

BUFFER FRINGE PERFORMING ARTS FESTIVAL: CREATING AND CURATING BEYOND THE LIMINAL FRAGILITY OF BUFFER ZONES IN CYPRUS

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Abstract

The Buffer Fringe Performing Arts Festival was born out of the contested and fragile space in between border lines, the buffer zone in Nicosia, Cyprus. This paper will address the Festival's enactment of a new understanding of affective space that can enable resistance and co-creation beyond the liminality of a post-conflict buffer zone (in Nicosia and beyond) through the pandemic in 2020–2021, and 2022. As we will explore the Festival's role in creating dialogue between the space and narrative layers of melancholia and nostalgia beyond the rupture that the division has produced through collaborative and process-based approaches, we will unpack the role art and co-creation can play at a moment and a space of transition to produce alternative affective agency. Within an already contested geography, 2020 brought along the pandemic and the closure of crossing points in Cyprus which paused all planned activity and demonstrated the fragility of contact between communities and artists, whilst simultaneously producing new possibilities. Buffer Fringe 2020 was one of the few artistic platforms in Cyprus and globally to have adapted and materialized a hybrid festival, while also developing interdisciplinary and innovative methodologies. Encouraging a decolonizing agenda and embedding creativity into a social process, the paper also looks into the public space intervention in the recently opened part of Famagusta in 2021, consequently touching upon the collective curatorial approach

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of the Festival in 2022 as embodiments of a new understanding of space that can enable resistance and co-creation beyond liminal fragility.

Keywords: *post-conflict buffer zones, performing arts festival, liminal fragility, affective agency, pandemic, curation.*

Introduction

Since its establishment in 2014, the Buffer Fringe Performing Arts Festival laid the ground for a creative, critical, and performative space with consistent presence across the divide in Cyprus. In this paper, we will address the Festival's role in producing an alternative space generated by curation and creation beyond the liminality of a post-conflict buffer zone, through the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, as well as the recovery in 2022. Notwithstanding, the split created by the isolation caused by the pandemic, was a moment of questioning and perseverance, which produced different possibilities that are addressed in this paper. The Festival developed interdisciplinary and innovative methodologies which enabled exploring the relationship between arts, resistance, liminal fragility, and alternative affective agency by investing in collaborative, process-based approaches and alternative forms of curation and creation. Encouraging a decolonizing agenda, in this paper, we have explored the potential of a liminal time and space to become a ground in reimagining affective agency as a reflexive process through the Buffer Fringe Performing Arts Festivals of 2020–2021, and 2022.

Embedding creativity into a sociocultural process, how can we trace the relationship between liminality, affect, and alternative agency through a fringe festival that started from a post-conflict buffer zone? For this, in this paper we have first explored how a buffer zone gains an affective dimension through a festival. Following on, as one of the few artistic platforms in Cyprus and globally to have adapted and materialized a festival despite the Covid-19 pandemic, we have focused on how the festival responded to the pandemic. Consequently, the paper looks into how the performances from the 2020, 2021 festival iterations and the 2022 collective curatorial approach of the festival produce a space of resistance and co-creation beyond liminal fragility.

A Festival of Buffer Zones: Liminal Reimaginings

The buffer zone is the space between the two ceasefire lines in Cyprus, running through the island from east to west. The buffer zone was drawn (for the most part) in 1974. The part of the buffer zone referred to in this article is the area called *Ledra Palace*, which has been under UN control and marked with barricades and intercommunal fighting since the late 1950s. In contrast with most of the buffer

zones, Ledra Palace has been an active space from its birth to the present. With the once-grand Ledra Palace Hotel being used as a UN Exchange point and living quarters for the UN Peacekeeping force, the space has been used to exchange war prisoners and detainees throughout periods of violence and tension. In its more recent history, Ledra Palace was the first crossing point to have opened in 2003, giving access to the majority of the inhabitants of Cyprus to cross from one side to the other. The buffer zone is a function of the spatiality of the nation-state structure and the violent conflict that resulted in the island's division and cannot be separated from the mechanisms that resulted in its creation. However, it also does not belong to any side, community, or individual, rendering it an irregular and fluid space.

Taking on from Turner's conceptualizations on liminality, Bhabha [2004: 1–7] argues that the *beyond* is a contested and uncertain space, where people go against structures and hegemonies and act upon spaces where they negotiate different narratives and identities within the postcolonial condition. The Festival aimed to create a space *beyond* where artists and audiences could negotiate essentialist notions of identity, home and division that are part and parcel of the Cypriot postcolonial condition. Since 2019, the themes of the Festival questioned in-between spaces, displacement, and pockets (beyond) respectively. These themes have aimed to create an enunciative split *where contradictory discourses overlap and discrepant kinds of meaning-making converge* [Tsing 1994: 279]. Notwithstanding, it is not the buffer zone in itself that is a liminal space; rather, liminality becomes possible through contact, creative production, disruption, and questioning of divisive, monophonic, and dominant narratives and discourses that are produced from this transitional moment and space. In Rosaldo's terms [1993: 207–208], we conceptualize the buffer zone as a borderland, as a site of creative cultural production that requires investigation. Tracing this borderland as a liminal moment connects the traumatic ambivalences of personal, psychic history to the broader disjunctions of political and everyday existence that has divided Cyprus. For Edward Said [1993], a *contrapuntal crack*¹ emerges from the communities that question the normalized everyday understanding, and dominant, divisive narratives. Framing liminal rupture as a *contrapuntal crack*, we conceptualize affective agency as a cross-corporeal cohabitation that sutures the psychic and the discursive. This then allows interpreting the notes in-between different positionalities, melancholia and nostalgia, displacement, and unhomeliness through the performing arts Festival from a borderland.

¹ The term 'contrapuntal' has been coined by Edward W. Said [1993] in *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage. Said refers to things that cannot be reduced to homophony, focusing our attention on numerous identities, the polyphony of many voices that can be heard at the same time. A contrapuntal understanding has been useful for us to critically reflect on our positionality and consider self-reflexivity as a critical informative tool.

In the process of framing the space and context, the need has emerged to explore its narrative layers, including *trauma* and *melancholia*, which Khanna [2003] analyses in relation to the colonized nation/community rather than approaching it on an individual basis. According to Freudian theory, melancholia refers to the subject's inability to successfully assimilate loss; however, for Khanna, *colonial disavowal* also works as a form of melancholia for subjects of colonized states [2003: 167]. Traces of what could not be mourned following colonialism, according to Khanna [2003], can lead to a form of critical agency where the spectral emerges as affect addressing the incapacity to introject the obsolete ideal of nation-statehood in the postcolonial era. For Abraham and Torok in Khanna [2003], this incorporation can be glimpsed in language and transferred intergenerationally, finding embodiment at particular historical intersections stimulated by specific incidents through performative acts and narratives.

The buffer zone's irregularity and fluidity enable it to embody governmentality but also resistance through the insertion of activism, affect, and artistic creativity which becomes possible through programs such as the Buffer Fringe Festival that questioned division and aimed to decolonize narratives, histories, and stories.¹ As Berger [2003] also underlines, resistance is not just to reject political and ideological lies but instead, it is also to create awareness of these lies which can find embodiment via art. Exploring the matter of radical political agency through affect involves, as Hynes and Sharpe contend, *bodies and minds from the point of view of their capacities or powers... oriented not to what the mind and body should do, but to the always indeterminate question of what they can do* [Hynes and Sharpe 2009: 4].

The Festival enabled complex positionalities of curators and artists to engage with new creative frameworks. The opening of the Home for Cooperation in 2011 and the Buffer Fringe Festival in 2014, produced not only the possibility of a new space and institution emerging from the buffer zone, but the possibilities for arts funding to conduct an entirely new type of work: *arts for conflict transformation*, within the former zone of violent conflict. This included the institutional funding for the Home for Cooperation, which also partly funded the Festival, from the EEA Grants, powered by the governments of Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein², as well as international academic institutions and organizations that supported the artistic and educational work of the Festival. On this line, in this article by focusing on

¹ Relevant articles: Evangelou, E. (2018). 'Theatre Beyond Nationalism: Participatory Art in the Cyprus Buffer Zone' & Ioannidou, E., Christodoulou, V., & Evangelou, E. (2022). 'From ethnography to performance: transforming interview narratives into artistic performative acts – The project 'Greco' at the Buffer Fringe Performing Arts Festival'.

² Additional information can be found at: <https://eeagrants.org/archive/2014-2021/projects/CY-CIVILSOCIETYPDPs-0001>

several performances and processes from the 2020, 2021 and 2022 editions of the Buffer Fringe Festival, we explore the potential of the Festival to produce a space of affective agency and collective resistance that enabled artists, organizers and audiences to question and reimagine the past in a way that also makes peace with the present.

We start with the lecture performance *History Lesson*, by Argyro Nicolaou from the 2020 Festival. The Performance explored the relationship between historical memory and nostalgia, finding embodiment through the critical onlook of Cyprus-related films. The artist explored the affective relationship of the perception of identity through the nostalgia of the moving image, in relation to nationalist and post-colonial visual references. Following on, the performance we focus on from the 2021 Buffer Fringe, creates a crack through the politics of memory taking place in the forcefully abandoned town of Varosha following its opening to public visitors after 48 years. The *95 Stops*, tech-enabled performative promenade through the city, was an intersection between geography and memory, as it was based on testimonies, manifesting a system of power relations and political violence that stem from, but extend beyond Varosha. Time and place are negotiated through the performance, creating a crack that strikes through memory and experience for the participant, creating the possibility for the present to intrude into the past. Finally, through the 2022 edition of the Festival, it seems that the process to turn the festival into an *an artist-based conflict transformation festival* as suggested by Perlman and Moiseos [2023], was completed, with the introduction of collaborative practices in the heart of the organization of the festival itself, thus extending the possibilities of festival-making.

Before 2003, there was no possibility that the authors of this paper could meet in Cyprus, as one of them comes from the southern part of the green line and the other from the northern part of the green line. The opening of the crossings was a moment of joy, surprise, and questioning. As we returned to Cyprus after studies abroad, it was not the fetish of a liberating, utopian buffer zone that pulled us to co-create from this space. Still, it was the need for a critical stance not only to question political violence, dispossession and the effects of imperial politics but also to explore our own relationship with these power dynamics that we have been raised with. This in-between or beyond space to question, co-create, sustain solidarity and decolonize brings about a *contrapuntal awareness* in Edward Said's terms [1993], almost like a double vision to also make peace with what we have inherited as post memories. It answers where you start decolonizing the past, present, and future. It is our intertwined and, at the same time disjunctive stories and perspectives through our utterances of checkpoint or border, Famagusta, Varosia or Varosha, that a liminal rupture becomes possible.

As one feels that the standing ground is not the home to which one can ever return or fully occupy while still feeling deeply for it, a constant mode of questioning and a sense of insecurity about one's relationship to place and memory, to past and present can be generated. Bhabha [1994] puts out the concept of *unhomely* by alluding to various works of postcolonial literature that critically approach the idea of a true and stable *home*. According to Bhabha [1994], the space between the *heimlich* (homely) and the *unheimlich* (unhomely) is a postcolonial space in which one can understand how a person's identity is a combination of what is alien and familiar. This concept is similar to Freud's approach as, according to Freud [1919 [2001]], an uncanny moment is produced when the subconscious slips into the conscious. The same thing happens when the outside world penetrates the *home* and disrupts an identity perceived as stable. Alienation can be an excruciating pain as it is not familiar. However, according to Bhabha [1994], the alienation that individual experiences during the *unhomely* moment may also provide an opportunity to rethink one's identity. Through our layered positionality as artists, academics and curators, Greek-speaking and Turkish-speaking Cypriots, living and approaching the buffer zone from its opposite sides, we have tried to further unfold the *unhomeliness* of our positionalities, the festival, and the performances to explore their connection with a past in conflict, a divided present and alternative affective agency.

Framing the Context

Understanding the micro space of the Buffer Zone in Cyprus also requires understanding the sociocultural context and history it is located in. The island, resting in the very east of the Mediterranean seas, was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1571–1878 and served as a bridge from the administrative centre (Constantinople/Istanbul) to the Middle East and North Africa. With the transition from Ottoman rule to British colonial rule starting in 1878, Cyprus and its largely uneducated (mostly) rural population was governed as a British colony and exploited for its natural resources. In the rural and urban communities, Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Maronites, Armenians, Jews, and other ethnic and religious groups lived in both mixed and homogeneous communities.

Through the British colonial period, several critical socio-cultural changes emerged; among them was the rise of nationalism in various population groups, with the transposition of religious affiliation to national affiliation, with Orthodox Christians and Muslims becoming Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots. As British colonial rule in Cyprus neared its end in the 1950s, Greek and Turkish Cypriots were already split. From 1955, with its official beginning, the Greek-Cypriot military group EOKA employed guerrilla warfare in its anti-colonial agenda, which included the central claim for the unification of Cyprus with Greece (*enosis*), while the

Turkish-Cypriots, and their armed group, TMT, advocating for *taksim*, or division, as a means of opposition to Greek-Cypriots.¹

Despite internal tensions, the Republic of Cyprus was established in 1960, unifying Turkish and Greek Cypriots under a single sovereign entity. Tensions between the two groups began early, resulting in the 'Turkish Cypriots' withdrawal from the government in 1963, the creation of Turkish-Cypriot enclaves and the sporadic-yet-consistent violence between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, until 1974, a landmark year in its recent history. The events of this year culminated in the emergence of the present status quo, with the separation of the island into two parts and the segregation of its population. A military coup incited by the Greek junta on July 15 created chaos on the island, with the ensuing armed invasion² of Turkish troops (starting on July 20 and continuing throughout August 1974) splitting the island in two. Once a ceasefire was agreed, the line dividing the island included the capital Nicosia from east to west. According to Zetter [1994], 180,000 Greek Cypriots had to move to the southern part of the Green Line, whereas according to Ozersay and Gurel [2006], 65,000 Turkish Cypriots were displaced to the northern part of the Green Line. Conversely, migration of *agricultural labour* from Turkey to Northern Cyprus was encouraged, with initiatives fostering Turkish migration to the island continuing from 1975 until 1979. Villages that had sought internal migration within Turkey, primarily owing to socioeconomic and environmental issues, were forced to relocate to north Cyprus and were reinstated in housing and lands left by displaced Greek Cypriots. Despite continued talks at the political level from the late 1970s onwards, the two sides developed and nurtured separate narratives of identity and remembering, using the division as a political tool to this end. The crossing points that had been closed since 1974 reopened in 2003, with Ledra Palace opening first and six more following since then. Many Cypriots returned to visit their homes, and many crossed to see how the 'other' side of their country looked after 30 years of segregation. Currently, 20 years after the opening, the ceasefire conditions continue with no significant steps in the resolution process.

According to Green [2010], unresolved political border concerns can cause individuals to feel as if their daily lives have come to a halt until the issue is solved,

¹ The relationship between Cyprus with Greece and Turkey, as well as the development of nationalism, is analyzed in the following book: Aktar, A., Kizilyürek, N., and Özkirimli, U. (2010). *Nationalism in the troubled triangle: Cyprus, Greece and Turkey*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

² Discourses about the military operation in 1974 vary depending on the actors. A comprehensive analysis can be found in the chapter entitled "A Critical Comparison of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot Official Historiographies (1940s to the Present)", by Mete Hatay and Yiannis Papadakis, in the edited volume: Bryant, R., and Papadakis, Y. (2012). *Cyprus and the politics of memory: History, community and Conflict*. London: I.b.tauris.

which becomes a defining feature of their everyday life. Reflecting on the situation in Cyprus, with the permanent impermanence of the Buffer Zone, Bryant states:

The limen in “liminality” is considered as a threshold, and to be at the limen refers to being caught in between one state of being and another, having permanent liminal status refers to the state of being stuck between the political form the entity once was and the recognized body politic it wishes to become [2014: 126].

Reflecting on the situation in Cyprus, with the permanent impermanence of the buffer zone, Bryant [2014: 133] continues to state that, *if liminality is a transition stage, it is unknown what stage will follow that*. This makes liminality appear indefinite, the future uncertain. Memory in Cyprus, just like many other spaces, has been politicized as a wound, embodied in the rupture of division and in personal suffering. Rebecca Bryant [2012: 340] contends that when the future emerges as a threshold of anticipation, past wounds come to allude to both a predicted violence and to a moment when the wounds would be healed. In this sense, former suffering is part of the present, not to mourn the dead or leave the past behind but to settle histories still disputed. As a consequence, while the border harbouring the *other* was disrupted by the opening of crossing points in 2003, the border as a construct of suffering remained stable. As a result, Bryant [2012: 358] proposes seeing the *wound* on the body politic as a *threshold of anticipation*, pointing to both a former cause of pain and a future *healing* which should first restructure the present. The present, on the other hand, remains liminal. Therefore, in perspective, we might infer that creating peace necessitates a political resolution but most importantly a significant restructuring of the present.

A Festival of Innovation

The year 2019, constitutes the beginning of a circle of investigation and thought around the buffer zone as a space and its contentedness, as that emerged through the themes selected and implemented in the work of the Festival. The 2019 festival, curated for the first time by dramaturge and scholar Ellada Evangelou, proposed through the theme of *Defining the Buffer Zone* to stimulate processes of decolonization of the space by inviting artists to respond to this question, as per Spivak’s famous words, to allow *the Subaltern to speak* [1988: 271]. For the first time in decades, artists from Cyprus and across the world were asked to define the space in-between. The concept of the Buffer Fringe 2020 and 2021, shifted to the experience of mobility, local and international, and it was encapsulated in one word: *Displacement*. In a series of questions that served to open up the conversation, the Festival artists responded to how they understood mobility *as an experience of people, ideas, and practices, in their own reality or that of others?* [Home for Cooperation

website 2020]. The theme was decided before the beginning of the pandemic, but it found (and in a way, extended) its meaning throughout the 2020 and 2021 iterations of the Festival. The concept, as it was first developed pre-COVID, considered Cyprus as a geographical and socio-political space, which was for an entire century framed by histories of violence, colonial dispossession, and imperial politics where the mourning of displacement and dispossession can be traced across generations. As the globe moved into lockdowns and isolation, the buffer zone manifested itself through a new fragility, as the crossing points closed even earlier than airports, including the crossing point of Ledra Palace where the Home for Cooperation sits and where the Festival takes place (for the most part).

In that sense, *Displacement* as the theme of a fringe festival that stems out of a fragile border area certainly carried deeper meanings and outcomes as the healing and resisting power of artistic expression created a discontinuous crack to explore the role of memory, remembering, and nostalgia. In this context, liminal fragility led to a disruption, a crack in our understanding of time and space. In this context, going ahead with the festival meant actively resisting notions of liminality as those were formulated during the period of segregation, but also during the 2004–2020 period of contact, whereby the liminal space of the buffer zone is ruptured. New methodologies and interdisciplinary tools explore the relationship between arts and alternative agency and propose new ruptures through acts of redefining affect through solidarity and collaboration. The remaining paper explores how this process took place during 2020 and 2021, and, even post-pandemic, through the 2022 festival.

The concept of festivals as liminal, transitory spaces and experiences has been widely explored by Turner [1969, 1974, 1982]. For Turner [1982], through a festival, individuals can create or be part of a space where they can disengage from the norms of society and their everyday identities. Buffer Fringe Festival's audience throughout the three editions reflected a community that came together through ideological and artistic motivation. The Festival mainly attracted local and glocal communities from both sides of the divide who identify as Cypriots and question the divisive, dominant political discourses and narratives as well as international artists, researchers and like-minded individuals. Turner [1974] proposes three distinct forms of *communitas* related to liminality: *spontaneous, ideological, and normative*. The concept of *ideological communitas* addresses collective perspectives and ideas that breakdown conventional social narratives and structures that can give rise to alternative perspectives. In this sense, we can posit that the Festival has created an *ideological communitas* which provided its audiences with a platform to question, express and resist the current political stalemate and division in Cyprus. This transcends the peripheral and transitory narratives and embodies a more enduring and profound connection based on mutual values.

The theme for Buffer Fringe 2022 was *Pockets (beyond)*, which aimed to spark a discussion on who is visible or invisible and why. This theme explored differences of identity, past and present, inclusion and exclusion, transferring agency back to the marginalized and forgotten individuals. As the open call suggested,

The pocket in question is a pocket of resistance against the inhumanity of the new world order and a place where we keep things we need or love: pockets contain and hide things, yet they also keep them close to us. What pockets contain may also be traces and remnants of the past that stay alive in the stitches that keep the pocket together. In that sense, a pocket may look like a blind spot but blind spots resist the logic of the main frame and go beyond expected ways of seeing [Home for Cooperation website 2022].

Beyond implied a disruptive movement, a different direction, it promised the future while acknowledging a sense of disorientation brought by the precarity of our times. It aimed to explore whether a pocket could be an alternative space for living and creating. The inquiry delved into identifying and examining our blind spots and questioning dominant notions of culture, race, sexuality, as well as environmental and human crises through the lens of art. The goal was also to encourage an exploration of the intersection of everyday life and art and empower artists to challenge, and puncture established power structures. Ultimately, this process aimed to highlight the agency we have as individuals and as a collective to pose these crucial questions.

Displacement During the Pandemic-2020

Following a period of complete lockdown with discussions on whether the 2020 Festival could take place and how, the Artistic Director and the Festival team proposed three new principles that would make collective creation possible, which were the process and collaboration-based methodologies and the *Thinking Partners program*. The process-based methodology meant that the festival would not only host the work of the artists if/when that would be possible in a physical space, but it would also showcase their creative process. Artists and artist groups shared their weekly updates presenting their work which were then shared through the Festival blog and social media. For the *Thinking Partners program*, the Festival partnered with IMPACT (Imagining Together Platform for Arts, Culture and Conflict Transformation) of Brandeis University to provide participating artists with a *Thinking Partner*, a person who would work closely with the artists, to advise them and support them throughout their creative process. The program's engagement with a thinking partner was based on the idea that oftentimes, *we need another brain to think together with* [Buffer Fringe website 2022].

The Thinking Partners (TPs) initiative connected people from various regions and fields of knowledge with artists and artist teams to work together. Throughout the preparation process for the performances, the TPs maintained close contact with the artists to foster critical dialogues about the creative practice and the *arts for conflict transformation field* in general. The Buffer Fringe's local artist and cultural networks, as well as IMPACT's global connections to arts practitioners, researchers, and culture workers active in the arts for conflict transformation field, were used to find TPs. As a result, the TPs came from all over the world, including Cyprus, Argentina, Serbia, Netherlands, and others. The project aimed to invest in artists and the rigor of the creative process it supported to contribute to the creation of an artist development plan that may be duplicated in the arts for conflict transformation sphere.

Buffer Fringe Festival 2020 was one of the few festivals that decided to produce a *hybrid festival model*. These included primarily *live* performances in Cyprus, such as performances and installations in Cyprus with in-person audiences when feasible despite pandemic limitations. The activities were live-streamed online via the Buffer Fringe Facebook page and website, as well as through other virtual platforms of groups collaborating with the 2020 Festival. The entire Festival included 28 local and international artists, with nine performances, two installation pieces, two virtual discussions, and one online international academic conference. Four of the nine performances were presented live in front of an audience in Cyprus, while the others were live-streamed in Cyprus and two in New York from the Gallatin Galleries at NYU.¹

According to Perlman and Moiseos [2023], the Buffer Fringe Festival is one of the most prominent initiatives of the Home for Cooperation, which explicitly promotes a multi-communal agenda and is associated with the pro-reunification and bi-communal Cypriot civil society and the diplomatic community. On the other hand, the Buffer Fringe Festival 2020 conveyed an alternative set of sensibilities in its approach to facing and trying to transform the Cyprus conflict, with its questioning approach to conventional bi-communal practices and its very intentional decision to select displacement as the festival's theme. For Pearlman and Moiseos [2023], instead of providing a solution, the Buffer Fringe Festival 2020 utilized the space created by the festival to question the conflict and division to develop a more thorough and critical comprehension of it by choosing performances that attempt to comprehend the historical roots of conflict and division. Although the term *problematization* is commonly used in other contexts, such as critical thinking and pedagogical dialogue in educational circles and social science studies, for Pearlman and Moiseos [2023], BFF 2020's approach could also be described as *problematizing the conflict* in the

¹ More information can be found on the NYU Gallatin Galleries website.

framework of arts, culture, and transformation of conflict. Buffer Fringe 2020 evoked feelings and honest exploration where repeated traumas and ongoing oppressions have resulted in numbness and silencing; it nourished capacities to embrace the paradox and ambiguity that characterize complexity.

In this part, through tracing one of the 2020 performances, we will attempt to connect the traumatic ambivalences of personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of the colonial and political context. *History Lesson* by Argyro Nicolaou was an interdisciplinary performance that took place in 2020. As Nicolaou could not come to Cyprus from New York due to the pandemic, she performed at the Gallatin Galleries, and her performance was live-streamed. The performance took place as a lecture and, in Nicolaou's terms, explored *the intergenerational effects of internal displacement and the inchoate histories they produce* [Home for Cooperation website 2020]. The performance used films shot in Cyprus before 1974 which are not commonly known in Cyprus for being shot in Cyprus, like *Exodus* (1960, starring Paul Newman), *Sin* (1971, starring Rachel Welch), and *Ghost in the Noonday Sun* (1974). Nicolaou underlined in the description of her performance that she utilized these films *to learn about the other side*, patching in the blanks that followed her refugee mother's past by developing an alternative history course of Cyprus. Through the performance, Nicolaou questioned mainstream conceptions of Cypriot history moulded by the country's colonial past, inviting students to question what concepts such as *Island, Anatolia, natives, and settlers* mean, which are still crucial debates for the communities of Cyprus. She invited the audience for a *historical un-looking* through moments that created a blank hole in the history of the island and our memory.

As Nicolaou questioned the colonial past of the island as the history teacher, the authority figure who talks to her students, displaced histories found embodiment in the slippery delay between the sound and the vision of her performance as technical issues faced in New York and Nicosia led to gaps and delays between the sound and the vision of her performance. In Homi Bhabha's [1994: 36] terms, we want to question whether this slippery delay can be perceived as an *enunciative split* that enables the cultural analysis of any narrative via a temporal discontinuity. Considering this slippery ground as an *enunciative split* would, in turn, allow us to question the relationship between alternative affective agency and what nationalist politics and mechanisms of remembering and forgetting have obscured. As Nicolaou shares her process of creating an alternative history class, she notes:

We acknowledge that these foreign images carry the stain and legacy of colonialism (including the well-rehearsed tropes of Orientalism) but we are adamant that they are also invaluable sources and tools, bearing in mind how little we know, and how little we have at our disposal. Why should we not re-appropriate

these images, re-claim them, use them against their original intentions of painting a false picture of the island, and instead put them to use in crafting a history lesson that seeks truth in art and distances itself from the facts of ethnonationalism?
[Home for Cooperation website 2020]

Expanding on Butler's theory on gender melancholia, focusing on Nicosia Navaro Yashin [2012] argues that when the person who has been lost is the one who belongs to the community of the so-called enemy, the loss is not symbolized as a loss and therefore is not grieved generating melancholia, a psychical subjective state in which the object of loss is mainly unconscious to the identity of the mourner as the loss lingers on. For Svetlana Boym [2001], nostalgia is a characteristic of modern time, a historical affect as it is more than just local longing but the outcome of a new perception of time and place that separates local from universal. For Boym, there are two sorts of nostalgia: restorative and reflective. Restorative nostalgia emphasizes *nóstos* (home) and strives to restore the lost home over time. Reflective nostalgia treasures broken memories while devaluing space. It demonstrates that longing and critical thinking are not mutually exclusive and that affective memories do not relieve one of empathy, judgement, or critical thinking. According to Boym [2001], reflective nostalgia has elements of grief and melancholia. While the loss is not fully understood, it is associated with the loss of collective frameworks of memory, which results in a deep mourning that works via pain reflection towards the future. In that sense, by focusing on the connection between the performance and its relation to collective memory, can we question whether post-conflict melancholia is leaving itself to reflective nostalgia? When historical memory gets enmeshed with nostalgia and finds embodiment through art, it seems to create a space to mourn over what the politics of nationalism has concealed, which in societies like Cyprus, could help face a past that has not been really pondered upon and generate alternative affective agency.

Unpacking Displacement from a Town in Ruins-2021

The Festival was held amid the global health crisis for a second year in 2021, attracting 59 artists from twelve countries with 16 performances and events over three full days, powered by 22 collaborations with local and international organizations. In cooperation with The Festival Academy and supported by the IMPACT (Platform for Arts, Culture, and Conflict Transformation), Buffer Fringe 2021 hosted a Hybrid Forum on Festivals and creative events and performances. During the Forum, festival practitioners, stakeholders in the performing arts, and artists worldwide discussed the role of festivals and creativity in conflict transformation. These approaches were critical in allowing creatives to analyze their experiences on their terms and in their own time during such a fragile period as the pandemic.

The performance we have focused on in this part of the article is *95 Stops+*. Buffer Fringe's collaboration with artists from Limassol and Famagusta (two cities that have a high number of displaced people) began in 2020 with Elena Agathokleous from MITOS Center for Performing Arts and Nurtane Karagil, a Famagusta-based artist using an arcade that has been renovated by the artist community around it namely Magusa Kale Pasaji, a community space in the medieval city of Famagusta. Through the performance, the concept of displacement was intended to be transformed from a negative to a positive connotation, and it was thus treated as humans' ability to communicate ideas that are remote in time and space, as a new opportunity to discover a new dynamic such as the possibility of feeling connected and at home.

In 2020, Elena designed a virtual map with 95 spots worth stopping-feeling-listening-learning-hearing in along the 95 km distance between Limassol and Famagusta. In 2021, the collaboration grew to include Famagusta New Museum [FNM]. Founded in 2016 by Yiannis Toumazis, FNM is an active platform that strives to reactivate the abandoned city of Varosha in the social, cultural, and political fields through its programs and events. FNM's motto is *I Understand and Forgive the Past; I Love and Generate the Future* [FNM website]. The organization aspires to awaken citizens by facilitating public conversation and developing artistic participation and activist interventions. Varosha, once a prosperous resort town in Cyprus, was fenced off after its 30,000 Greek-Cypriot inhabitants had to leave within a few days following the Turkish army's dominance over the area in August of 1974. The UN Security Council in 1984 declared that any settlement effort in Varosha by people other than its rightful inhabitants would be illegal. The town's future was placed on the negotiating table early in the talks to solve the Cyprus conflict, giving its displaced residents the idea that they would return to their homes. The town was partially opened to the public on October 8, 2020, after it had been under Turkish military rule, with substantial parts locked off since August 1974. As dark tourism took off, the town became a photo shoot background for new visitors, whereas, for the old inhabitants, memories of the past resurged.

The performance in the context of Buffer Fringe 2021 consisted of an audio walk where artists Nurtane Karagil and Yiannis Toumazis aimed to launch a sensory experience through a geolocated sound map via the ECHOES application in Varosha. The team created a geolocated audio tour through the sound map that serves as a self-guided tour that guides the listener to walk around different parts of Varosha by listening to the memories of Yiannis, who was forced to leave his home in Varosha in 1974. The sound map materialized in an artistic intervention on the second day of the Buffer Fringe Festival in 2021 as the Festival audience walked across Varosha guided by the team and the map. Through this intervention, the audience was invited

to re-imagine and reconnect the town in ruins with its stories and memories that transform the remaining ruins into a town that once belonged to people. For Svetlana Boym [2017], ruins compel us to think about the past that could have taken place and a future that may have eventuated.

The walk starts with Toumazis clarifying that they used to call the town Famagusta or Varosi and continues with his school: Saint John Elementary School. The audience reimagines the school, the municipal café, Demokratias Avenue, and the Kypseli Pastry shop through Toumazis' 14-year-old eyes. He recalls every detail: who lived where, where to obtain the best spinach pie, and which store sold what. His memories reactivate the space, and the walk reconnects him to his childhood. He continues,

*We can not visit my house, but we can see it from the wall... I remember the private diary that I was hiding behind my books... I was writing some very personal stuff in there. Hopefully, it was burnt during a bombardment or something...*¹ [95+ Stops ECHOES App].

Through the walk, Toumazis is transported back to his childhood and adolescence, and memories of that period surface. For Boym [2001], nostalgia was privatized and internalized throughout the twentieth century, shifting yearning for home into longing for one's youth. As one feels that the standing ground is not the home to which one can ever return while still feeling deeply for it, a constant mode of questioning can lead to an alternative layering of narratives. Nostalgia for Boym [2001] is a yearning for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. While the actual trauma is never fully recollected, it appears that the element of nostalgia in the process of remembering results in the unhomey rupturing of the present. When sharing her feelings about the creative process, Nurtane, who grew up on the outskirts of Famagusta, wrote 'how fascinating is the concept of *Don't forget / Δεν ξεχνώ* is in the south, engraved in every school text-book of our childhood, and how it contrasts with the welcoming sign in the northern checkpoints: "The Turkish Republic of Cyprus FOREVER," as if the two sides play these memory games – is it a curse never to forget or the curse is to forget forever?' [FNM website]. The following quote connects the past with the present in a rather unsettling manner for the narrator:

¹ His narrative continues: "I remember we were at the orange grounds in Ayios Memnon, where my grandfather had his orange grove and house... We were all digging holes in the dirt to be protected from huge bombs. First, we saw two white spots in the air; then you heard a terrible aircraft noise and the explosions from the bombs... I remember the worms crawling on my hands because we were digging in the ground, and I remember thinking oh, this is how it feels when human corpses decay because of the worms that eat them."

This shop was selling the latest sound equipment at the time. I remember the apricot cake; it was amazing... Here we bought all our English books... Republic Avenue, or Democracy Avenue, was the most commercial street, with galleries, cinemas, and shops... It is also a very important spot here for me because after Famagusta opened and when I came here, I saw one of the most dreadful images... I saw a newlywed couple, probably from Turkey, taking their wedding photographs in front of my uncle's looted house. I felt really ashamed of that... [ECHOES App].

How can we make sense of couples and young people who come to the town in ruins for photoshoots? One may argue that it is tied to ignorance, apathy, and memory politics, which legitimizes the presence of the de-facto state in the north. Yet, could it have a more profound, visceral link with the aspiration of being a member of the global world, the perceived lack of agency due to political non-recognition for the communities who live in Northern Cyprus, as Hatay and Bryant [2021] argue, the colonial past, and the ideals of modernity? During an interview, Melek, who had her wedding photographs taken in Varosha, suggested:

I used to hear about Varosha from my grandparents all the time. I live in a village about 20 minutes from the area, so we always went near to catch a glimpse. There are many stories about how the town was the richest in the Mediterranean, with the first 7-star hotel and many famous actors and actresses having houses and partying there. Now that we can walk around the town more easily, we went to take a couple of wedding pictures there; it is interesting to live close to a place that was once the center of the world.¹

By being photographed at a place once acknowledged and appreciated by the world, could the individual feel to have agency in the world that political non-recognition denies? According to Yael Navaro [2012], Turkish Cypriots gained a newly discovered middle-class position after 1974 by acquiring homes and belongings left behind by the displaced communities and access to public employment and education opportunities in Turkey. As a result, Varosha became an almost legendary town associated with wealth, modernity, and progress in this newly established polity. Kemal, who is now in his 80s, explained:

I used to work in Varosha at a hotel construction in 1974, one day my boss asked me to go close to him and whispered not to come to work tomorrow because they would close the barricades and I would not be able to go back; I tried to protest, but he did not allow protesting, he dropped me with his car that night to a safe region. It was indeed true; the subsequent day, attacks started again. Apart from

¹ From face-to-face interview part of Nihal Soganci's doctoral research – May 2022.

*working, I had only visited Maraş (Varosha) once with my family to have ice cream on the beach; those places (referring to Varosha) were for the rich and tourists.*¹

Stoler [2013] concentrates on the remnants or vestiges of violence in their physical and material manifestations (such as ruins) and their lasting, structural, and political forms (as in postcolonial states). In that sense, could we consider these photoshoots part and parcel of the postcolonial condition following the failed *independence* that buries the imprints of colonial violence and ideals? Stoler [2013: 2] focuses on how an empire's ruins shape and cut through the emotional and physical space in which people live and what compounded layers of imperial detritus do to them. Ruins are, therefore, both things (actual material artifacts that can be identified as the detritus of empire) and metaphors (indicating colonialism's continuous impact) [Stoler 2013: 11]. Could we then, through these narratives, catch a glimpse of the intergenerational transmission of trauma and traces of colonialism and violence, as well as economic disparities that divide the communities in the first place? The unhomely moments through these performances connect the traumatic ambivalences of personal, psychic history to the broader disjunctions of political and everyday existence. Hence, it enables us to explore culture, power, political violence, and imperial amnesia as processes through which we can explore how they carve through the psychic and material space. Through this performance and interviews, we witness not just Toumazis' personal stories but also a system of power relations and political violence that extends beyond Varosha. The performance brings together layers of political, corporeal, and affective components showing us the interstices between unhomeliness and up-rootedness as implicated in affective forms. The cracks that strike through the memories form a disjunctive temporality to glimpse how the past intrudes into the present through different forms and stories.

Pockets (Beyond) and Collective Curation in 2022

The post-pandemic era demanded revisiting the curatorial model. Mainly because the insularity that the pandemic editions demanded became overbearing. Therefore, the decision was taken to embrace the social and collective responsibility to change, engage, and share – which was felt strongly from the vulnerable place of the buffer zone. As mentioned in the Manifesto, published in the Spring of 2022, together with the new theme of the Festival,

In 2022, our vision embraces a cross-cultural / cross-disciplinary / cross-generational approach, and we continue to encourage a decolonizing agenda. We are particularly

¹ From face-to-face interview part of Nihal Soganci's doctoral research – April 2019.

concerned with the role the arts can play in addressing the fault lines of post-conflict societies. These fault lines can become hubs for activist interventions to deconstruct and decolonize the dominant divisive narratives locally and internationally. A space for sustainable solidarity. Participating in global conversations aiming to create an interdisciplinary and collaborative festival, we emerge from the Buffer Zone of Nicosia (..) [Buffer Fringe website, 2022].

The manifesto concludes by introducing the new model of creative support and curation of the festival, a system whereby multiple agencies lie at the heart of the preparation of the festival, with a team of curators and a creative coordination and consultation team. Overall leadership and coordination were carried out by Nihal Soganci and Ellada Evangelou, who were joined by five curators and the Thinking Partners team from the International Community Arts Festival of Rotterdam (ICAF). The Thinking Partners practice was reimagined as a series of group discussions between the ICAF collaborators, the BF creative team, and the five curators/three curatorial teams. The series of online discussions allowed for collective exploration of curatorial motifs, engagement with audience reception and conflict transformation in relevance with the Festival theme. The curators included Lebanese director/performer/peacebuilder Raffi Feghali, who curated the festival's first day (Friday, October 7) at *Rustem*, a colonial-era Bookstore in north Nicosia. Feghali reflected poignantly on identity and belonging in the context of history and culture and how these sentiments translate into a narrative. The second day of the festival (Saturday, October 8) was curated by a team of three; Australian Cypriot author/dramaturg Kat Kats, Australian performance director Bryce Ives, and Cypriot theatre director Maria Varnakkidou. The team's curation revolved around the creation of a queered space that expanded the agency and ability of the individual and in doing so, the community while at the same time deconstructing the black box, which was the performance space at Theatropolis in south Nicosia.

Cypriot art historian Derya Ulubatli curated the third day of the festival. Her curation of the space of Ledra Palace buffer zone and the area around the Home for Cooperation was heavily informed by the work of German philosopher Edmund Husserl and his theory of *otherness* resulting from intersubjectivity rather than isolated subjects. Ulubatli's curatorial vision sought to build a space where we can embrace all diversities and where various agents can live and produce together beyond all *identities*. In this final section of the paper, instead of exploring an artwork, we will speak about the curatorial model itself. We will focus on exploring how the politics of curation, a practice with an embedded hegemony based on the imposition of a (usually singular white and male) perspective, was deconstructed through a polyphony and a series of dialogic processes.

The decision on the names of the curators was taken by the creative team, based on several factors, first and foremost considering the relationship built and maintained with artists and cultural agents over the years, as well as artistic merit and ethical alignment. Therefore, the proposal to Raffi Feghali (Buffer Fringe artist, 2019), Kat Kats and Bryce Ives (Buffer Fringe Artists, 2020), and Maria Varnakkidou (Buffer Fringe Creative Team 2020 and 2021) were based on these criteria. In the case of Derya Ulubatli, the Festival team had approached her for a collaboration in 2021, and she was unable to work with the Festival due to other engagements.¹ She had, however, expressed her desire to collaborate with the Buffer Fringe. A publication she issued in 2022 on Art in Cyprus,² reignited the interest of the creative team for Ms. Ulubatli.

Starting in March 2022, the Creative Team and group of curators started to build a system of communication around working together, based on several elements: creating and sharing the timeline of the festival; having regular individual and group meetings; engaging the curators with decisions on a variety of issues, artistic and technical; framing the Thinking Partners program as a support program for the Curatorial model. In regards to the points above, we will explore two aspects of the collaboration further. The first is the involvement of the curators in the selection of venues, and the second is the recalibration of the Thinking Partners program to support the curatorial model. The selection of venues is a process that started early on in the process of organizing the festival. Venues in the south of Nicosia (TheatroPolis) and north of Nicosia (Rustem Bookstore) were secured, and the area of the Buffer Zone around the Home for Cooperation was negotiated (in terms of its use) with the UNFICYP, who is the custodian of the space.

The coordinators visited the spaces with the curators, either live or virtually through video calls. The process that led to the decision-making was organic and depended on how curators experienced the space. The first decision was taken by Raffi Feghali, who upon visiting Rustem, expressed a strong affiliation with the space: as a Lebanese of mixed Maronite and Armenian background, curating in a Turkish and English language bookstore with colonial heritage, the overlapping narratives

¹ The contribution of Ms Ulubatli to the Festival, as a young curator coming from what politically and historically is termed as 'minority', was also seen as a continuation of the discussions taking place within scholarly and artistic circles in the Turkish Cypriot community. A reflection on the topic can be found in the following publication: Bardak, Plumer, E. (2021). From Narration to Dialogue? Thinking about the Way We Talk about Contemporary Visual Art in the Turkish Cypriot Community. In: *Contemporary Art from Cyprus: Politics, Identities, and Cultures across Borders*. Ed. Stylianos, E., Tselika, E., and Koureas, G. London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, pp. 37–52. Bloomsbury Collections.

² Birey, T., & Ulubatli, D. (2021) *Being and Understanding the Other: A Brief Look at the 21st Century Cypriot Art*. European Mediterranean Art Association: Art for All Publications.

of oppression emerged as a strong counter to the creativity which a performing arts festival can insert in a space. This was also the line of his curatorial choices, with works that spanned from a poetic musical duo of Greek narrative and song, a queer Arab performance artist, an anti-war dance love story between two men, and a musical performance of a themed album, presenting an imaginary alternative reality by a Turkish Cypriot artist collective. The choice of venue by the curatorial team of Kat Kats, Maria Varnakkidou, and Bryce Ives was dictated by an effort to deconstruct and transfer the experience of the Cypriot diaspora to the Festival.

All three curators shared an understanding of the experience of belonging to the diaspora: Kat Kats, a second generation Australian-Cypriot, and her partner Bryce Ives, heavily influenced by the experience in his own artistic practice, and Maria Varnakkidou with a migrant family background. The deconstruction of the space, therefore, manifested itself in the intention to, firstly *queer* the space through a proposition of performances which break from the gender-conformist mainstream. also deconstructing the space of the venue, allowing performances to happen in different ways and places. The resulting program in the venue started outside the space and included a performance by a choir, a queer artist, a tech-based performance and a musical dance piece. The audience was asked to move, look up, sit down, and dance throughout the night, challenging the conventions of the classic blackbox.

The choice of Derya Ulubatli to curate the space of the Buffer Zone also came with a strong personal inclination towards installation or site-specific work. The curator, with an arts and research background on Cyprus, and an understanding of the possibilities of positioning art in a/the space, selected the space of the Buffer Zone and the Home for Cooperation. Derya aimed to place within the buffer zone, a diversity of narratives, engaging artists and audiences in dialogue and exchange. Therefore, the selected artworks were all visible and in dialogue with the space, with two installations by Cyprus-based artists in the Moat area and three performances in an outdoor stage area, in constant dialogue with the leisure area and the street/crossing area itself.

Related to the choice of venue and other crucial decisions in the curation of the overall festival, including how the creative team would work together, the Thinking Partners program created a dialogue-based support structure. Through a series of virtual meetings, the project team and members of the ICAF core organizing team (Jasmina Ibrahimovic, Anamaria Cruz, Amy Gowen) engaged in a structured dialogue, which was recorded and shared in the form of notes, and (finally) through a comprehensive report on the work carried out, including the methodology.¹ The

¹ More information can be found at the Thinking Partners Program 2022 Report.

discussions focused on the composition and needs of the festival audiences in relation to the space and their interactions with it, as well as the possibility of affective agency in that experience. The discussions also focused on the extensions of the theme of the Festival, the idea of *space as a pocket*, and how that facilitates processes of *collective authorship* as expressed by Claire Bishop [2012]. Finally, through the conversations with the creative team and thinking partners, the Festival team contemplated on Conflict Transformation and Transcendence, with a Report on the dialogue mentioning the following:

The festival actively exists in this macrocosm inundated by social, political and historical contexts that exacerbate the present conflict and heavily inform the division of the greater community. In spite of this, or perhaps, because of it, Buffer Fringe acts as a catalyst for the transformation of this conflict, providing the environment in which spaces transcending these contexts can exist. It is critical to acknowledge that the cultural, historical, and political contexts that exist are not to be discounted; they are real and they carry weight in the lives of people in the community. However, this transcendence allows for the exploration of peace-building and reconciliation within a community in a conflict zone through the use of arts and culture [Thinking Partners Program 2022 Report: 10–11].

The conversations over Zoom, as those were associated with the Buffer Fringe as a space of applied theatre practice, as per the definition provided by Shaughnessy, were [*r*]esistant and transcendent [2012: 3]. In the framework of a dialogic openness, the participants in the discussion created an incubator through which a new series of ruptures took place within the liminal space, also powered by the fact of the collective nature of the process itself. Repositioning individual affective agency for each curator vis-a-vis the spaces of their work, as well as each other and the festival as a practice, generated the type of alternative agency which in turn becomes resistant and transcends the specific place, to make a statement about the practice of curation in contested contexts overall. In their research regarding Buffer Fringe 2020, Perlman and Moiseos [2023] report that the festival falls within what they suggest, *an artist-based conflict transformation festival*. This generates extensions for the practice, both within the arts community but also for the possibilities of festival-making.

Final Reflections

In 2020, a few weeks before the Festival, rigorous testing, mask, and distancing regulations for crossings and theatre performances were announced from the authorities on both sides of the divide. Upon receiving the news, there was a lot of doubt about whether it was possible to have a face-to-face festival across the divide

as planned. After conversations within the team, Ellada got up from the meeting room and went to inform the H4C management that the Festival would still happen adhering to all measurements as required. The festival would happen as a resistance to authorities that blocked crossings before announcing any other measures, it would happen as an embodiment of resilience for all artists, audiences, and people involved who wanted to question dominant ideologies and create a space to enact an alternative understanding of the past. The action was both literal and symbolic at the moment and in hindsight.

This action comes at the foot of two decades of questioning political violence, dispossession, and the effects of imperial politics: the opening of the crossings in 2003 prompted this critical stance and allowed us to act together and explore our own relationship with these power dynamics. A performing arts festival that was born out of a buffer zone in between these crossing points, became a space of collective action, to co-create, sustain solidarity, and decolonize. The Festival has created a dialogue between the space, narrative layers of melancholia and affective agency producing liminal reimaginings beyond the rupture that the division has produced.

For Butler [2015], acting together is an embodiment that challenges dominant political perspectives as, *the claim of equality is not only spoken or written, but is made precisely when bodies appear together, or rather, when through their action, they bring the space of appearance into being* [Butler 2015: 89]. Human bodies remain a permanent and irrepressible source of resistance, resilience, and power even in the darkest times. Looking back, going ahead with the festival in 2020 despite the pandemic and the almost impossibility of crossing was indeed an act of resilience driven by affective agency. McManus [2011] posits that agency is derived from tangible experiences, specifically affective interactions that influence or activate the ability to take action. Based on Spinoza's ideas, McManus [2011] proposes that there is a connection between agential potential and psychic consciousness which resonates with our conceptualization of affective agency as a cross-corporeal cohabitation that sutures the psychic and the discursive in a performative way.

Performances and methodologies that we focused on in this article rendered visible a past that had not truly been pondered upon in the history of Cyprus, that also had a place for the other's suffering. In that sense, the performing arts festival from this particularly fragile context became a ground to create beyond the memory of absence producing a collective space of alternative affective agency. We have explored that when the memory of the past intersects with art, it can create an alternative affective space for an extent of mourning and reimagining what nationalism has obscured. Buffer Fringe 2020, 2021, and 2022 highlighted the potential of art and acting together to question dominant perspectives, be it pandemic, be it political uncertainty, and has shown resilience through art not only as a performing arts festival

but also as a performative form of power that creates the ground to deconstruct and decolonize dominant divisive narratives.

Without effective reconciliation processes that address these dynamics critically, any *peacebuilding* effort risks becoming a victim of the power systems and governmentality that led to its formation. *Peacebuilding* can quickly become a fetish that replicates exclusionary institutions leading to contradictory outcomes. Being in the buffer zones implies being at the intersection of bordering mechanisms and power dynamics, and utilizing this place to foster peace can only happen via questioning and critical thinking and tapping on tools that bring about alternative affective agency, which we have explored through the performances and ways of working generated by the Buffer Fringe Performing Arts Festival.

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