

A Time Known to All: Stephanos Stephanides and Ari Sitas

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Abstract: This essay concerns itself with the way in which two renowned poets, both of them Cypriots, involve the reader in journeys which become mental maps of the lands in which they have lived in, and the poetry that has become a palimpsest for further conversations. The concepts of time and place are further entrenched in biography, as they concern themselves not just with geographical arenas and habitats, but with a continuing sense of the sacred and the inviolate. Coming from territories identified with war, and reflecting on combustible boundaries, the two poets allow us to enter into a fragile world, peopled by their dreams. For both Stephanos Stephanides and Ari Sitas, the tactile sense of Nature, and their belief in the interrelatedness of dream time with real time, is presented powerfully. Cyprus emerges as a common ground of their belonging, as does their sense of being active agents of change, or political catalysts, in the practice of poetry.

Stephanos Stephanides and Ari Sitas, the two Cypriot poets whom I present here in terms of a fragmental representation of their work, have understood war, death, the map of the world as ever complex, and have survived to tell its tale. For the purposes of this essay, I shall be drawing mainly from Stephanides' recently collated work, *The Wind Under My Lips* (2018), as the key text for understanding his work. I shall be analyzing this voluminous work, along with the poetic work of another Cypriot poet, Ari Sitas, published as *Slave Trades and an Artist's Notebook* (1999) and *Rough Music: Selected Poems 1989-2013* (2013). Both Stephanides and Sitas represent the world view of travellers and their experience, in Africa, India and The Caribbean. They bring to the reader the sensual delight in living and being in the world. Their styles are different, for in Stephanos work, one senses the lyric quality of the psalmist, where nature and culture intermingle in the memory of blessings, in spite of the persistent shadow of war. There is both the hum of the flute of the minstrel, as well as the imagery of pastoralism. Ari Sitas, on the other hand, presents the muscularity of the drums of war, the memory of which never goes away for either poet.

My essay is concerned with the way in which these two Cypriot poets look at their world, encompassing their childhood, and developing a cosmopolitan perspective over time. They write dialogically, drawing in multitudes of persons, and explore the truth of fragments of existence, understood as coexistent with parallel political universes. Their creative writing draws on their lives and how both come to terms with their sense of loss of homeland, and the experience of division of their island nation, by the colonization of the island by Turkey.

As writers and readers who understand the significance of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, both see translation as intrinsic to their work, and as David Harvey would say, use it as "a means to codify a common political agenda." (Harvey 2001, 198) Harvey focuses on the questions of translation, providing us key moments in the understanding of respect, learning to live with difference, fluidity of culture, and instability of the self. (ibid 198) This mutual attention, where those who carry the double burden of resiting submersion into another culture, while retaining respect for their own, involves that we "create a frame that includes both self and other, neither being dominant, in an

image of fundamental equality.” (ibid 198) For both Stephanides and Sitas, the body becomes the carrier of experience, which language then carries forward. Harvey speaks of this epiphenomenon of translation as being both regulating and restrictive, as well as liberatory. Each poet knows that he becomes vulnerable because the metaphors of taking on another culture is clothed with an immense responsibility, as well as all the dangers of being misinterpreted. Just as Burkhardt was concerned with the milling quality of continuous wars and revolutions, David Harvey wants to ask how can we understand terror, and its relation to institutions which it tries to bring down? In two completely different modes of composition, argument and style (Ricoeur 1977, 31) Stephanos Stephanides and Ari Sitas bring to us the sense of surprise that we look for in the reading of narratives.

The Acts Of Writing, Translating and Interlocution

As Roland Barthes describes it, the ‘question’ that literature asks is never answered. “The history of literature will then no longer be the contradictory answers offered by writers to the question of meaning, but the history, on the contrary, of the question itself.” (Barthes in Richard Kostelanetz 1969, 517) My essay attempts to take the significance of the syntagmatic text as essentially necessary for our understanding of the two writers, as they mark themselves biographically, with regard to a longer migrational history, which is also osmotic and cosmopolitan in relationship to the significance of Cypriot culture. This draws our attention to the “replenishing of meaning” that is Barthes term for infusing history and poetry in narrative prose. “.the ordeal of meaning suffered by a certain society, and the history of this work will be in its way the history of that society.” (ibid 318) It is the link between biography and their immediate political circumstances which are constantly in flux that become the metanarrative of the two Cypriot poets.

Alongside this natural compounding of multiple selves, which permits Stephanides, as the global citizen, to foreground himself with an ardour, which leaves the observer entranced and yet outside of it, is the vivid presence of the translator, where a relationship of trust is emphasized. It is this trust, which Stephanides demands of us as readers. His power of assimilation in the communities that he participates in, makes him one of them, his loyalties are with them, and he sets up mutual spaces of conversation, where the participants linger, and explain themselves to the author as well as fellow participants. Stephanides suggests in his writings that transculturation must be understood as the opening up of borders, and questions the role of the State in the regulation of osmosis. His poetry looks at the many ways in which memory is ruptured, and how individual choices make people different.

Stephanides uses poetry as mnemonic, where the sense of his own being is immersed in the memory of these cataclysmatic experiences. He suggests that Hermes is ever present in his journeys, and contemplates the role of will in shaping our fate and our impulse to transcend. How does the poet deal with the cards that fate delivers? “Nostos” becomes the term by which nostalgia is given an accolade, where it is life affirming. Rather than presuming that looking back is fatal, or does not allow for the way forward, Stephanides explores the concept of *nostos* to replenish the reflections of time and memory, where the essence of the past is ever pervasive. The potency of *nostos* lies in its curative essence, for it is never dismissed, but changes its value, according to the recollection with which it is invested. He writes of lying among the drying apricots and plums, of falling asleep too soon and missing the shower of stars, of ancient skies, and new mornings, punctuated by games, friends and rivalries. (Stephanides 2018, 166-170)

While Stephanos brings to the study of his beloved Nicosia, and the larger trails of Cyprus (sea and cities and villages and mountains) a sense of the opaque, through dream language and poetry, Ari Sitas brings to our view the sense of the putrid, the squalor, the offal, the suppressed desire of the body. It is not that Stephanos is not concerned with this. Stephanides explores this in his ethnographic work on the Kali Puja taken to the Caribbean by Indian indentured labourers. His video documentaries on the Kali Puja in Guyana, *Hail Mother Kali*, 1988, and in New York, *Kali in the Americas*, 2003, (available on YouTube) explore among other things, the body in trance through the ritual process. He takes the ethnographic challenge as documentary film maker to convey both intimacy and foreknowledge, and the analytical distance research brings.

Ari Sitas is much more violent in the images he produces, because his sense of security comes from Africa, for he can identify with the slang, the hype, the rap. For him words have a compelling authority, for they beat down on him, and therefore on us. Sometimes the sorrow that arises from witnessing defeated peoples has its surreal consequence, which is to laugh at them, be contemptuous of them, and yet remain intimate with them. He needs to define himself in relation to them, but being displaced himself from his own home, from Cyprus, he creates a symbiosis with displaced Black peoples without loss of identity. (Sitas 2013, 48)

The process of ethnographic documentation for both Cypriot poets, recolonizes mimetically, the bodies and minds of the interlocutors without embarrassment. This relationship is reinvented, and represented through documentary film, verse and prose. It is haunted by intimacy, and the overpowering need for contact, for touch, for reaching out. (Stephanides 2018, 276)

In the next section I will bring to the reader some of the biographical details which define Stephanides large body of work where poetry and prose provide for supportive frameworks of reference.

Maps of Non-Chronological Events

Stephanides brings to us the metaphor of islands continually, and the parallelisms that we seek are not merely geographical, but are orchestrated by relationships and memories. There is Cyprus, redolent with memories of oranges and olives, of grandmothers, and his chess playing and divinely beautiful mother. There is England, cold and distant with a language which was once foreign, but now the medium of his verse, and spaces marked by the absence of intimate family, and his childhood friends.

In the titular piece of *The Wind Under My Lips* Stephanides explores the beginning of his travels. It is with immense agony that Stephanides remembers his father taking him away, in 1957, to England. He remembers his absent mother who later leaves for Formosa aka Taiwan, so his imagination in childhood and adolescence moves among three islands. Formosa seems an unintelligible space till he reaches adolescence and meets his mother again, while the memory of his grandmothers in Cyprus remain vivid in his mind, as he languishes in the chill and monotonous routines of school life in England. He describes these islands as so remote from each other, in the South China Sea, the Northern Sea, and in the Middle Sea. (2018, 50).

Later, as a young man, with his appointment to the University of Guyana, he finds that Guyana has the ability to embrace him. At home, in Cyprus as a child, he was always welcome in his grandparents' villages, and always in familiar landscapes with people he knew and

loved. He had never imagined that he would leave his home, and travel to distant lands. (2018, 52)

In Guyana he finds a sense of his own inviolable freedom, which he thought lost during his adolescence. This is made possible by his apprenticeship to the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon during the years he lived in Guyana among Indians whose ancestors were taken there as indentured labourers, and among those who later relocated to New York from Guyana. In later journeys to India he pursues the Goddess in her original home, both in North and South India. In the poem 'Blue Moon in Rajasthan' he finds himself in a state of utter pathos, loss and ferment. There is dirt and sickness, but most of all, there is love, which recognizes his unity with the Goddess. (2018, 80)

Here then, is for Stephanides, the dream of the mother, and more powerfully, the mother displaced. He believes that islands have their own relational topography, symbolized by boats and travel, but biographically speaking there is no recompense, only loss, when the islands divide family members from one another. Photographs become the embodiment of this aloneness, and sense of distance, which is further articulated by the act of witnessing. Each one knows of the other's trauma but can do nothing about it. The story captures the record of times past and the record of a brutalising history. In 'The Wind Under My Lips', Stephanos also tells of his return to his childhood home in his village, in the Turkish-occupied part of the divided island. It is really a movement to nothingness. The house has been taken over, after the occupation, by someone else.

Stephanos reflects on the experience, which leads him into a reverie about love at the moment of loss:

I wondered away in my spectral reverie contemplating whether love might be just a rehearsal for departure to some unknown other place – a place we don't know when love begins. (2018, 48)

Several poems written at around the same time speak of this moment of return. In "No Time For Prayers" he beckons us to understand reincarnation, so he might visit again those places so near to him in memory, those places which are bound in his soul. The images he gives us are profoundly sea worthy involving the search for water, by digging stones, and the measure of oil, water and wine, carrying these in pitchers between orchards and cemeteries.

dreams languishing in bosoms of sea anemones until dark
when they lay in the dimness of paraffin lamps
maternal pelvis sounding
in the ceiling's triumphant arch
frail epiphany radiant in momentary conflagration
the gift of incarnation. (2018, 104)

Both losing home and losing one's mother remains within the agony of verse. It is in this sense that we have to understand that the poems which inform us about Ma in her manifestation of the divine Kali, and her ritual practice among Indian indentured labourers in Guyana, which has elements of shamanic practice and become a symbol of his life and verse. These rituals are later taken by the Guyanese migrant communities to New York, where they continue to be elaborately performed. Through the assimilation into this practice of absorbing Kali/ Mariamman/ Durga's appearance and blessing, which are further swallowed up into the sea, by idol immersion, the inertness of forgetting and loss are absorbed (2018, 88). The home also becomes Kathy (his wife), Katerina (his daughter), and the Cyprus of mutual recognition. "Everywhere was nowhere," the

Sybil tells him (2018, 328).

For Stephanos Stephanides, his father remains the obscure figure, the handsome accountant who wooed his mother with such passion, that the entire village remembered the incendiary nature of their love. Marriage brought with it all the questions that they had never asked of themselves. His mother's independence became the wedge that would never dissolve their conjugal silence or ultimate enmity. There seems no solution to their each holding on to their autonomy. (2018, 43) The dominant place that Stephanides gives to his family is the clue to how these dominant persona affect his life, and his work, even in his old age, constantly appearing to him as reasons for writing exquisite new verses.

Stephanides is at first sent to his grandparents, visiting his mother in those occasions when she can have him with her. The animosity between his mother and his father's mother is something that he remembers. She is lovely, recognized for her talent as a chess player, and willful. No one can deny her the right to make decisions, and so comes estrangement, and consequently, the departure of Stephanos and his father, to England. Poetry is perhaps born from these long silences, from Stephanos' sense of exclusion from what was once home.

"Larnaca Oranges" is probably the most vehement of these secrets which we are told. His father's mortuary symbols include sucking oranges peeled by his son, a reversal of roles, a frightening closure in prayer.

No mourning no black no bearded priests you oft declared;
and now you have relinquished your memory to me
giving me your final gift;
your body abject becomes once more a rhythm in your
mother's womb
while I pursue the taste of your dislocated oranges (2018, 120)

Cinematic as these images are, where a childhood lambent in pleasure with sea, sky, and playmates, including absorption in girl gangs away from macho peer group bullies, it had perforce been wrenched away by a Northern sea journey to Britain, to live with hitherto unknown relatives. Stephanides rests in these memories:

I soaked in these images and they stayed with me like visions that transformed the world around me – both a spectacle and intimate participation as were the activities and ritual festivities that came and went with the sacred rhythms in the cycles of the seasons spilling over and out with the excess of ripe pomegranates bursting open their skins to reveal the fruit inside. (2018, 54-56)

But the whale that swallows him up never goes away. The remembrance of cold winters alone with extended family in Britain, and away from all that he knows as childhood in a Cypriot village, and in his mother's flat in town, is washed away like the taste of 'plums on rooftop terraces':

For a moment, and then another
You are rocked back and forth
With gentle ferocity
By an earth that turns
While history closes in (2018, 190)

These plums, pomegranates, oranges, apricots, medlars become the landscape of his desire. In the mythos of his flagellating self, where new worlds meet the old, the essence of his poetry is a form of divination. It is the understanding of the self, through legends, festivals, family histories and biographies, where each fits into the other without murmuring, as if the silences are distilled in verse, that we can hear only because he allows us to. Geological time welds with sunrise and moon appearances which take on a continental form; each continent, the Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe, Australia begins to merge in the phraseology that defines their similarities and their differences. This animism is not clumsy, it is as old as the sea, in which he was floated as an infant (2018, 43). It devours the poet such that he trembles to the sound of the sea's existence, and yet, in the comfort of words, of secret languages made public, he strives to make us feel at home in the world. For him, the separation of here and now, past and future, is not decipherable. His mind is osmotic, and the figure of the Dragoman (who is a translator) appears to show him the way, by presenting his androgynous self as the guide/visitor, who knows no fear. In 'Rhapsody on the Dragoman', Stephanides sets forth the syncretistic history of Cyprus. It is because the history of a fragmented isle continually represents the accident of birth, of wrenching, and of new worlds to which new fealties are expressed, that his world becomes circumscribed in ever new ways of seeing, never quite losing the chains of one's loss.

In the night I go under
 In company of dervishes and learn
 Why cyclamens sprout in pavement cracks
 And mutter promises, amidst the dust,
 Of the beautiful and the unseen. (ibid 332)

Unravelling Mythopoesis

Stephanos uses the tropes of the Nature Gods, and the lust to return to the womb with startling effect. He knows the way forward is always towards annihilation, but he is fearless, as the ancestor worship typical of remembrance allows him the calm to write verse. Poetry is for Stephanides, the return to Dionysus, to the dervish dance, the appearance of the gods of the Greeks. The resplendence of the mother then begins life anew, through the division of the sugarcane with the cutlass, and the poet's cleaving to the pen. The displacement is thus always foiled, for rather than seeing living in the past as a move towards decrepitude, Stephanos Stephanides understands it to be immensely healing. Sexuality is a language of rejuvenation, and the ode to the mother a way of legitimizing fecundity in ever real ways such as we find in the powerful poems 'If it were given' and 'Daughter' dedicated to his wife Kathy and daughter Katerina.

It is this orientation to the material body, past and present and future that allows the complexity of the disruptions of catalytic events to be finally lulled. (2018, 302)

In the Creole culture of Guyana, where the descendants of Indian indentured labourers break their coconuts, Stephanides finds his community, his soul mates. His skill is at blending in as Steve Baba, in New York, where he follows in camera what he has propelled through verse, and it becomes manifest as documentary. What is available to us as viewers is the very moment of self-abnegation of the other, the death of the self, the surrender to affliction. Through this mimetic code, he surrounds himself with the tactile, with the acolyte, with the sense of being released through catharsis and a mutually inflicted violence. (2018, 280)

In “Rhapsody of the Dragoman”, Stephanides manipulates our vision to understand that, time without compartments exists in our minds. The dragoman is androgynous, and informs the body of the listener who, through silence and guile, makes his/her path with the ability of the courtesan who gives her body, or whose eyes are plucked. The lust of the adventurer is blind.

As the guide to the visitor of the city, the poet, intellectual, savant is alert, for indeed, the visitor makes the inhabitant understand the city differently. Every time is new, each is intense in the mutual discovery of the body placed in time, and yet pursuing the relics of past warriors and slaves who inhabited the city. The archaeology of the city is locked in its flora and fauna, its water ways, and its shared poetry. The enchantment lies in detachment, and yet words create the veil of ardor that human beings find so necessary in order to live. There is synthesis of both, without discord. (2018, 334-337)

There is always for Stephanides, the return to the ritual, and its process of healing in the face of sickness and death. The image of Kali calls him, and in essence, he accepts the terrible nature of that apprenticeship. When he leaves Guyana, he writes a poem ‘Lotus of the Mud Flats’ that both celebrates the experience and mourns what he has to leave behind. (2018, 284)

The wrenching that comes from partition and colonization by the Turks is profoundly communicated by leave taking from the home, where childhood was so fractured and yet, leavened by friendships. Burkhardt writes that for the Greeks being separated from the graveyards of their ancestors is most difficult to bear, and that “Being forcibly removed to a new place of residence was an act that caused more sorrow and grief than any other..” (Burkhardt 1963, 8) Wrenched out of its ancient classical context, this applies to the Greek Cypriots who have known hundreds of years of intrusion by English, French and mainland Greeks, and in the middle of the last century by the arrival of Turks who replaced Cypriots, both Muslim and Orthodox Christian.

This paper has attempted to communicate that this terrible story of forced migration has appeared in the life work of both poets as the essential mytheme of their writing, where the individual and the collective unconscious become interlocked in a sort of death dance which only poetry can unravel. It is this which has concerned us, as to the embeddedness in collective representation, where Greek Cypriot poets are able to draw deep from the psyche, from memory, from the intensity of their experiences to give us a new history born out of this narrative, of how they can individually talk about what happened to them in the mid 20th century. They represent that past not in soliloquies of solitude, but in a dialogic fashion, creating new images and patterns, bringing in the one case the effervescence of a Cypriotic landscape, and in the other, the tumult of South African shantylife.

It is this artistic return to rhetoric that has concerned me most in my analyses. Ricoeur writes of the vehemence of this kind of primary, confrontational language, which does not abstract or provide rationality or philosophy as its frame. “In short, rhetoric cannot become absorbed in a purely ”argumentative” or logical discipline, because it is directed to “the hearer.” (Ricoeur 1977, 29) It is the intensity of subjectivity, “of emotions, of passions, of habits and of beliefs” (ibid 29) which permits the reader to actually sail along with the Cypriot poets, who define their citizenship not in terms of local maps merely, but transcend those to actually take us on routes we would never ever would have known existed. In the next section, I will bring to the reader’s attention the verse that Ari Sitas brings to us which create a bridge between Cypriot migrants and the new home in which he as a citizen of South Africa makes familiar to himself by compounding verses which are immediately mirror images of the reality that he sees in his every day environment.

Ari Sitas and the Fulcrum of Africa

Ari Sitas and Stephanos Stephanides are visiting, through their verse and prose essays, the spaces of their childhood in different ways, and yet the linking of the imagination is made possible because of their radical understanding of petite bourgeoisie and working class politics. Both of them revel in the intuitive understanding of the cultural locations from which they have been forcibly removed in childhood, but to which they continually return as public figures who have been associated with the Arts and Humanities. Their continual travels are only to popularize their discipline.

In his poems, Ari Sitas catches the depth of the abyss, and makes it his own. As a migrant from Cyprus, the cadences of trains travelling, of the sound of waves become his very own. As travellers to Africa, a continent which they make their own, these people who offer the poet/protagonist their hospitality are much like him, occupying dusty shanty towns, where they give space to life, saying “my rags this side/ that side, thine” (Sitas 2013, 24).

This home-making is accompanied by such a dread and continual violence that the everyday becomes imbued by the sacralization of the image in the mirror, which mimics this very violence and shrouds it in the self made mask which greets the person of the poet. As he describes it in ‘Barbarism’, there are the subterranean memories, of exile and death of loved ones, and the giving up of God:

I lost you and your promise of paradise before my first dentures. . . . I lost you in the
din of the sound that sounded like our demented neighbour banging on his metal bath,
and I murmured, please, please, please let it be bath-bangs.
Later, I walked with cool brain past the venom people. (Sitas 2013, 34)

There is a terror of poverty, of shared childhoods, of the smell of occupational leavings, which subsist on the need to support a family, and becomes the lacquer of the corpse. Water does not cleanse it, nor does death, for the hacker of blubber the remembrance of cod fish sticks in the brain, like stains, which each stands for a memory. The assault of the reader’s senses in ‘Crooning’ is what Sitas looks for, the pain of passage, of desire and of the accompanying demonization as one seeks to escape (Sitas 2013, 25).

In *Slave Trades*, Ari describes the mutual conflagration, which is both memory and time, the genetic predisposition that migrants have to remember the past and their origins. His protagonist recalls the lewdness of the daily rape of his mother, who sees this as the cost of her religiosity, and the abandonment of all things familiar, with her husband’s death. Each cadaverous space is explored through a child’s remembrance of death, and the fleeing thereafter, the countries all listed as possibilities of escape, Ethiopia, and Natal being only abstract spaces in the itinerary. And yet, they arrive, and new histories are born.

For Ari Sitas, the Marxist, the marriage is a bourgeois union, and the woman the slave. The woman who escapes is by definition free, yet bound to her natal clan, and the steps she takes are imprinted in time. She will not be bought with silks, food, or the profits made from the sale of guns, but she will always look back, and remember. Each relationship then becomes a sacred covenant of love and longing, with the specialized skill of withdrawal and betrayal, where nothing promised, can bring the enchantment of the mutual gaze, which cannot atrophy, at least in memory: “Your obedience is final, total, bought” (Sitas 1999, 62). The accusation of clan loyalty is preceded only by the consent to mutual freedom.

In a memoir to Greeks, leaving their homes, and encountering Christian Ethiopians, Sitas, changing voices and genders, posing domination and enslavement in one narrative, cries for the past, hoping for new futures.

We shall go leave, we shall erase our stamen from history's favourite haunts and
colonise some territory that ploughs for the seeds of dreaming

and in the dark
if you are wading through a field
of decaying bird, a calcified eagle
and scattered feather remember
that some seeds turn nasty
but most turn the spine of a
navigating star (1999, 165)

Who is the slave, who is the master, and how does Africa prefigure in these journeys? Sitas has made his choices, and travels with his dream companions, writers of letters which they once thought private. And the morphology of the island always beckons, and in the mind, provides succor from fear, for the nostos, as in Stephanides's work, is the true memory for the lost. (1999, 157)

Both poets provide us a sense of succor by reminding us that memory is both lament and celebration. Like sleep, it heals, while we remain alert to the dangers of the future. The dream time of poetry is essentially its austere truth. Words provide Sitas the final balm, and through the voice of his protagonists, who, like the chorus, move from emotion to emotion, he continues his journey towards liberation:

The past was never beautiful
but through its knotted strings my ancestors
speak to me with apocryphal gestures
and languages you will never understand
and dances that would strain your gait
(1999, 167)(1999, 170)

But for the Cypriot, the sea is his/her mother, and welcomes his/her body, which like hundreds of others may have been shot by impending armies in which ever country they be in. (1999, 171)

In "Rhythmskewed", Sitas dredges his memory to remind himself of his childhood, where his sense of catapulting to words is so violent, that he knows how words formed and punctured his lungs, and ripped his gullet and intestines. (Sitas 2013, 24) He remembers his father, the food they ate, the early morning revels of fishermen gathering before dawn at seaside cafes. The Greek heroes rose out of the sea, and so also, the howls of women who had lost them to war. And the Cypriots exulted because they were not Greeks. This very carnal sense of being, of lust, death, war and loss all reverberate in the present, as Sitas shows us that the same Greeks are to be found in the streets of his present day hometown; they can be recognized as tellers of stories, poets, soldiers. (2013, 67)

Ari Sitas asks us, what are we, but the sum of our nightmares, how may we make sense of our childhoods which are torn from us by war, and we are expelled from the instinctual sorrows of our clan? For him this memory is embedded in his psyche, and it encapsulates what are centuries of wandering legends, the source of battle and migrations. Everything is familiar, because he has

been there before, and the sea crossings have brought blood and descent, war and fecundity, which remain imprinted in his psyche. He remembers how his clan members would face new warriors returning, and would quote Michaelides about the plough digging the earth, but becoming earth in time, destroyed by its own dredging. (Sitas 2018, 69) He might as well be, like Derek Walcott, recognizing the myriad colonialisms that beset the free, in the new countries of their choosing.

But we were orphans of the nineteenth century,/ Sedulous to the morals of a style,
We lived by another light,/ Victoria's orphans, /bats in the banyan boughs. (Walcott 1994, 219)

It is this treacherous colonialism, this palimpsest of cultures and memory that turn up at every point, the pain of which poetry submerges. It is in the acceptance of death as the natural end to life that nostalgia best serves, and all the sea crossings can only bring them back to the one place of anchor, which is Cyprus. So in their own way, Sitas and Stephanides, the Cypriot poets, who remember their childhood wherever they are, and the valour of their kin, bring back to us to the tumult of the present and the risks of surviving the past.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to juxtapose two poets who have received considerable attention in their location as university professionals who have contributed to the debates on nationhood and belonging to a cosmopolitan worldview. Their poetry is essentially directed to the intensity of their feelings about life experientially understood, where they are able to take on, and communicate the natural sense of belonging and living in the world. Ari Sitas comes across as someone with a strong political will, while Stephanos Stephanides is essentially more engaged with the description of both beauty and the incandescent nature of love and memory. If they have used the biographical contexts of their own intense experiences these have been strung in their verse like recurring mythemes. There is an intense sense of belonging to the here and now, risks which travellers continually take in order to always "return" home. This home of memory in Ari Sitas case is always fabricated because he has adapted to South Africa, which he then describes in terms of the complex history of local communities who have been extracted from their own homes and placed in exploitative situations. For Stephanides, the world and its opaque geographies are always domesticated by the love he feel for its physical attributes, while compounding the grandeur of his tactile relationship to the mother Goddess, which is a recurring theme. If the landscape has been devastated by occupation, and villages emptied, then for Stephanides, there will always be the overwhelming fear of the return to war, even if borders open up.

What monstrous figures lurk among the rubble?
Have they become too lazy and inert they cannot
Lift their weight? And why don't they just take off
And sail effortlessly across the plain and the sea
Letting both Minaret and Cypress to move heavenward
Fenced and yoked together in reconciliation by wire and
Petromin (2018, 302)

My intention in this paper was to juxtapose two poets who have taken on the responsibility of communicating through verse their intense love for Cyprus while remaining honour bound to their vocation as ethnographers and theoreticians. Their preoccupation with biography as a tool in explaining politics and war is essential for us to understand the ambiguities of our global condition. Through their verse they make impossible conditions of life and the dilemmas of survival just so much easier to bear.

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Documentary Films

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Notes

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