Whose sidewalk? Tactically negotiating the middle ground between public and private space in Limassol

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Abstract

The ‘public’ is traditionally the state’s domain, while the ‘private’ belongs to citizens. However, the boundary between the two is not always well defined by law. In the case of a neighborhood in Limassol, Cyprus, formal boundaries separating the private from the public are dynamic and contested, giving way to the emergence of new, informal borders, which are acknowledged by a mutual and tacit agreement between neighbors – a social and cultural consensus. I focus on common expansions of private spaces into public space in Limassol, as well as the ways in which social consensus is achieved through the use of several tactics, resulting in perceptions of sidewalks as liminal spaces, between public and private. These tactics, which I call ‘tactics of inhibition’, aim at transforming public space into private space on a symbolic level. In doing so, they ignore the state’s law, abiding instead by social norms that disregard or even undermine it, ultimately treating sidewalks as both public and private.

Key-words: Tactics of inhibition, Symbolic boundaries, Domestic space, Urban sidewalk, Cyprus.

This article focuses on the boundary between the state and citizens, through the study of the boundary between public and private space. It illustrates negotiations of this boundary and the ‘domestication’² of the state through various tactics, primarily ‘tactics of inhibition’. In other words, I am examining how domestication of what belongs to the state has various implications for how citizens ultimately understand the nature of public space and how the state in general may behave, react, and respond to their actions pertaining to public space.

The work draws from ethnographic research in Ais-Savvas (this is not its real name), a lower-middle class neighborhood in Limassol, Cyprus, between May 2014 and August 2017. This research was supplemented with observations and interviews in different parts of the city. Domestic space was chosen as the domain where the domestication of the state is observable and even tangible, as I will demonstrate later in this article. Equally observable and tangible is the negotiation of the boundaries between the public and private, in the form of space. Ethnography is in a privileged position when studying issues like those under scrutiny here because it offers itself for the study of mundane and everyday practices that are oftentimes ‘invisible’ to different methodological approaches.

Specifically, the space surrounding the home offers an ideal vantage point for an ethnographer as it can somewhat overcome Labov's (1966) "paradox of the observer" – the fact that researchers, and especially ethnographers, want to observe how people act when they are *not* being observed. This has several implications for my research, as a large part of it is rooted in observation in public spaces surrounding domestic ones. According to Corbetta (2003, 247) "when the observed environment is public and open, it is not necessary (at times it would be impossible or ridiculous) to reveal the observation". I observed the behavior of many people in Ais-Savvas, and not all were informed of my research and its purposes.³

A specific incident that occurred during my research triggered my understanding of sidewalks as contested territory. What follows, is an excerpt from my ethnographic diary, written on March 17, 2016:

This morning, I went on a bike ride to the beach with my friend and interlocutor, Yiannis. We met in front of his house, and I parked my car in front of his neighbors' house. Yiannis insisted that I park my car elsewhere, as the people living in the house were 'eccentric' (*en paraxeni*). I paid particular attention to avoiding blocking any entrances and the lack of any traffic signs prohibiting parking at that spot and told Yiannis that I had every right to park there, as it was completely legal. I deliberately ignored the makeshift "no parking" signs that were placed in front of almost every house, store, restaurant, or cafe in Limassol but that held no legal power whatsoever. After a few kilometers of biking under the hot sun, it was finally time to dive into the sea. Not long after we arrived at the beach, my cellphone rang, and on the other end of the line was a policeman. He wanted to know if I was the owner of the car that he had tracked to me through its registration. I responded positively, and Yiannis gave me an 'I told you so' look. The policeman's tone was not aggressive or strict at all; quite the contrary, he asked me very politely in an *informal tone* to move my car somewhere else. All this time, he was speaking in standard modern Greek. I asked whether I had parked illegally, and all of a sudden, he switched to Cypriot Greek⁴ and told me that the man living there is a *pellos* ('insane' in Cypriot Greek, *trelllos* in standard modern Greek) and that he would not stop calling them to complain about my car. I replied very politely that the police should apply the law and that they should not side with the *pellos*. After all, their job was to enforce the law of the state and not the demands of someone who believes that he owns the sidewalk.

The policeman's choice to switch to Cypriot Greek when referring to the *pellos* indicated his inability to express a noninstitutionalized but culturally relevant behavior – that of the *pellos* – in standard modern Greek. The use of restricted code⁵ (Bernstein 1971) by the policeman signified common belonging; it imposed a *shared informal middle ground* to a supposedly formal encounter. 'Reasonable' people are expected to understand that when dealing with a *pellos*, it is best to simply acquiesce to get rid of them. This, when applied to the specific *pellos* behavior I described, produces an interesting metaphor: It is a behavior that is culturally

relevant but not legally sanctioned and, interestingly, more important than the legally legitimate behavior.

In this case, somewhat ironically, it was the very ‘instrument of the (state) law’, a police officer, who prioritized the socially licit over the legal by transforming a *formal* encounter into an *informal, intimate* one. Generally, I do not perceive bureaucrats as mere “instruments” of power (see Bernstein and Merz 2011; Herzfeld 1993; Heyman 2004; Lipsky 1984). The police officer was, in the end, an adherent of the same cultural worldviews as the *pellos*. I suspect that he would not have liked the idea of someone parking in front of his house either. After I hung up (the first time), Yiannis told me that ‘this is how Cyprus is’ (*etsi en i Kipros*) and that, sooner or later, I would conform as well. Yiannis was right. In fact, I quickly adapted to this new situation. After another phone call from the police asking me politely to move my car, I was no longer in the mood for swimming. I went back to Yiannis’s place, and when I arrived, the *pellos* was shouting indistinctly, yet aggressively. I got into the car, and went home, defeated by the way ‘Cyprus is’.

I went home terribly upset. This incident took place only a short time after I had moved to Cyprus, and I did not yet know that this was the norm and that I was probably the *pellos* (or *pello-kalamaras*⁶) in the neighbor’s and the policeman’s versions of the story. Perhaps I was also the *pellos* in Yiannis’s version; when we returned, he seemed somewhat embarrassed by my behavior toward his neighbors. This was the first in a long line of similar incidents that were either reported to me by my interlocutors or that I witnessed myself. I had indeed ‘learned my lesson’, one delivered to me by a street-level bureaucrat, perfectly in line with Lipsky’s (1984) demonstration of how bureaucrats teach citizens lessons about the *expectations* and *possibilities of action* within a state system. However, in this case, the lesson reinforced a social norm that defied the state’s law and rendered the sidewalk contested territory, often an extension of a private citizen’s house.

The *pellos*, at least in my version of the story, obviously considered the sidewalk part of his property rather than what it was to me if not to everyone – a public space. This perception was shared by most of the people with whom I spoke during my research. I even observed people (interlocutors or others) who did not act as if they owned the sidewalk and would not get into an argument over someone parking in front of their house but were always ‘curious’ to see who it was that parked in front of their porch or on ‘their’ part of the sidewalk. Such seemingly mundane behaviors are ethnographically insightful, especially when one seeks to understand the relationship between the citizens and what the state represents, as well as how the state’s institutions and authorities are perceived in various aspects of social life in the Republic of Cyprus, and most importantly, the ways in which the state is domesticated.⁷ This behavior is even reflected in a short film by Soteris Christou titled “No Parking” (2012), which is about two men fighting over a parking spot. Domestic space offers many ethnographic examples of different expressions of this effort to privatize public space and indeed *domesticate* it both metaphorically and literally, in the sense of attempting to make it another part of private domestic space.

Photo No. 1 – Cars parked on sidewalks in Ais-Savvas.

Meanings of Home

Greek Cypriots often say ‘it all starts from the home’ (*oulla xekinoun pou to spiti*) to explain the presence or absence of a person’s manners. Indeed, the home is a particularly important point, in space and beyond, for the establishment of a widespread disregard of public space and the domestication of the state in the form of the appropriation of common spaces in Limassol. In this sense, constant efforts to encroach on public space by stretching the boundary between the private and public spheres are reflected in the common local perceptions of home and in the uses and abuses of the public spaces surrounding it. This article will demonstrate this boundary (un)making through a variety of ethnographic examples.

In addition, the results of my ethnographic research suggest the central importance of the home in the Republic of Cyprus. Most of my interlocutors invited me to their home when I wanted to arrange an interview, something rather unusual in my previous ethnographic research in Greece and Albania. Moreover, they would often over-emphasize ‘Cypriot hospitality’ as a cultural trait of Greek Cypriots and a source of ‘national pride’. The home, primarily the domain of the family, is a central social structure that provides security and support in the Mediterranean cultural region in general and in the Republic of Cyprus in particular. In the words of Irene, one of my interlocutors, ‘the Cypriot (*o Kipreos*) is very hospitable. He wants to invite you and you can do whatever you want in his house. You *kalamaraes* meet at cafes and bars. The *Kipreos* will open his house. This is *proper hospitality*’. As with all such pronouncements, a certain critical distance is needed when interpreting this claim, but it suggests that understandings of hospitality and the home play an important role in Cypriot (re)presentations of self.

Putnam and Newton defined home as “at once an idea, a social institution, and material reality” (Putnam and Newton 1990, cited in Attfield 1999, 73). Home may be a physical structure, but it also “refers to the idea of houses or households as typical social institutions, defined by dominant norms” or even to imaginary spaces and bodily practices (Samanani and Lenhart 2019a, 3). The house and the home have been studied extensively, both in sociological and anthropological literature. In recent years, anthropological approaches have made a distinction between the house and the home: The former involves normative, widely reproduced, and often material forms, whereas the latter involves subjective feelings of belonging and dwelling (Samanani and Lenhart 2019b). Ethnographic studies of the home (Benjamin and Stea 1995; Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence Züniga 1999; Buchli 2002;

Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Cieraad 1999) have established that it represents *a worldview*, how people view themselves and their physical surroundings. These values are reflected in the *physical* constitution of the house. While worthy of investigation, the inside of the house, and its related symbolisms and social meanings (including the gendered or class aspects of domestic space) are not my focus in this article. Instead, my focus is on the outside of the house and the public space surrounding it. I am particularly interested in the *middle ground*: the in-between, liminal space between the home/private and the state/public and how this middle space is (re)produced independently of the state's law, which clearly defines a sharp line between the public and the private.

In its conventional sense, 'home' evokes thoughts of fixity and solidity, which produce sentiments of connection: "For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (Bachelard 2014 [1958], 3). Bachelard (7, my italics) goes on by pointing out that:

In the life of a man [sic], the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is *the human being's first world*. Before he is 'cast into the world' as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house.

It is exactly these characteristics that 'it all starts from the home' implies. The fact that the home is central to the process of socialization reflects the importance of the practices I will illustrate next.

Whose sidewalk? Producing boundaries

The home is viewed in social science literature as a nodal point in a series of polarities: journey-arrival, rest-motion, sanctuary-outside, family-community, space-place, inside-outside, private-public, domestic-social, spare time-work time, feminine-masculine, heart-mind, Being-Becoming. These are not stable categories; they are both solidified and undermined as they play out their meaning and practice in and through the home (Cieraad 1999, 8). In the case of Ais-Savvas, it is important to remember that the 'public' is traditionally the state's domain, while the 'private' belongs to the citizens. Scholars often perceive borders as bridges and barriers, porous and impenetrable, protectors and threats, sites and symbols. Border studies have shown that urban entities have their own internal and external borders (Wilson 2014, 103). I will argue that such 'internal' urban micro-boundaries can be even found in the domain of domestic space, separating the private from the public, and that they are dynamic and contested. As Van Gennep (2019 [1909]) has illustrated, the threshold of the front door is a liminal zone that separates and links two distinct territories. The borders of this marginal zone are not necessarily marked, but they are acknowledged by a mutual and tacit agreement – by *a social and cultural consensus* (Hall 1999). The porch is also a border territory (Rosselin 1999, 68) on the boundary between public space and the private realm of the home. In this article, I examine the most common expansions of private space into public space in Ais-Savvas, namely

parking arrangements on the boundaries of domestic spaces, trees and plants on the sidewalks, and the ways in which, in a tactical manner, a social consensus on the boundaries between public and private spaces is achieved.

Determining where the boundary of the domestic space is placed is a difficult task for an ethnographer. During discussions and interviews, my interlocutors usually pointed to the actual legal boundary of their properties even though I was observing practices that contradicted this claim daily. For example, something as seemingly insignificant as the clothes worn in the private space rather than the public space can be important indicators in ethnographic research. According to Cieraad (1999, 57), shoes symbolize their usefulness in the public space of the street. However, “a slipper that is flung about, is a negation of the shoe’s use in public space and therefore a symbol of private, domestic territory”. That it was not uncommon for many of my interlocutors and people in Ais-Savvas to walk in public space in slippers and even barefoot is an indication of the private appropriation of this public space. Women wearing pajamas or nightgowns while tending the space in front of their plots are not a rare sight either. They also tend to clean the public space surrounding their homes. I also observed men building sidewalks as a response to the state’s reluctance to ‘do its job’ (that is, to take care of or even build a sidewalk in the first place). In addition, people place makeshift signs and other symbols to inhibit other people from parking in a public-yet-symbolically-privatized parking space. As I will demonstrate in this section, all these tactics essentially transform public space into private space, at least in practice.

Photo No. 2 – Antroulla in her pajamas, cleaning the sidewalk in front of her porch.

The following extract from my field notes illustrates a case in which the boundary between the public and the private is ‘softened’ by literally becoming “slantwise”⁸:

04/17/2017

This morning, Ttooulis was building the sidewalk in front of his house. I stopped my car and asked him what he was doing. He responded that he had applied for a re-laying of the pavement in the municipality a long time ago, and they did not do it. He said that he even invited the mayor, who came, and his response was that the municipality had other priorities. So, Ttooulis decided to take matters into his own

hands and repair the sidewalk himself. He told me that he planned to repair Marios's sidewalk next door as well [...] Marios confirmed their joint decision to do this and that he will even pay for all expenses for materials since Ttooulis is putting in the labor.

Photo No. 3 – Ttooulis *slanting* the vertical sidewalk/boundary.

The way in which Ttooulis built the sidewalk gives rise to a remarkably interesting metaphor: a boundary constructed at a 90-degree angle is prohibitive – difficult to penetrate and dispute. Walls, fences, and other obstacles are usually constructed at a right angle, for functional and symbolic reasons. They are disruptive and make their presence clear to all, insiders and outsiders alike. On the contrary, rebuilding a boundary slantwise ‘softens’ it; the motivation and meaning of building a sidewalk in this manner are “immediate, personal, and slantwise to power” (Campbell and Heyman 2007, 22). Ttooulis’s sidewalk was built slantwise as shown in Photo No. 3 – with a gradual angle/slope to make it easier *for him* to park. Instead of a vertical angle (the common practice for pavements that makes them a strong boundary), he and other people in Ais-Savvas rebuild the sidewalk slantwise, therefore ‘weakening’ the boundary and making it easier/smoother for *their* car to climb onto it. Even though the sidewalk appears more crossable, other tactics compensate for slanting, which is primarily functional (it prevents damage to their car when climbing a sidewalk).

According to my interlocutors, anything that has to do with the state usually takes a great deal of time, and the results are not always guaranteed. Ttooulis’s decision to build a pavement on his own and Marios’s decision to fund the project were justified by this reluctance of the state. Ttooulis’s attempts to get the municipality to build the sidewalk failed. Additionally, they both understood this as a home renovation project, as if they were beautifying their front porch. In fact, when I asked Ttooulis why he undertook the project himself, he replied, ‘See how nice and tidy (*sistarismena*) it is now? Not like before... Are you thinking of building *yours* as well?’ The notion of having to do something on your own if you want to get it done at all has multiple implications for the ways in which the state of the Republic of Cyprus is perceived by the citizens. One line of argument I often heard was that because the state cannot meet the ordinary needs of citizens, the citizens in return do not feel they should provide what they legally ought to either. Marios’s words are indicative of this line of thought: ‘What do you

expect from the thieving state? They only care for their own pockets (*via tin pounga tous*), not for the citizen... Why should I care and be legal (*Yiati na ime nomimos*)?'. In other words, *a state that ignores you deserves to be ignored*.

Additionally, the fact that Ttooullis demanded the reconstruction from the state authorities before building it himself is an indirect, albeit revealing recognition that this is public space in terms of law. In other words, only after the rightful owner disregarded or ignored his requests, he felt that 'taking matters in his own hands' is justified. Furthermore, he justifies his choice with reference to the state's reluctance and inefficiency on the rhetoric level. This may also be seen as an indirect recognition that the sidewalk is the state's and therefore it is the state's responsibility to rebuild it. If it fails, only then he feels entitled to do it himself.

As mentioned earlier, another example of privatizing behaviors is the frequent cleaning and tending of the sidewalk by women, despite the fact that keeping public spaces clean is normally the municipality's job. However, this tending of the sidewalk also constitutes a tactical expansion of the private space into the public space. It is a form of symbolic appropriation wherein the social consensus is confirmed and reproduced daily through a mundane task. Indeed, the sidewalk in front of a person's house is widely perceived as 'their' sidewalk, and similarly, the side of the road in front of a person's house that can be used for parking a car is seen as that person's 'private' parking space.

Women usually tend and keep the sidewalk clean in 'their' part of the street. They also take care of the plants in the public space, but only those they perceive as theirs – trees that are planted in 'their' part of the sidewalk in front of their plot. Yiota, a 46-year-old private sector employee, told me that her neighbor's, Yiannoulla's, trees should not be there:

Imagine if there was someone with a disability here. How would he pass between the trees? Even a woman with a stroller. But they do it when they build the house, they ask the contractor to leave some space for planting trees, for shade and fruit and so that they are not seen (*Yia na men tous thoroun*) by passersby. They do not care... (*en tze kofti tous*).

However, when I asked Yiota why she does not say anything about the trees in Yiannoulla's sidewalk, she responded, 'It's their sidewalk (*en dhikon tous*). Thank God we do not have any disabled people in the neighborhood. God forbid (*mi kako*) we had one, we would have to tell them...' These observations demonstrate that there are certain indicators that point to the 'owner' of each part of the public space. Nevertheless, Yiota, like Ttooullis, also indirectly acknowledges the public nature of Yiannoulla's sidewalk and subsequently, the public nature of sidewalks in general. If she considered them as entirely private spaces, then Yiannoulla would be entitled to do with 'her' sidewalk as she pleased. However, the fact that the sidewalk needs to be crossable by outsiders, signifies its liminality; Yiota, while respecting the social consensus, renders certain (ab)uses unacceptable.

Generally, the street is perceived as the boundary in everyday practice, according to most of my interlocutors. More specifically, the center of the street, thus resembling state boundaries within rivers. During my research, on several occasions, I came across women arguing about the cleanliness of sidewalks and even of the road in front of their plots. I wrote in my diary:

08/23/2017

Mrs. Maroulla, from across the street, was shouting to Mrs. Dina that when she cleans *her* [Dina's] sidewalk and the road in front of her house, the dirty water runs in front of her [Maroulla's] house, and then she has to clean again, and apparently swipe the water elsewhere. Mrs. Dina responded that she must clean, regardless of where the water goes, because it is too dirty (*leshi*). It seems that Mrs. Dina perceives the cleaning of the public space as her responsibility, which is also true of Mrs. Maroulla.

It seemed that most of my interlocutors did not have any emotional or other form of attachment to common places (places shared with others). Instead, they usually expressed their attachment to their homes. Most of Irene's arguments, when describing why Cypriots prefer detached houses over apartments, were related to illegal yet socially licit practices, such as the ability to use the sidewalk as a parking space. For most of my interlocutors, the ability to afford a house in the Republic of Cyprus seems to be something that transcends comfort to become a symbol of social status. A large detached house is considered a testament to the owner's professional success. Often, the house is provided to a newlywed couple by their parents (Argyrou 1996; Papadakis 2001, 595) or purchased after acquiring a loan. A new perspective that goes beyond social status or comfort also came up during my research – that of the difficulty that many of my interlocutors face in abiding by the rules in blocks of flats. An apartment building does not easily allow the expansion of the private space into the public, as detached houses do, because the 'public' (i.e., shared spaces in an apartment building) has to be actually claimed from neighbors (i.e., 'real people'), as opposed to public space that is claimed from 'the state.' Unlike 'real people,' the state is commonly perceived either as abstract and impersonal or as an adversary. This is evident in the preference that most residents of Ais-Savvas demonstrated for detached houses rather than apartments. According to Yiannis:

They [Cypriots] prefer the *land* [meaning ground floor homes with a yard]. Firstly, it is a matter of financial situation. Only a few stay in apartments. It is hard for me to feel that I have to share spaces with others. *It annoys me to share a space.* To place an announcement the day before you will have a barbecue (*napsis foukou*)? I do not speak comfortably [meaning confidential discussions between family members that may be overheard by neighbors]. I cannot exploit the common spaces privately (*en imporo na ekmetallefto idhiotika tous kinokhristous khorous*).

Yiannis's words further illustrate my previous point: 'I cannot exploit the common spaces' (what is shared) 'privately.' All the tactics deployed to 'mark' the sidewalk seek to transform the public space into private space and, in this sense, to *domesticate* the state by *domesticating* its property. I obtained numerous accounts with similar content. Pambos, a young private-sector employee who lives in a detached house, told me that if you live in an apartment 'you cannot park your car on *your* sidewalk.' Talking about a public space as if it were *yours* is common in many neighborhoods in Limassol, especially relatively dense ones, as my interlocutors claimed. Panikos, another private sector employee, told me that you can 'change your motorcycle's oils on your sidewalk, you can wash your cars, you can even (*ama lakhi*) have a barbecue, or plant a lemon tree.' Even though this view may seem to contradict the idea

of the sidewalk as a ‘middle,’ liminal social space, in the next section I will illustrate the ways in which this boundary is being defended from ‘invaders’ and ‘trespassers’ who may disregard the social consensus I have described.

Tactically ‘defending the boundary’

My interlocutors in general respected the appropriation of public space and they did not feel that their own right to public space was violated. Sidewalks in front of houses are considered private spaces by most people in Ais-Savvas. Etiquette dictates that people ask for permission when they need to park in front of someone’s house, even when parking there is legal. Many of my interlocutors shared numerous stories of people parking in front of the ‘wrong’ house, usually resulting in arguments and even fights and car ‘keyings’ (scratching cars, *khtarsimo* in Cypriot Greek).

Discussing the home, how we achieve a sense of comfort within spaces, and how we symbolically appropriate space, Wise (2000, 297) notes:

Beyond the walls and streets of built place and the song of the milieu, we mark out places in many ways to establish places of comfort. A brief list of ways of marking: we may mark space more subtly by placing objects (a coat saves the seat), or by arranging our stuff (to make sure no one sits beside us on the bus or the bench).

In the case of Ais-Savvas, *placing objects* is the most common tactic to achieve a sense of comfort, and at the same time, these objects assume the role of a flag – serving a purpose similar to that of a national symbol at state borders – to demarcate territory (see Wilson and Donnan 1998), to signify where one place ends and another begins. Just as we arrange our belongings on the bus or in airport lounges to prevent someone from sitting next to us, we may arrange certain objects on ‘our’ sidewalk to inhibit people from parking there.

According to Altman (1975, 107, my italics), territorial behavior is defined as:

a self/other *boundary-regulation* mechanism that involves personalization of or marking of a place or object and communication that it is ‘owned’ by a person or group. Personalization and ownership are designed to regulate social interaction and to help satisfy various social and physical motives. Defense responses may sometimes occur when territorial boundaries are violated.

Moreover, territorial behavior is an ‘attempt to affect, influence, or control actions and interactions (of people, things, and relationships) by asserting and attempting to enforce control over a geographic area’ (Sack 1983, 55). Many improvised symbols are made and used to demarcate an ‘out of reach’ area in Ais-Savvas, especially in terms of parking. In this case, these symbols are clearly important because, even though people are legally entitled to park in certain places, they usually do not because they are discouraged from doing so by these signs and symbols. Most people in Ais-Savvas use makeshift ‘no parking’ signs, such as a chair placed by the sidewalk, a traffic cone, a potted plant, or anything else strategically placed in a

potential parking space, and the meaning all of these symbols carry was shared and recognized by all my interlocutors. “No parking” signs bought from the local hardware store and placed strategically around plots are quite common in every neighborhood throughout Limassol. In addition, if one does not obey the directives contained in these cultural symbols, there are consequences.

Photo No. 4 – Compilation of common boundary-marking tactics and symbols in Limassol.

These consequences usually involve an escalating series of actions. According to my interlocutors' and my own experience, the first-time violator's punishment usually takes the form of a 'fair warning'. This is typically accomplished by lifting the windshield wipers of the perceived perpetrator's car. Consequences escalate to 'keying' the car after it has been parked in 'someone else's' parking spot several times. I came across these practices during my fieldwork, and in the beginning, I was puzzled by the sight of parked cars with lifted windshield wipers. When I discussed this with a few interlocutors, they explained these commonly practiced informal punishments. Even though 'keying' (*khtarsimo*) is not as common as lifting wipers, it had happened to Eleni, one of my interlocutors. However, even the subtler wiper

lifting, which I experienced firsthand, is a symbolically important gesture. It is a warning and an acknowledgment by the plot owner that they have noticed and do not approve. The practice discourages the ‘trespasser’ from continuing to park in that particular spot. Regardless of whether parking there is legal, it is unacceptable according to social norms and therefore illicit from a cultural point of view. The fact that at least some people disregard the social consensus and park on ‘other people’s’ sidewalks, along with the need to defend a boundary through a set of consequences, in the form of informal punishments, also imply the acknowledgment that sidewalks are liminal; no one would park in an entirely private space and the consequences for that would most likely involve the state’s regulatory authority rather than the vigilantism I have described.

Josephides (1999, 139) recognizes a clear distinction, and at the same time a continuity, between the tactics employed for the purpose of coping with or taking advantage of a *de facto* situation and those that intentionally challenge social practices to effect change. According to Kyriakides (2018, 477, my italics), “Josephides gestures to the manner by which the tactical often strives to extend beyond the opportunistic, spontaneous and *ephemeral*, in order to acquire a trajectory of longevity, and more deeply affect socio-political structures”. The case presented in this article is a combination of the two: On the one hand, these tactics are improvised, diverse in nature, ‘make-do’ and ephemeral (i.e., often based on objects that can be moved easily), but at the same time, they affect social structures. They are individualistic or familistic and do not share a stated ‘common enemy’. They are successful in affecting social structures, as it is ‘common sense’ for most of my interlocutors that one cannot park where such symbols are displayed. And when the opposite is done, it is often done in a performative manner as a ‘rebellious’ act that aims to safeguard what is formally legitimate from what is socially sanctioned, or as a last resort, when no other parking spaces are available.

Conclusion

The home, including the material culture contained and displayed within it, is a site for both *the appropriation of the outside*, public world and the representation of the private, inside world (Miller 2001, 1, my italics). While Miller examines symbolic-cognitive appropriation, in the case of Ais-Savvas, there is an appropriation of public space taking place in the most literal sense. Although a great deal of literature concerning the use of public spaces already exists (Duncan 1995; Shields 1992), what actually happens in what may be seen as the *middle ground* between the home and the public space has not been equally considered (see Cieraad 1999; Miller 2001). It is exactly here where this article’s contribution lies: it brings inhibition tactics, boundary-making, and boundary safeguarding to the fore.

Cieraad (1999, 2) argues that “we [...] express ourselves symbolically in the spatial arrangements and decorations of our houses and the surrounding public space”. This article has further supported this idea by illustrating how “the surrounding public space” is being “claimed” or “arranged” by house dwellers. I have illustrated a case in which the public space surrounding the home is not only a domain for expressing oneself but also a liminal territory, the boundary of which is drawn and safeguarded by locals. It is liminal because it legally belongs to the state, although in practice, it is appropriated by the citizens as private, and this

is supported by a value system in which law is less important than social norms. In this value system, the actual parking laws and regulations are irrelevant and hence ignored altogether. What matters is a social consensus that dictates what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behavior regarding the boundary between the public and private. This can be understood as a different way of claiming public space by *sabotaging* its very essence – that is, its public nature. It needs to be noted that in order to sabotage, one needs to acknowledge what is being sabotaged. Thus, by sabotaging the public nature of sidewalks, people in Ais-Savvas concomitantly acknowledge that they are essentially public spaces.

The process of claiming public space is achieved by placing various objects to demarcate one's territory – simultaneously inhibiting others from putting something else there and effectively reclaiming that public space – and by tending the space one claims. All the tactics I have described here can be understood as “tactics of inhibition” rather than prohibitions. This is because they quite often undermine formal prohibitions through informal action. For example, the space in front of one's house is public, and the law allows the general public to park there; however, such parking is inhibited by an *informal* yet socially *licit* set of norms. This space is also contested because it is liminal, and the need to defend the boundary constitutes on its own an indication that the boundary is contested (there would be no need to defend the boundary if it was not disputed in any form). Most importantly, as illustrated in Ttooullis's case, the locals resent the government for not doing what they perceived to be its job. That resentment is also a form of acknowledgment that the sidewalk is public space in legal terms. The residents of the neighborhood are not simply ignoring the law and treating the sidewalk as entirely private property (if that was the case, they would not blame the state for inefficiency). Moreover, all tactics presented in the article have an ephemeral character. Interestingly, most of the various symbols and objects used by people to demarcate the boundaries of their private space are ephemeral (with the exception of trees), ready to be (re)moved when there is such a need (e.g. when an inspection for illegal interventions takes place). This is yet another indirect acknowledgment that the sidewalk cannot be entirely and permanently privatized.

The everyday practices and attitudes toward the sidewalk examined in this article, treat it as both public and private, and therefore liminal. The constant boundary blurring, making, and unmaking of boundaries can be seen as a powerful metaphor of the middle ground between the state and the citizens, producing and reproducing the perceptions of the state in a very private yet identity-shaping place – that of the home.

Notes

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² The term “domestication” was used by Gerald Creed (2010). Creed’s ethnography details life in a Bulgarian town that engaged in “informal sector,” “local level,” rural responses to the processes of socialism, collectivization, decollectivization, emergent land law, democratization, and political reform. Creed (2010, 3) illustrates how Zamfirovo’s residents “domesticated” these processes, accommodating state policy in accordance with the needs and constraints of their own households and communities in order to make the effects of these policies beneficial or at least tolerable. He examines local-level solutions to the inadequacies of state enterprise. In Zamfirovo, this informal economy, which existed within webs of personal connections and mutual favors (*vrazki*), included the cultivation of produce, machine knitting, woodworking, sharecropping, weaving, and theft.

³ These people do not face risks as a result of my research because I do not know their identities. Informed consent was provided by the people I interviewed, photographed, chatted with, and “deeply hung out” with. In addition, in the photographs included in this article, the faces of people and the license plates of cars have been redacted to further safeguard anonymity.

⁴ It is common for Greek Cypriots to switch to Cypriot Greek in informal contexts. Papadakis (2001, 589) notes: “Greek Cypriots are taught at schools and employ in writing and orally, on formal and public occasions, standard modern Greek [...] For informal oral exchanges, each community employs what could be called the Cypriot dialect.”

⁵ This is a concept introduced by Bernstein (1971) to denote an informal use of language that is linked to immediate situations (context bound).

⁶ In Cypriot Greek, mainland Greeks are called *kalamaraes* (singular: *kalamaras*), a name usually – albeit not always – employed with negative connotations.

⁷ This article is based on research from my PhD thesis, titled “Tactical Citizenships: Encounters with Everyday State in the Republic of Cyprus” that examined various aspects of the relationship between citizens and the state.

⁸ Campbell and Heyman (2007) coined this especially useful and relevant term, which emerged from the debate on Resistance vs. Naturalization of Domination (for an overview of this debate, see Theodossopoulos 2014). According to Campbell and Heyman, in some cases, informal practices aim only at survival or better terms of living, and they call these practices “slantwise behaviors”. The authors note that some practices do not “fit neatly into one or the other of the two endpoints, but rather that complexity and contradiction are still conceived of through a combination or interaction of the two extremes” (Campbell and Heyman 2007, 2).

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