos Trikoúpis', Encyclopedia Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia, (19 July 2022).

² Red Rebels Brigade, 'Red Rebels Brigade', (2022)

<<https://web.archive.org/web/20221003005451/http://redrebelbrigade.com/>>.

economic characteristics. In addressing the definition, from a post-colonial angle, this was used to distinguish the civilised from the savage. Across academia the ‘focus on disciplines as distinct tribes tends to bleach out the complexity and variety of different ways of thinking about knowledge’.³ Trowler supports that academics shied away from the term initially, it enticed them to somehow abandon the hard lining of disciplines and of academic tribes and seek more inclusive ways of teaching, a recollection of how knowledge might be conveyed.

Everything *TS* displays is an experience. The crafting is dynamic and identity driven, the Amazon region comes alive, the Pacific and Caribbean Coast, the tiny village Terra (earth) on the western Cyprus coast. Knowledge is transmitted gently, through emphasising the labour and value in artefact and craftsmanship. The symbols on weaves and objects are messages and myths, they speak in historical and cultural dialogues preserved. I reflect on Phelan who describes the ‘humanly embodied sounds [...] the musical hospitality and its ability to invite and evoke missing cultural landscapes’⁴, conveyed through music, historically enabling a migrant to carry it with him, not restricted by what is lost or left behind. I think of Turino, where he emphasises why music matters, it’s ‘musical meaning [...] the crucial role in social, spiritual and political life’.⁵ Finding one’s self rather than losing it, and in ‘salutary internationalisation of different value systems’⁶ which enables societies to bond and integrate, at home and away from it. This is what a craftsman strives to sustain within his craft, a sound, a language and all that makes a tradition.

Colonisers looked upon tribes and sought ways to manipulate, subject and control, acknowledging that a boundary or territorial field calls for protection.⁷ Breaking them up often

³ Paul Trowler, Murray Saunders, and Veronica Bamber, ‘Tribes and Territories in the 21st Century: Rethinking the Significance of Disciplines in Higher Education’. Florence: Routledge, (2012), Web.p 46.

⁴ Helen Phelan, ‘Sonic hospitality: Migration, community, and music’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Education*, vol. 2, ed. by G. McPherson and G. Welch, Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2012), p. 180.

⁵ Jan Fairley, ‘Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation’, by Thomas Turino. Chicago, USA: The University of Chicago Press, 2008. 258 Pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-226-81697-5.” *Popular music* 29.1 (2010) pp.161

⁶ *Ibid* 162.

⁷ Trowler p 50.

meant better controlling their dynamics and freedoms. Tribes under these circumstances both need and wisely seek recognition, however the colonisation of the senses, beliefs, traditions and rituals is what is at stake. The land owners shift, culture outlives them all. Was colonisation a small price to pay if the identity remained intact or had incurred little damage? As I look around there is no denying that an *'unhomeliness* of the interdisciplinary [...] in this ocean of knowledge'⁸ is felt within the display. All embrace their colonial past, the Southern American objects and the western Cypriot ones, and in doing so embrace their *homeliness* with their lands.

Bridging knowledge

As I become familiar with the displays and practises of *TS*, a spiritual journey of intellectually woven connections surfaces, a storytelling chant buzzes in my ears, 'the story makes an impression and creates an opening, then service-learning follows'⁹ capturing a learning experience, to understand the social and cultural nationhood. The imam's call for Muslim prayer, from across the Line, breaks the silence. The north is reportedly mainly inhabited by Muslims, the south mainly Greek-Orthodox with minorities of Catholic-Latins and Maronites as well as Armenian-Orthodox. The Islamic call is not disturbing but familiar. Residents are accustomed to it, the prayer neither fears the silence of the Mula bastion scar nor the wild green growth. Oh no, it flies freely across it all!

Perplexed by the overlapping layers of meaning, I drift to what Jacobs had in mind when describing cities as 'living organisms in which streets are the "lifeblood"[...] as a "sidewalk ballet"' [...] that keep the city safe'¹⁰. A carpenter workshop sits opposite. The smell of freshly

⁸ Trowler p 53.

⁹ David Elliott, ed. et al., 'Artistic Citizenship : Artistry, Social Responsibility, and Ethical Praxis', Oxford University Press, Incorporated, (2016), ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kcl/detail.action?docID=4707143>.

¹⁰ Jane Jacobs, 'The Uses of Sidewalks: Contact', in *The Urban Design Reader*, second edition, eds M. Larice and E. Macdonald, Abingdon, New York: Routledge, (2013), pp. 142-15.

sawn wood makes its way across the road. I admire the new shelving units in the shop. Teresa informs me of their encounter, he showed her how to cut out the shelving. Jacobs comes to mind again, 'the sum of such casual public contact at a local level [...] is a feeling for the public identity of people, a web of public respect and trust'¹¹. I smile. There is hope in the community despite the differentiated demographics. They work and live in harmony through these small random 'sidewalk' contacts, through unplanned and unmeasurable private moments.

I question Teresa on the indigenous knowledge she and her partner Alejandro experienced through the locations visited, to better understand how they relate to colonies and decolonisation. We touch upon the production of paja toquilla hats from Equator, although they originated from the town of Montecristi. They came to be named Panama hats, extensively sold to colonial workers of the Panama Canal. I capture her sensitivity when describing the lengthy and intense process of making a hat, now recognised as an intangible heritage object, sold worldwide for up to USD5.000. We agree that the production chain is flawed where makers receive a fraction of the price for their efforts. A failure to recognise the substantial scientific knowledge contained in indigenous craft, and so failing to put a price on it. As Dei writes, we ought to integrate 'indigenous knowledge in the academy and affirm this collaborative dimension of knowledge'¹² and perhaps in doing so to 'develop a critical epistemology to account for the producing and validation of critical knowledge for decolonisation purposes'.¹³

How possible is this, I think, touching the weaving of a paja toquilla hat on display, to convey the relationship they have with this object, to communicate this as a survival for the craftsman, a form of spiritual and environmental relationship and not thousands of dollars in profit. Closing my eyes, I bring the hat to my head, paying homage to the makers. Never before has putting on a hat felt so powerful an experience. Thinking of post-coloniality, I wonder, are

¹¹ Ibid p. 150.

¹² George J. Sefa Dei, (Nana Adusei Sefa Atweneboah I), 'Rethinking the role of Indigenous knowledge in the academy', *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 4 (2000), pp. 111–132.

¹³ Ibid p.113.

we there yet? Unless these voices are clearly included by those who navigate the discourse of disciplines, of cross-disciplines or trans-disciplines, this dialogue has not been exhausted; ‘decolonisation is a process not arrival’ argues Tiffin.¹⁴ If the appropriate acknowledgment is not credited by the Western researchers, of the collective and ongoing dialectic exchange of knowledge creation through indigenous societies,¹⁵ then we are not there yet.

Actionability vs Disciplinarity

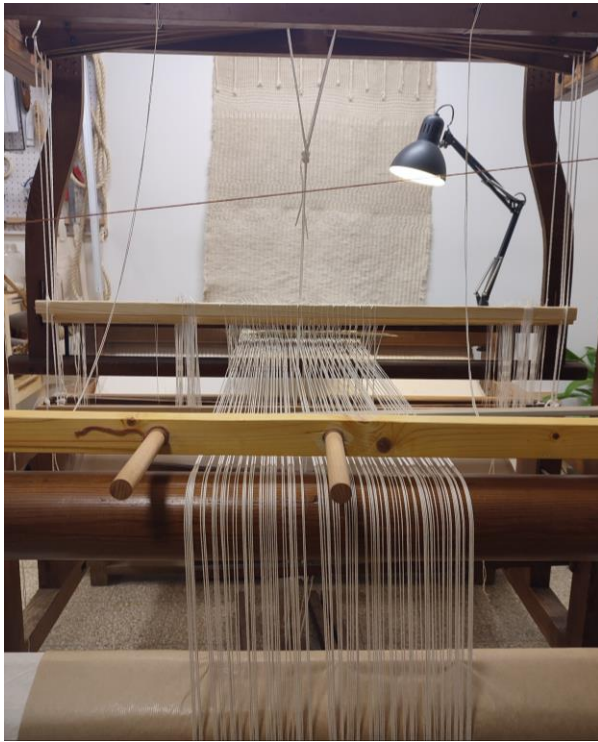
Sheltered under the glow of the window, a loom sits proudly amongst the smaller ones used for teaching purposes. Those generational knowledge techniques of repetition and dedication until you master a craft, are carried down. What becomes obvious in *TS* is the curiosity to reflect upon ancestral creative practices, the biodiversity of primary materials testing, preserving and enhancing knowhow. Students, designers, craftsmen, archaeologists, anthropologists and researchers all contribute within the space. Standing here, I experience a disappearance of a specific stage, this welcoming of ‘unlimited potential for movement and design [...] the stage now becomes accessible as a performance space without visual restrictions’.¹⁶ This is what Balme specifies: how the stage becomes both a ‘mimetic’ and a ‘diegetic’ space, within this space-stage we can experience the visual and acoustic dialogues unfolding, in an equally subtle way we see a world and time opening up, beyond the workshop and display area. The Global Science Forum (OECD, 2020) contributed to this perspective where social challenges were assessed by incorporating transdisciplinary research of ‘more innovative and holistic solutions, integration of practical and experiential knowledge, attention to norms, ethics and abstract ideas’,¹⁷ by including citizens, academics and stakeholders.

¹⁴ Helen Tiffin, ‘The Long Process Of European Decolonization English Language Essay’, ukessays.com. (2018), UK Essays (2022). <<https://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-language/the-long-process-of-european-decolonization-english-language-essay.php>.

¹⁵ Dei p. 116.

¹⁶ Christopher Balme, ed., ‘Spaces and Places’, in *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 47–62.

¹⁷ Julie Klein Thompson, ‘Beyond Interdisciplinarity : Boundary Work, Communication, and Collaboration’, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, (2021), Print.



The Danish Lervard loom



Yarns

Heritage Propels Innovation and Notable Inclusion

Meanings in craft, like a language, need to be conveyed in ways relevant to the present to ensure future continuity. Environments where resources and infrastructure are limited, depend more on the craftsman's skills and ability and tend to intensify simplicity and creativity. Knowledge from indigenous people is no longer 'a myth, a legend and fable [...] it is not seen as evidence of thousands of years of observations'¹⁸ supports Lu. Additionally, interpretation through empirical observation is a scientific analysis and so indigenous knowledge should sit

¹⁸ Donna Lu, 'How Scientists are Working for Greater Inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge', Guardian, (30 July 2022).

next to scientific research as an indispensable perspective to findings; not as ‘advisors’ but ‘decision makers’, no longer as ‘the research - they become the researcher’.¹⁹ she argues.

Three pots of coloured ground stone, used to make wild clay ceramics within the space, draw my attention. I reflect on rock art, that prehistoric writing on the walls of knowledge preservation and people ‘[h]istory had different start dates, depending on the particularities of whether and why people wrote or encountered others who wrote about them’.²⁰ The role of historians was to record only written historical findings; what came before the written recordings is classed as archeology or prehistoric. These prehistoric wild clay pots may not have made it into histories on ‘developments, innovation and cultural evolution along a linear timescale’.²¹ A wooden board with labelled fabric sits next to them, they are mud dyed fibres, a waste material from the wild clay processing. I study these natural pigments of soil, a mixture of rich minerals, colours and clay deposits. Terese informs me of the process of collecting and recording in preparation of fibres and textiles, that natural mordants are an ever transforming activity, reacting to environments and usage. In the words of Elliot ‘the arts are potent influences for shaping character, identity, membership and belonging. Artistic citizens acknowledge those influences and seek to use them responsibly’.²² The mixing of traditional / modern techniques and materials within the process, acts to communicate the individual stories of region and creator, through the object, his life and dwellings.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Laura Rademaker, Goldhahn, J., Maralngurra, G., Mangiru, K., Paul S.C. Taçon, & May, S. K., ‘The amazing archive of first nations stories written on stone’, (Apr 27, 2022) Sapiens, Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/amazing-archive-first-nations-stories-written-on/docview/2718228579/se-2>.

²¹ Ibid p. 3.

²² Elliott p. 77.



Wild clay sand



Wild clay ceramics



Natural dye textiles



Natural dye samples

In conclusion: some thoughts on Artistic Citizenship

I step outside, back on Trikoupi street and the darkened sky, contemplating how privileged art is, in having the power to effect social change, to enhance or break down human collectivity. This privilege of art is challenging for those seeking to authentically immerse themselves and revive it, a commitment to the cause and to the identities of people and their beliefs. An engagement and integration with one's own and unknown kind. Artistic citizenship is 'the affiliation of a shared identity [...] inclusionary and exclusionary'.²³ My passing experience within *TS*, has left a mark of commitment to the cause of the community, a responsibility beyond the craft, art, writing or being, a participating engagement to sustaining 'virtues of character' as written by Dunne; those 'qualities acquired and exercised [...] through their apprenticeship and into the practise, their answerability to its standards of excellence, and their submission to the demands of achieving its characteristic ends'.²⁴ Subtly suggested through the activities and unique relationships within the *TS* dialogues, the space enabled these soul-searching emotions I have experienced.

In this essay, we have seen social and practising aspects, inspired by incorporating indigenous crafts, within a contemporary creative space. Exploring this, what surfaced was how art and activism through the working and living environment of Trikoupi and *TS*, manifest a technique, a story, a ritual leading to a social cry on 'social ills and shifting attitudes'.²⁵ We sought to understand how academic 'tribes' through westernised disciplines, have distanced their perspective from aspects of colonisation²⁶ and questioned whether any practice or learning, whether academic, craft or art, exist solely without the other? Are these not rooted in the common struggles of what concerns us all and unlike 'a system that prioritises the need for individual material wealth over the needs of the collective'.²⁷

²³ Ibid p. 64.

²⁴ Ibid p. 72.

²⁵ Ibid p. 192.

²⁶ Trowler p. 56.

²⁷ Elliott p. 194.

The challenge remains: how to entice engagement but also perseverance through issues that matter to the artist/activist, and in their own unique perspective on humanity? How one places this work in a position to withstands being drifted into a 'framework of resistance'²⁸ and in conforming to pressing matters, in case they disturb. We have attempted to show how in engaging with a more embracing, inclusive and holistic view of identities, cultures and techniques, knowledge can better support the shortcomings of rigid disciplines. Adopting a view of this part of town, the safety of the Green Line as an intersection of voices, calls to prayer, and community wisdom passed down through theoretical concerns.

The stars and sky are slightly more vivid now that the few workshops are closed and I reflect: 'art gives us a vision of what the world should be; activism gives us a toolbox to craft that ideal world'.²⁹ Not yet ready to leave, I make my way towards the Green Line, the idea gives me hope, that this time, instead of avoiding it, I might try to "try it on" solemnly, respectfully, like a paja toquilla hat, in a ritual of homage and self-decolonisation.

²⁸ Ibid p. 202.

²⁹ Ibid p. 206.

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doi:10.1017/CBO9780511817021.005

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