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# Cosmopolitan localism as creative self-discovery: Greek Cypriot popular music in the 21st century

MARIA KOUVAROU

*Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Cyprus, PO Box 20537, CY-1678, Nicosia, Cyprus*
*E-mail: kouvarou.g.maria@ucy.ac.cy*

YIANNIS PAPADAKIS

*Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Cyprus, PO Box 20537, CY-1678, Nicosia, Cyprus*
*E-mail: papadakis.yiannis@ucy.ac.cy*

## Abstract

*Since around 2005, an increasing number of songs have emerged in the Republic of Cyprus that use elements from the Greek Cypriot cultural heritage, like lyrics in Cypriot Greek, folk music features and other references to 'tradition'. These songs belong to contemporary genres, including rock, metal, fusion and hip hop, genres that already existed in the country but became 'localised' in a different manner, owing to the socio-political context. This article presents the first attempt to situate the popular musicscape of the Republic of Cyprus within debates pertaining to global musical flows, describing this context and arguing that the turn to elements from the Greek Cypriot cultural heritage is a recent phenomenon. We argue that this process signifies a new era of music-making in the Republic of Cyprus that can be theorised as 'cosmopolitan localism'.*

## Introduction

Δαμέ που ζιω, μανά, τον πόνο μας/γράφουμε τον κομμάθκια ('Here where I live, mother/we write our pain as songs') (Fres, 'Τριαντάφυλλο [Rose]', 2024)

In May 2021, a review of Greek Cypriot Antonis Antoniou's album, *Kkismettin*, appeared in the *Financial Times*, marking the first instance of Greek Cypriot popular music being highlighted by a noted publication with this kind of global reach (Honingman 2021). The review emphasised the album's cover artwork, namely the barrels that provide the physical boundaries in Cyprus' Buffer Zone, dividing the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot sides, and which the musician recorded himself playing as percussion instruments, and used as thematic concept. Antoniou is beating the dividing line, in both senses of the word. This evocative, powerfully

localised musical-political gesture can be seen as an implicit recognition of the fight against the divide, and as a way in which notions of divide (or their elimination) can lead to the creation (and perception) of new music endeavours. *Kkismettin* ('fate'), a word of Turkish Cypriot origin used on both sides of the island, and here written in Cypriot Greek, is a polyvalent symbolic choice for the album title. With its Cypriot Greek lyrics and elements from the folk music of Cyprus, *Kkismettin* belongs to a new era of Greek Cypriot popular music that has been emerging since around 2005 (links to all songs and albums discussed can be found in the Discography section). This era is defined by songs that use elements from the Greek Cypriot cultural heritage, including lyrics in Cypriot Greek, folk music features and other references to 'tradition'. We use 'tradition' throughout as a heuristic shortcut, bearing in mind its critiques (Hobsbawm 1983; on Cyprus see also Azgin and Papadakis 1998).

This article presents a first attempt to situate the popular music of the Republic of Cyprus (henceforth RoC) within debates pertaining to global musical flows. It suggests that the novel and growing tendency to use elements from the Greek Cypriot cultural heritage is a pivotal moment in the history of popular music expressed in global genres (rock, pop, hip hop, metal, etc.) in the RoC, although it has been preceded by a different stage of music 'localisation' that appeared in different forms and at a different historical juncture. We argue that, owing to the socio-political context of Cyprus, the creative turn to the elements of the (Greek) Cypriot cultural heritage emphasises for the first time the 'geography' of the Cypriot context and signifies a musical emplacement (to borrow from Tragaki, 2019) that we theorise as 'cosmopolitan localism'. We also view these new musical forays as a reminder that in the shadows of unresolved traumas related to the island's conflicts and divisions (as is later explained), life, complete with abundant creativity, goes on, generating what Bhabha (1994) names 'third spaces' that allow individuals to negotiate and redefine their place at home and in the world, or in his words, sites where 'newness enters the world' (Bhabha 1994, p. 212). Following Bhabha, moreover, we suggest that the turn to 'tradition' (or 'heritage') does not signify a nostalgia for roots, nor does 'localism' signify a nativist turn, but rather the creative negotiations between different kinds of boundaries: past and present, Self and Other(s).

Our understanding of this localism as 'cosmopolitan' resonates with Delanty's critical discussion of the cosmopolitan imagination, which occurs 'when and wherever new relations between self, other and world develop in moments of openness' (2006, p. 27). It is one of 'self-problematisation', in which the 'reflexive and critical self-understanding of cosmopolitanism' plays a central role (p. 36). In contested contexts like the RoC, both localism and cosmopolitanism in the creative domains can have political meanings and resonances, bridging the 'two faces of cosmopolitanism' as understood by Hannerz (2005), namely the faces of culture and politics that do not need to be mutually exclusive. As we aim to show in the discussion that follows, the kind of cosmopolitan localism evident in the popular musicscape of the RoC is tightly connected to critiques of hegemonic identities and the place-bound creative rediscovery of the Self, which has been fuelled by the social, cultural and technological transformations that allow contemporary creatives to be continuously connected with the wider world. Much like Appiah's 'rooted cosmopolitans' are 'attached to a home [...] with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different, places that are home to other, different, people' (Appiah 1996, p. 22), the work of the contemporary musicians that we are

exploring starts from a more 'rooted', literally and metaphorically, understanding of the postcolonial Cypriot Self or, as these musicians suggest, Selves.[1]

Cyprus is situated at the crossroads of Europe, Africa and Asia, and close to Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt and Greece. When it gained its independence from the British colonial regime in 1960, the RoC was founded, composed primarily of Greek Cypriots (78%), Turkish Cypriots (18%) and smaller minorities. Inter-ethnic strife initiated the process of separation between the two main communities, while in 1974, a Greek-led military coup supported by local Greek Cypriot right-wing extremists, was followed by a Turkish military offensive. The latter resulted in the geographical division of the island into a Greek-Cypriot-controlled south side (RoC), and a Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot-controlled north side (the unrecognised, except by Turkey, 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus'). The 'Cyprus Problem' as it has come to be called, throws its shadow on all aspects of life on the island, and becomes the backdrop against which the two ethnic groups constantly negotiate their relationship with each other, with the respective 'motherlands' (Greece and Turkey) and the rest of the world, as they interpret, enforce and challenge their national, ethnic, linguistic and cultural identities. Music is an inescapable part of this negotiation.

In what follows, we first present our methodology and then move on to discuss the context in which these songs are created in terms of history, media, ideology and the broader popular musicscape of RoC. The third part describes the first attempts at musical localisation in the RoC, which were based on a perception of the local as influenced by and belonging to the popular music of Greece. The subsequent section focuses on the significance of Cypriot Greek lyrics in providing songs with markers of locality, suggesting that linguistic experimentation becomes the first step for creatively exploring one's position at home and in the world. Then we examine songs that feature elements from the Greek Cypriot cultural heritage and discuss these as creations that encapsulate experiences of contemporary Cyprus and offer renewed understandings of 'Cypriotness'. The subsequent discussion considers these songs as a reclaiming of aspects of cultural heritage for the formation of localised musicscapes with cosmopolitan visions, and further elaborates the reasoning of the use of the term 'cosmopolitan localism'.

## Methodology

The nuanced distinction between the two phases of localisation in RoC exemplifies the significance of ethnographic research for the study of popular music, since the sonic results alone can easily lead to conceptualisations that are not adequately analytical of the dynamics that led to their production. We have been following the musical developments in RoC in a variety of capacities (music journalism, sociological commentary, participation in the music scene etc.). This has made it possible to identify, better contextualise and analyse the creative shifts that concern us here. The primary research, conducted mainly between March 2022 and September 2022, was based on qualitative methodologies, including participant observation during performances, most of which are attended by audiences of a range of ages and styles, although younger people predominate. Our research methodologies also included online observations of the artists' official social media pages (Facebook and Instagram), as well as examinations of relevant features that appear in the media.

[1] For a discussion of postcolonialism in relation to the music scene discussed here, see Kouvarou (2024).

First-hand in-depth interviews with 10 key performers, excerpts from which are published here with their permission, have been particularly illuminating. The interviewees, one female and nine male musicians between 24 and 45 years old, are all involved in song composition and lyric writing, in addition to performance. The notable imbalance in terms of gender representation, reflective of the wider musical context discussed here, requires elaboration. Whereas the RoC has many active female musicians, the scene discussed here is dominated by male practitioners. Considering the perceived openness of this scene, this imbalance can be explained, in our view, as resulting from internalised norms of gender performativity in RoC. In the same way that women's behaviour is more scrutinised (or for that matter 'policed'), women are expected to behave and speak 'properly', thus avoiding non-standardised ('rougher', 'unrefined', 'peasant', 'low class', etc.) linguistic forms such as Cypriot Greek. Moreover, folk music performances were historically linked, but for a few notable exceptions, with (the stereotype of) male practitioners.

## Setting the scene

… μες στο φτιν σου ψουψουρούν φκιαχτήν την Ιστορίαν ('in your ear someone murmurs a doctored History') (Antonis Antoniou, 'Livanin [Incense]', 2021)

Given ethnography's focus on context (Finnegan 1989; Cohen 1991; Lohman 2018), it is necessary to bear in mind the historical and sociopolitical context within which Greek Cypriot popular music has evolved, as presented in the introductory section, especially so if this is performed with notes (musical and beyond) of 'Cypriotness' and pulls strings that relate to the relationship of Cyprus with itself in its divided form and the world beyond. Although the creation of music with elements from a locality's cultural heritage is neither new nor unique to Cyprus, its particularities render it an interesting case that challenges straightforward notions of local and global dynamics in popular music terms.

Research on Greek Cypriot popular music is still sparse. This article builds upon the work of Hajimichael (2014, 2015a) in drawing connections between Greek Cypriot popular music and social critique, and Demetriou who deals with the notion of 'modern tradition' (Hajimichael 2015a) and Cypriot instances of 'world music' (Hajimichael 2015b), the latter with a specific focus on the work of Monsieur Doumani (a significant band of the music milieu discussed here). Our discussion also takes further the first overview in book form, *Music in Cyprus* (Samson and Demetriou 2015), which explores music of the island from various perspectives, but only dedicates one chapter to popular music (Hajimichael 2015b). Other scholars who discussed Greek Cypriot popular music are Pieridou-Skoutella (2011), who examines the formation of popular music identities by Greek Cypriot school students; Stylianou (2010), who discusses the use of Cypriot Greek lyrics in Greek Cypriot hip-hop; and Kouvarou, who discusses local live music networks (2018), the use of Cypriot Greek in the hip-hop music of RoC (Kouvarou 2022), and the use of tradition and heritage in Greek Cypriot popular music as a signifier of a renewed process of decolonisation (Kouvarou 2024). This paper broadens the scope by examining how popular music activities in RoC lead to new creative explorations, namely a creative self-discovery of the (Greek-)Cypriot identity, that we conceptualise as cosmopolitan localism.

This hitherto sparse scholarly attention mirrors the hegemonic structures surrounding the production, consumption and development of Greek Cypriot

popular music. Since 1990, Greek radio and television stations have opened branches in the RoC that mainly broadcast music from Greece and Anglo-American popular music (Pieridou-Skoutella 2011). Although the situation was never entirely straightforward and, in recent years, with DIY technologies, social media and online broadcasting, it became even more complex, RoC's 'mainstream' media are still defined by an attachment to the recording industry of Greece and the almost exclusive broadcast of music 'made out of Cyprus', be it Greek or Anglo-American. The fact that from the 1980s, local artists migrated to Greece in search of larger and more profitable 'panhellenic' careers (Hajimichael 2015b), also mitigated music production in the RoC and further strengthened the ties with the Greek recording and media industries. These events have contributed to the impression that RoC does not have a local music industry and is not producing music of its own.[2]

Despite occasional divergences from our broad sweep above, it remains a valid argument that the development of RoC's popular music has been hindered by various factors, including the hegemonic structures of local media, the dependence on the media and the recording industry of Greece and the impact of piracy which, in Hajimichael words, 'stunted the development of many local musicians' careers' from the 1970s (Hajimichael 2015b, p. 186). However, this disruption was not a prevention. Greek Cypriot musicians kept making music independently and, especially since 2005, RoC has witnessed an explosion of popular music output that shows that the local scene is more vibrant than ever, with new forms and experimentations, some of which are receiving international acclaim.

The blossoming of RoC's popular music, bottom-up and independent from the Greek music centre, is connected to social and technological changes, including technical developments, accessibility to means of recording, production and dissemination, and the return to Cyprus of people with the relevant know-how. It is telling that almost all the musicians interviewed recorded at least one album in their home studios. As Antonis (with whom we opened this paper, and founder of Monsieur Doumani, a fusion band formed in 2011 in Nicosia that combines folk music from Cyprus and the Middle East with Balkan, jazz, rock, psychedelic and electronic sounds) pointed out,

> many people returned who studied sound engineering, production, composition, etc. Somebody with this knowledge and today's technology can, with a computer and a microphone, create decent work. Not like in the past, that you absolutely had to go to a professional studio and pay lots of money to record.

A substantial number of active musicians in the country have studied abroad, at universities in Greece, the UK, the USA, Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Germany, among others. Although some choose to remain abroad after their studies, the majority return to RoC, bringing with them new skill sets, knowledge and expertise.

Also evident in all our interviews was the usefulness of social media for the promotion of the music. This is important, considering that the output of local musicians does not receive adequate visibility by the mainstream media of RoC. Although exceptions exist (e.g. the state channel's CyBC television shows ROADTRIP and

[2] Hajimichael (2015b) discusses Keravnophone Records, a recording unit operating in Cyprus between the early 1960s and late 1980s, a largely forgotten fact that emphasises the 'disruption' of local popular music development.

*Μουσικό Ραντεβού* [Musical Date], occasional radio broadcasts and interviews, and inclusion of songs in the programmes of independent online music radios), the local music scene is far from being sufficiently represented in the major stations' playlists.

## Re-interpreting the local

… έχω την έμπνευση να ακούω Βαμβακάρη … ('I have the inspiration to listen to Vamvakari[3]') (Άγραφος Βίβλος [Unwritten Bible], 'Ναυάγιο [Wreck]', 2021)

As mentioned above, RoC's popular music has been aligned with that of Greece, owing to structural and cultural affinities with what many would call 'the motherland'. Samson states that as early as the 1930s 'pre-modern traditional music was joined, and eventually sidelined, by various forms of commercial music' (2015, p. 14) performed initially by travelling theatre groups and later disseminated by the Greek recording industry and the local broadcasting system. Popular music 'made in Greece', as the popular music of any part of the world, is not a *sui generis* concept. As Tragaki (2019) shows, music in Greece is a multi-faceted universe that can be seen as a paradigm of cosmopolitanism and hybridity. Itself a sonic convergence of 'East' and 'West', with historic influences from Byzantine, 'oriental'/Ottoman, Balkan, Mediterranean and European music, it has been fluctuating for years – owing to ideological and political reasons – at times concealing and accentuating certain characteristics (musical patterns, scales, vocal delivery, instrumentation, etc.), or concurrently doing both in different genres. It should be noted that categories such as Mediterranean, Byzantine, Balkan, Ottoman and European music are used here as heuristic terms given their limitations (for a good guide on the uses of such terms in the context of Cyprus see Samson and Demetriou, 2015). It is clear, however, both within and outside Greece, that Greek popular music has been associated with the *bouzouki*, a stringed musical instrument which many musicians of RoC consider a symbol of Greek Cypriot locality as well. *Bouzouki* is, in fact, the connecting thread between the various styles of post-war Greek music (see Tragaki 2019; Economou 2019).

A common manifestation of Greek popular music in terms of entertainment, and the one dominating the lifestyle fantasies attached to its star system, is the *skyladiko* (literal translation 'the dog's place'), or the aesthetics of what Tsioulakis (2019) calls the *pista* (singing/dancing piste) culture. Stemming from the late 1960s *laiko* (people's) culture, it developed as a modern offset with global aesthetic. This manifested in its attunement to the developments of the global music trends and the incorporation of influences from the Anglo-American pop, rock, hip hop and other internationally popular genres. Its global aesthetic is often accentuated by the absence of *bouzouki*, but it maintains its affinities with the modes of entertainment

[3] Markos Vamvakaris (1905–1972), for many 'the father of *rebetiko*', is a prominent figure who wrote and performed some of the most emblematic *rebetiko* songs, including 'Fragkosyriani' (which has been re-interpreted widely throughout the years). The reference to Vamvakaris by contemporary musicians indicates a symbolic connection with the *rebetiko* culture, described by Holst (1989) as the urban underworld, and suggests an interpretation of the artist as an anti-system figure. Often, Vamvakaris is used as an element in the lyrics according to the musicians' ideologies toward the prevailing order.

associated with the Greek popular music. It is in this category that many Greek songs that circulate daily in the airwaves of RoC belong.

The popular music circulating in Greece and RoC came to closely converge and audiences of both regard the same popular music idioms as their own. Pieridou-Skoutella (2011) indicates the role of Greek popular music in the construction of Greek Cypriot children's musical identities. Her ethnographic research included children from urban and rural areas of RoC from 5 to 12 years old. The children considered the Greek popular music styles 'their own', and were 'opposed to the music of their parents and other adults' (2011, p. 134). Interestingly, the music of 'their parents and other adults' which Greek Cypriot children opposed is *laiko*, which is also a Greek popular music genre. In Pieridou-Skoutella's words: 'Greek *laiko* has to a great extent replaced and marginalised Cypriot traditional music's functions in familial and societal events in the rural areas of Cyprus' (2011, p. 136).

One cannot, of course, overlook the concurrent effect of the 'global' music idioms disseminated by the Anglo-American 'centre' (rock, pop, disco, hip-hop, metal, etc.). Both Greece and the RoC have been influenced by these international styles in terms of consumption and production. However, owing to its attachment to Greek popular music, and the previous 'lack' of a substantial domestic popular music industry, the RoC experienced this global influence in a unique way, localising it through a 'local-as-Greek' filter. Crudely, one could say that this initial localisation happened both second-hand, through the products of the Greek recording industry that are also considered 'its own', and first-hand, through a parallel creative process that used characteristics of Greek popular music that historically came to belong to the popular music vernacular of the RoC as well (like the *bouzouki* instrument, the *skyladiko* aesthetics, types of singing, and others).

This contributes to the following conceptual knot: if this conversation between global and local, happening since at least the 1970s, was experienced in the RoC through the use of the local as influenced by the Greek popular music, then what are we to read in the recent '(re)turn' to the Greek Cypriot cultural heritage, especially from musicians who have grown *into* and *with* the global music flows, and in times when the speed of dissemination allows for an immediate influence from almost anywhere (and anytime) in the world? What does this turn to the 'locality-within-the-local' tell us?

Before we attempt to untangle this, it is worth looking at how the local as influenced by Greek popular music manifests even in the scene discussed here, co-existing with the local-as-Greek-Cypriot-cultural-heritage. Louis of the metal band Zivanished, founded in 2014 (whose name is an anglicised neologism indicating intoxication by the local drink *zivania*) remembers: 'There came a time when I became completely immersed in the Cypriot mood, and I bought a *bouzouki*, I was playing the *bouzouki* and drinking *zivania* and watching *tsiattista* – this was when I was in the UK, so it could also be a bit of nostalgia'. Louis sees *bouzouki* as part of the local cultural heritage, alongside Cypriot features like *zivania* and *tsiattista*. *Tsiattista*, also noted by Azgin and Papadakis (1998) as tshattista from the Turkish çatmak (to fit together), holds a particularly important place here as it is a style of oral poetry that was included in the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2011.

These two layers of localisation also appear in hip hop with Cypriot Greek lyrics: JUΛIO's (whose name mixes the Latin and Greek scripts) '15–17 MUSH UP' (2018) is a medley of songs over a sample of 'Μάνα μου και Παναγία [My mother

and Holy Mary]' by Greek singer-songwriter Grigoris Bithikotsis (composed by the famous Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis); JUΛIO&ICE's 'To Point εν Αλλού [The Point is Elsewhere]' (2014) uses a sample by Greek artist Apostolos Kaldaras, and a spoken word sample of Greek singer-songwriter Pavlos Sidiropoulos; and Άγραφος Βίβλος [Unwritten Bible]'s 'Το Τρένο [The Train]' features 'Το Τρένο Φεύγει στις 8 [The Train Leaves at 8]', also composed by Mikis Theodorakis. In all these instances with samples of songs from Greece, the Cypriot Greek lyrics signify a 'locality-within-a-locality' (an extension of the 'self-within-the-self').

## The local in the local

Δαμέ το ραπ παίζει κυπριακό/εννα σούζεται η ψυσιή σου που το πρώτο λεπτό ('Here rap plays in Cypriot/So your soul will be shaking from the first minute') (Άγραφος Βίβλος [Unwritten Bible] & Chopo, 'Ραπ Κυπριακό [Cypriot Rap]', 2021)

Linguistic choices are significant in the context of Cyprus, since they cannot be separated from the language ideologies present in the island (Papadakis 2003a, b; Tsiplakou 2006; Hadjioannou *et al*. 2011), as these are outlined in this section. According to the 1960 constitution of the RoC, the official languages are Greek and Turkish, but after the de facto division of the island in 1974 and the total separation of populations, the official language in the south side has been Greek and, specifically, Standard Modern Greek, henceforth SMG. This is what is used in education, and other forms of formal communication. Nonetheless, the everyday variety spoken among Greek Cypriots is Cypriot Greek, used not only for every informal communication but also, and especially after the privatisation of the media that occurred in 1990, in various television programmes (Georgiou 2010; Pavlou 2004). Despite the increasing presence of Cypriot Greek in the media, the official public sphere of RoC is defined by the presence of SMG and the language ideology that surrounds it, which assigns it the status of a hegemonic linguistic variety through, for example, its use in the educational system, which also engages in language-policing by disallowing and stigmatising the use of Cypriot Greek as ostensibly vulgar, peasant and low-class (see also Fotiou and Ayiomamitou 2021). The contestation between Cypriot Greek and SMG marks the ideologies that surround the use of one or the other, suggesting a political element to the choice of Cypriot Greek for lyrics, even if this is not explicitly articulated (see also Stylianou 2010; Hajimichael 2014; and Kouvarou 2022 for a discussion in relation to Greek Cypriot hip hop). As has been argued, attempts to set an idiom as official can result in the unofficial idiom being considered more intimate (Papadakis 2003a). In the case of RoC this acquires another layer of political significance, considering the notable Turkish influences in Cypriot Greek in terms of structure, words, phrases and phonemes (Papadakis 2003b).

All the interviewed musicians write lyrics in Cypriot Greek. 'I wanted to express that story in Cypriot Greek so the [Greek] Cypriots would feel that emotion', said ΣaiΣ whose name, mixing the Greek and Latin scripts with the additional transgression of ending with a capital Σ, is the Cypriot Greek version of the name Savvas. Referring to the first song he wrote in Cypriot Greek, 'Το Κλάμαν του Μιτσή [The Young Boy's Cry]', he added: 'We learnt that [writing in SMG] was the proper way to do it but I realised that I was pretending something that I did not feel directly'. This resonates with the words of Demetris of Monsieur

Doumani (whose name combines the French word *monsieur* with the word *doumani*, which derives from the Turkish word *duman*, meaning both a lot of smoke, and the smoking of 'weed' or 'hashish' in the modern Greek slang; see also Demetriou 2015b):

> we always tried to comment on the contemporary Cypriot reality [...] So, speaking about Cyprus and commenting on its life, we considered Cypriot Greek as the most appropriate medium. And, also, okay, this is our language. The language in which we communicate every day, that we use with our buddies, our families, therefore it is the language in which we can express ourselves more easily.

Fellow Monsieur Doumani member, Antonis, added:

> the Cypriot language was and might still be quite misunderstood by the people of Cyprus. We observe a complex – inferiority complex – when it comes to its use [...] well, we wanted to change that or, say, to give a sort of opinion that it is not bad to use our language. On the contrary, it is good [...] it is the language in which you can communicate things more easily and directly. Especially if you are dealing with the Cypriot society.

ΙΥΛΙΟ made a similar point:

> first and foremost, what the use of Cypriot Greek states is that 'it's okay'. It's okay to speak in Cypriot Greek [...] Cypriot Greek does not deduct from the poetry, neither from immediacy, even more so when you speak to a Cypriot audience. So, if the use alone of Cypriot Greek is to make a statement, then this is it: It is okay! It is possible! We are allowed!

It needs to be pointed out that the musicians take a contemporary approach in their use of Cypriot Greek, avoiding parochial words and folkloristic expressions. As Vasiliki said,

> writing in Cypriot Greek comes more naturally to me. But I avoid using words that I don't use in my everyday life. I don't want to dig in tradition for words, I want [words] from the everyday speech [...]. Sometimes it could be something more poetic, something that I wouldn't use now as I speak with you, but I try as much as I can to have a more everyday approach, of my generation let's say.

From a somewhat different perspective, Antonis mentioned how he considers it good to also include words that 'our grandmothers said and now we might not be using that much', but not do it 'in a way that seems fake'.

We witness, then, the musicians' desire to use the everyday spoken idiom of their generation to express themselves in a manner that feels as direct and unpretentious as possible. This also entails an aurally and orally 'visible' revolt against the linguistic authoritarianism of the Greek Cypriot educational system. Considering the anti-establishment, critical and protest nature of numerous songs that use elements from the Greek Cypriot cultural heritage, the choice of the intimate rather than the official linguistic variety is not surprising: it entails an open revolt against the linguistic authoritarianism of the educational system. Often employing the linguistic idiom of the 'common (young) people', this linguistic choice is framed by a creative playfulness, emphasised in the way some subvert grammar rules in their own names. In any musical context this appears, along with the Cypriot pronunciation it is communicated with, it becomes a marker of 'Cypriotness': an attempt by Greek Cypriot musicians to resituate themselves by claiming a space of their own based on spatial

rather than cultural belonging, since the latter is entangled with the Greek – yet, one open to a multiplicity of influences including, as they also say, from Greece.

Referring to the relationship between music and place, Connell and Gibson write: 'Place became a critical musical resource, as a symbol in music (requiring strategic inauthenticity for adequate commodification), a means of national identity and the inspiration for ever-evolving local scenes'. And they go on: 'invented traditions required an invented geography' (2003, p. 277). However, the combination of tradition with geography seen here is not a matter of invention, but of rediscovery that is not employed in the usual nationalist manner to bolster an exclusivist monolithic (in this case, Hellenic) identity, but rather to stress multiculturalism and an opening towards Others, like Turkish Cypriots and migrants. The use of Cypriot Greek, which is associated with the lower classes, accentuates this and emphasises how there is both a class and multicultural dimension in this gesture.

The 'updated' approach in the use of Cypriot Greek applies to every reference to the cultural heritage brought into the creative palette of Greek Cypriot musicians, not least owing to how this is blended with the rest of the creative components. Examples include: references to food (e.g. 'Love me', Abnormals); traditional handcraft techniques like *lefkaritiko* ('the Lefkara lace') (e.g. 'KarpASSia', Pokafilias ft Samuel Kollifa); traditional Greek Cypriot attire like *vraka* (e.g. 'Μάθημα Πρόσφατο [Recent Lesson])', AT X Tobi); and, of course, folk music elements, whether rhythmical ('Το Βούττημαν [The Dipping]', Zivanished), melodic ('Κύπρος 2019μ.Χ. [Cyprus 2019AD]', ΣaiΣ) or instrumental (*Kkismettin*, Antonis Antoniou). The following example from the recent RoC discography illustrates these dynamics.

*100% Αγνόν Κυπριακόν Ξύλο* [*100% Pure Cypriot Beating*], the inaugural album of Zivanished, opens with a *tsiattisto*, performed acapella in its common metrical form: iambic 15-syllable verse in a rhyming couplet. Each line begins with the exclamation 'eeeehh' and ends with the repetition of its latter half in call and response style, both features seen as typical of Cypriot folk songs (Hajimichael, 2015a, p. 240). This unmistakable reference to the Greek Cypriot context becomes the preamble for the first instance of metal music in Cypriot Greek. In this 22 second intro, Zivanished conceal their metal heritage and emphasise their Cypriotness, employing a combination of humour and obscenity to comment on the social situation of the RoC. Nonetheless, soon after the *tsiattisto* ends, the sound of the distorted guitar brings everything 'home': metal music, Greek Cypriot folk and Cypriot Greek lyrics in new fusions.

## Cyprus 2019AD.: defining the *chronotope*

Εν μας χωρίζει τίποτε/Ενώνουν μας τα πάντα! ('Nothing separates us … Everything unites us') (JUΛIO, 'Άκου, θώρε, νιώσε [Listen, see, feel]', 2020)

JUΛIO's verse above suggests a position of solidarity with Others, that will be further explored here. This position is also embodied in Zivanished's example, which emphasises the 'Cypriot' element by bringing it into conversation with the local and the global. This is a new manifestation of the local-global dynamic in the popular music of the RoC by musicians who have grown in and with musical languages that already fused local (as influenced by Greek popular music) with wider global musical idioms, amidst pre-existing mashups of music languages that they consider their own. It is thus with the authority of 'owners' that they now use

these music languages as vehicles to discover and explore or, as Demetriou (2015b) posits in her case study of Monsieur Doumani, re-invent the traits of their cultural heritage. In their new music fusions, it is the cultural heritage from Cyprus that becomes the additional layer to the global idiom, and not the global idiom that becomes the additional layer to the local cultural heritage. Put otherwise, the musicians of the RoC explore a renewed sense of the local, specific to their own experience, by using the elements of the Greek Cypriot cultural heritage. This is a locality of emplacement that speaks back – intentionally or not – to ethnic-nationalism based on the idea of a common linguistic, religious, and cultural identity, and notions of shared descent and ethnicity. Thus, these musicians perform within the framework of a civic-nationalism approach: based on civic identity, and the idea of a shared territory, where all citizens are considered equal before the law (see Smith 1991 for a fuller discussion; for the Cypriot context, see Papadakis 2006 and Peristianis 2006). In the context of Cyprus, ethnic nationalism entails identification with the 'motherlands', Greece (to which any 'other' might be juxtaposed, and especially Turkey and Turkish Cypriots), while civic nationalism has to do with notions of a 'common ground', the geographical space of (albeit a now divided) Cyprus.

Locality in the sense of place and the particularity of experience is evident in ΣaiΣ' 'Κύπρος 2019μ.Χ [Cyprus 2019AD]' already by the title, as well as in the lyrics that mention the region of Akamas. References to places exist in abundance in the popular music of RoC ('Legacy', Tobi; 'karpASSia', Pokafilias ft Samuel Kollifa ; 'Οριοθέτηση [Setting Boundaries]', ΙΥΛΙΟ, etc.). This attachment to place does not unfold as nostalgia for a mythologised past, but, mostly, as a redefinition of a present reality speaking of its contemporary issues. This applies also to 'Κύπρος 2019μ.Χ.', of which the *chronotope*[4] leaves no 'where' and 'when' open to interpretation. It speaks about the present in the RoC, and it does so by addressing the Cypriot Greek speakers. In doing so, however, it points to the interpretation of the 'here' and 'now' as a chronotope of enhanced possibilities. 'Topoi', as Strand (2013, p. 147) writes, 'are per definition chronotopes; the lyrical milieu always assumes a certain location in time: versions of the present, relations to the past, visions of possibilities ahead'. Indeed, with their emphasis on 'Cypriotness' and their attachment to the locality of Cyprus, these songs emerge as different chronotopes, that redefine the 'chronos' as a time shift away from the monolithic narrative of Greek history and identity and its associated hegemonic structures which confined the development of Greek Cypriot popular music. It speaks of a 'topos' as both Greek, multi-ethnic and independent, and open to both 'East' and 'West'.

The idea of multi-ethnic and polyvocal Cypriotness is immediately audible in the musical treatment of 'Κύπρος 2019μ.Χ': its Middle-Eastern flavour evident from the first bars with the sound of the oud[5] and a modal melody common to the wider region. When the Cypriot Greek words appear, so do the electric guitar and drums, situating the song into the rock genre. The lyrics comment on the contemporary society of the RoC: the economic recession and the education system that leaves people 'uneducated'. The chorus urges audiences to 'wake up'. Meanwhile a trumpet, typical neither of Greek Cypriot folk nor of rock instrumentation,

[4] *Chronotope*, from the Greek χρόνος and τοπος (literally time–space), is a Bakhtinian concept used in literary theory to describe the unity of time and space that exists inherently in a narrative.

[5] The oud is mostly characteristic of Turkish Cypriot folk music; Greek Cypriots used the lute.

appears, taking over melodies played by the oud, and later giving way to and co-existing with female vocalisations of 'oriental' character. Toward the end, an electric guitar solo alternates with the vocalisations and trumpet melodies, weaving a sonic carpet of tightly knit Middle-Eastern and Western threads. It is important to note that, from a music analytical perspective, the employment of modalities associated with Middle-Eastern music (like the Hitzaz often used in the Cypriot and Greek popular musics) and the incorporation of instruments of the wider region (like the oud) do not necessarily indicate that the musicians use these elements in their performances or compositions as 'insiders', namely following all the norms and techniques of the musical culture they reference. In some cases, the way these elements appear can point to an ostensibly exotic approach to Middle Eastern music that is unfolding in the sense of 'dramatisation', or as Evangelou puts it, an approach to the 'Eastern' music that is mediated by the 'typified exoticism of the West' (2022, p. 194, translation by the authors). Hence our usage above of the word 'flavour' instead of a more concrete musicological term.

In a live rendition of the song, during ΣaiΣ project's appearance at the 2021 online Fengaros Reacts festival, the song is treated differently (a link to the performance can be found in the Videography section). Played on a stage decorated with references to the Greek Cypriot cultural heritage (ceramics, tablecloths with characteristic patterns), it features a more economic instrumentation: guitar, keyboards and violin (one of the main instruments of the Greek Cypriot folk music), electronic drum sample and voice. Throughout the song, the violin remains in constant improvisational conversation with the musical surroundings, playing modal melodies above folk-sounding riffs. The addition of the electronic drum sample brings the song to its contemporary basis, creating links with the rock genre in which ΣaiΣ's overall work belongs, although in this case the sample chosen alludes to ethnic and 'world music' genres. The rhythmical treatment of the song creates interesting dynamics, as what seems like a standard 4/4 metre is disrupted by off-beat, folk sounding riffs by all instruments. ΣaiΣ's overall work creates interplays between the rock and folk genres, blending instrumentation and melodic lines, and creatively employing rhythmic patterns from the Greek Cypriot folk music, like 7/8 (split as 3-2-2/8) ('Εν με Κόφτει [I don't Care]') and 5/8 (split as 3-2/8) ('Τι να σου Πω [What to Tell you]').

The merging of local, global and regional genres, and the way musical idioms are brought in conversation, serves as an audible statement that every musical element *owns* a place in the music practice of contemporary RoC. Greek Cypriot cultural heritage's place in this equation is clearly significant, since it is inserted there by choice and is not used in a nationalist or nostalgic manner but rather, to stress inclusivity and the multiple influences that compose the Greek Cypriot culture.

As Vasiliki said: '[the influence of Greek Cypriot folk in my work] is 100% conscious. But you know what I like? The freedom to "pick and choose whatever you like". I love it. [...] It is conscious and at the same time natural, organic.' In her song 'Υπομονή [Patience]', she applies this approach even to language, blending SMG with Cypriot Greek. She says, 'I could, with some effort, change the Cypriot Greek verse and make it like the others, but I asked myself "why?" It is part of who I am, what I am, how I speak in my own home.' This intention, especially in relation to the use of Cypriot Greek, echoes in every interview. Vasilis used the image of a mirror to describe it: 'in relation to Cypriot Greek, there is something in front that you have to try and clean and see that really, this is who I am, this is

how I sound, this is how I communicate'. This emphasis on *who* one is, pertinent to the identity politics of Cyprus, has direct relevance to the relationships between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, and the attachments to their respective 'motherland'. These, along with the relationships of Cyprus to 'East' and 'West', are the dynamics around which different issues unfold in the island, and these infuse many activities with shades that might be interpreted as political or even nationalistic. These dynamics between politics and identity are often concentrated in the paradox of 'borders', described as sites of division and contact, conflict and cooperation, security and anxiety, extreme nationalism and its contestation, creativity and oppression (Papadakis 2018). The focus on borders and their paradox brings us right back to the opening of this article and Antoniou's creative use of the metal barrels of Cyprus' Buffer Zone.

One way in which the binaries between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots have been constructed is by emphasising the relationship of each community with its 'motherland', stressing connections and similarities, which also unfolds as paradox. As Tsangaridou explains, 'the strengthening link with the putative motherland in due course served to emphasize those aspects of Cypriot culture that were truly distinctive (separate from the motherland)' (2015, p. 51). As discussed here, such Cyprus-specific elements found their way into the Greek Cypriot popular music, linking it with folk 'tradition'. Of course, the use and position of 'tradition' changes according to sociopolitical considerations and, as Demetriou points out, during the early 2000s, when RoC moved toward its European membership, there was an increased turn toward Cypriotness. She writes:

> the era of a new Cyprus and the renewed sense of a distinctively Cypriot (or arguably Greek Cypriot, as opposed to simply Greek) identity that it brought with it were not short-lived. This was a Cypriot identity that, for Greek Cypriots, maintained its Hellenic heritage (secured now at the heart of Europe), but also included a sort of localism that had not been present in the past. (2015a, p. 71)

It is suggested here that this localism and its respective explorations of identity has entailed many creative quests. In Antonis' words:

> we have to find *who we are*, our identity. We are from Cyprus, we speak this language, here there are these things, this society, that's how it operates, it has its problems, its daily life that is there to inspire you, one way or another. And these, I think, we must assimilate and insert in what we create.

In this, we note the link between Antonis' words and Bhabha's conception of 'newness'. 'The borderline work of culture', Bhabha writes,

> demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living. (1994, p. 7)

By locating themselves within boundaries and bringing together things usually kept apart, contemporary Greek Cypriot musicians blend their cultural heritage with their Greek music background and the global musical styles and create something new that also signifies re-interpretations of themselves.

Here, we can see how the (Greek-Cypriot-specific) local is assimilated in already-existing creations, disrupting hegemonic structures on different levels. First, it entered a wider popular musicscape that had not been inclusive of its local specificities up to this point, owing to the dominant ideologies in the RoC and the mainstream media that perennially placed emphasis on attachment to Greece. Secondly, it redefined the affinities of musicians with specific music genres. This is important as, in some cases, the interviewed musicians seemed to be first attached to a music genre 'heritage' and subsequently to their Cypriot cultural heritage. For example, Louis (Zivanished) commented on his use of Cypriot Greek as follows: 'I already had it in the back of my head that Cypriot Greek sounds very metal because it is a "heavy" dialect'. He suggests here that the compatibility of Cypriot Greek with metal contributed to his desire to use it in his creative practice. Similarly, JUΛIO stated: 'I will not lie, it is not the *tsiattisto* that brought me to rap [...] the similarities are there [...] but it is not the *tsiattisto* that brought me there. It was hip hop that I heard and said "this is what speaks to me"'.

The way Greek Cypriot musicians rediscover, explore and redefine the local, with an openness to plurality, has a distinctly cosmopolitan character. Vasiliki Anastasiou's 'Υπομονή [Patience]' (co-written with Ermis Michael) is an aural testament of this. Combining arpeggios of acoustic guitar with a violin playing folk-sounding melodies, it frames the contemporary singing style of Vasiliki alternating lyrics between Cypriot Greek and SMG. Her vocalisations in the middle of the song (unfolding over acoustic guitar arpeggios and a base note held by the string instrument) reference musics of various places (including non-regional), pointing to a 'world music' influence evident in the overall work of the artist. With its use of violin and acoustic guitar, Middle-Eastern modality and contemporary vocal technique, Cypriot Greek and SMG, 'Υπομονή [Patience]' encapsulates everything discussed above, using Greek Cypriot cultural heritage elements, while paying homage to other influences that define the locality that has given rise to it.

## Coda: fusion as musical cosmopolitanism

Πέτα σαν το πουλί, φκάλε ρίζες βαθκιά μες τη γη ('Fly like a bird, grow roots deep in the earth') ('Παλίσανδρος [Palisandros]', Marlia Project, 2019)

Monsieur Doumani's 'Tiritichtas' also encapsulates the dynamics described earlier. It is a song that densely combines sounds, styles, rhythms and melodies, and blends *tzouras*, trombone and acoustic guitar with electronic elements. Its lyrics speak of a haunting night creature, and the musical references to psychedelic and progressive rock give this creature an otherworldly character. 'Tiritichtas' is often performed by the band at the end of their live performances, as was the case for their appearance at Savino Live, Larnaca on 9 December 2022. The song ended with a semi-improvisational episode, a playful interaction between the musicians. The guitar became a percussion instrument, the trombone made constant interventions that evaded locations and genres, the *tzouras* was electronically manipulated. Antonis entered a frenzied vocalisation sequence, with incomprehensible sounds and words, and undertones from influences near and far. Under a continuous rhythm, the process seemed almost ritualistic, the happenings on stage (including movement and lights) taking an almost cosmic character. After a brief pause approximately 4

minutes into this episode, the song returned to its initial character, with the repetition of the word 'tiritichta' now treated as a musical element in its own right: its syllables were deconstructed and used for the creation of a rhythmical pattern akin to the sounds of the Greek Cypriot folk tradition, while the rest of the musical process evaded any categorisation in terms of locality.

The song belongs unambiguously to 'world music', and the associations of the music scene discussed here with the category merits some discussion. It was evident from our interviews that all participants have been, in one way or another, exposed to 'world music'. To some, it was a direct musical influence. To others, it became one of the vehicles through which they legitimised the use of local folk music, seen now with a fresh eye, not as a parochial tradition, but as cultural heritage which they also own and can use creatively. Demetriou (2015b) discusses Monsieur Doumani's work in relation to 'world music', also pointing to the previous 'othering' and 'exoticising' of Cypriot folk music, dissociating it from its parochial, even 'peasant' associations, and making it appealing to youngsters. Monsieur Doumani and Antonis Antoniou's work are both securely positioned within the global 'world music' market and represented by relevant independent labels. Be that as it may, we opt to be cautious not to apply the label of 'world music' to all the musicians of the scene discussed here, since not everyone is involved in the 'world music' production and economy.

'Tiritichtas', both in the album and the live interpretations we have witnessed, is indicative of the freedom with which contemporary musicians use heritage. Most of the musicians interviewed described the personal pursuits they underwent to be re-introduced to their cultural heritage. 'Every *tsiattista* battle available on YouTube, I have watched!', Louis (Zivanished) said. ΣaiΣ explained: 'From my university years, I started studying people whose work focuses on the Cypriot element'. Antonis spoke of Monsieur Doumani's explorations of folk music:

> the folk songs that we heard at weddings, on radio, etc, somehow became the basis. Then, of course, there was studying. We heard more versions by Tterlikkas, and even earlier by Kallinikos, and even some field recordings that we found and so on, that helped us somehow understand what was there, what *is* there.

Exciting as it might be in terms of discovery, the effort put in by musicians is sometimes coupled with feelings of grievance. As Vassilis put it: 'Since you don't leave school equipped [for Cypriot Greek], then you must do everything on your own. We say "how nice that we turn to Cypriot Greek and discover its wealth" but, shouldn't we have known already?'

Such observations give the local musicians' efforts to rediscover and employ their cultural heritage additional significance. It further indicates that this is a generationally specific turn that can be connected to a reconstruction of identity, also through heritage: the creative rediscovery and the place of the Self at home and in the world. Vassilis' words illustrate this point:

> I feel that the reason that we recently see a big need to turn to Cypriot [elements] is that the times we live in push us to belong in the world map. To belong everywhere, basically. And with being able to be everything, arises the question of who *you* are [...] Alongside the way our society is structured, that pressures us to express and be influenced by everything, it comes a bit as a reaction to be able to say 'wait a minute, I don't want you to tell me who I am, I want to see for myself who I am.' It could be this. Or this could be the way I experience it.

Globalised idioms seem to have long been integrated in the locality's musical vernaculars and generations of creators have been using them as their own. Therefore, elements of cultural heritage are not used to creatively modify global idioms in ways that will bring them closer to the local environment. Rather, it is the local elements that are (re)discovered and brought into the global, resulting in new music amalgams that are expressive of the cosmopolitanism that defines the global popular music of the past decades. Such dynamics are described in detail by Stokes (2007), who discusses music cosmopolitanism in relation to globalisation and 'world music'. Stokes defines cosmopolitanism as encompassing of music-making and music-consuming activities in the 'worlds' its practitioners inhabit, which is less the result of the processes of late capitalism and more as the outcome of artists' agency. He writes that such shift 'restores human agencies and creativities to the scene of analysis, and allows us to think of music as a process in the making of "worlds", rather than a passive reaction to global systems' (2004, p. 6).

This directly relates to van Assche and Teampău's descriptions of 'local constructions and functions of cosmopolitanism' that 'are not simply counter-forces to discourses of similarity and differences that emanated in global networks' (2015, p. 23). Rather, as Tsing suggests, they are the 'located specificity of globalist dreams' (2002; quoted in Stokes 2007, p. 6) and can coexist and compete, driven by varying motives and goals, but always remaining bound to the experiences of people who inhabit certain places at certain times and are affected by the same institutional nexus (Tsing 2002; quoted in Stokes 2007).

We take these notions of local cosmopolitanism further by theorising the recent creative ventures of these Greek Cypriot musicians in their nuanced particularity, as *cosmopolitan localism*: a localism informed by cosmopolitan visions, based on a renewed and open sense of Cypriotness in political (including anti-ethnonationalist), musical and linguistic sense. Such cosmopolitan localism understands the hybridity both past and present within, engages creatively with it, while being connected with the multivocal cosmopolitan flows of the world. Like Stokes's music cosmopolitans who 'create musical worlds and new musical languages, but they do so within systems of circulation that determine to a large extent what is available to them and how (and in which direction) musical elements move', the Greek Cypriot musicians discussed create cosmopolitan musics of 'intentionality and agency' that can be interpreted politically and culturally (the two faces of cosmopolitanism, to return to Hannerz), but should not be deprived of the element of 'pleasure and play' that also characterises the 'global circulation of musical practice' (Stokes 2007, p. 16). At the same time, in the sociopolitical dynamics of the RoC, the cosmopolitan localism of popular music that incorporates elements from cultural heritage becomes a process of creative self-discovery – a renegotiation of the selves – that speaks back to the hegemonic structures of the context that has given birth to it, and which has been emphasising the Greek part of the Greek Cypriot identity. By putting emphasis on the Cypriot aspects of this identity, the local musicians reclaim the particularity of the 'locality' while actively engaging with their already acquired cosmopolitanism. This brings us back to Delanty's position that cosmopolitanism is based on self-problematisation and self-understanding. In his words: 'Without a learning process, that is an internal cognitive transformation, it makes little sense in calling something cosmopolitan' (Delanty 2006, p. 41).

'Tiritichtas' ends with a psychedelically developed Eastern Mediterranean motif, clearly evoking elements of the Greek Cypriot folk music. Still, despite its

locational echoes, it is an ending of cosmic nuances, where time dissolves and place opens up, allowing for Bhabha's understanding of the 'inter' of the international as:

> the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people'. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves. (1994, p. 38)

Caught in the middle of multiple socio-political tensions and affinities, always in negotiation with themselves and others, these Greek Cypriot musicians use socio-technical advancements to rediscover their past, and 'translate' this in the vocabulary with which they express their present. In the process they redefine their selves and their place at home and in the world, making Greek Cypriot music that emphasises the second constituent, not just as a response to global flows, but as an active need to locate oneself in the global flow by cleaning the mirror (to borrow Vasilis' image) to get a clearer view of the self. This need swivels around the paradox of building, destroying and negotiating boundaries – between different music genres, between varied understandings of 'tradition', between the self, the other and the world. This interplay provides the cosmopolitan music output of the RoC with yet another political dimension. To borrow Hannerz' words: '[a] kind of modest bottom-up cosmopolitics may at least be a matter of maintaining a certain immunity to extreme antagonisms, of hatred or of fear, and to their more or less organised expressions' (2005, p. 212). Returning again to Bhabha (1994, p. 18) and recalling ΠΑΛΙΟ's verses ('Nothing divides us/Everything unites us'), such boundary work is a call for solidarity with Others. Antoniou, in turning the barrels-as-physical-boundaries to barrels-as-musical-instruments, turns this need for breaking the boundaries into a paradigm of cosmopolitan localism in the popular music of RoC.

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