


**ROUNDTABLE: TRANSNATIONAL PATRIOTISM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN,
1800–1850**

Life after Venice

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Transnational patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800–1850: stammering the nation.
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Konstantina Zanou's book could have been called *After Venice*. It traces the disintegration of the Venetian Adriatic world, through an interlude of alternative empires – French, Austrian, British, and Russian – to an era of nations, or, as she often puts it, nation-states, with special attention to the Ionian islands, or those born there, wherever they then spent their lives. She tells this tale by attending to the concerns of individuals who spanned this space, often by moving through it, but also through the work of the imagination. She offers us a rich, humane, and reflective account.

Her biographical sketches are grouped into four sections, each associated with a different line of argument. The first section reflects on the irony that three men later hailed as national poets of either Italy or Greece were all born on the same once-Venetian island off the Greek Adriatic coast. It is suggested that their divergent trajectories reflect the disintegration of a previously shared world – though also that their lives and affiliations were more complex than has always been acknowledged. The second section enjoins us not to forget Russia's presence in the region, even though it figured formally only as a protector: that is, as joint protector with the Ottomans of the Septinsular Republic of the Ionian islands, in the later Napoleonic era, and later as one of three protectors, with Britain and France, of the kingdom of Greece. Its presence in these roles was an effect of what was in reality a much larger if more loosely bounded political, cultural, and religious presence. The third section focuses on two autobiographers, using their lives to explore transnational subjectivities. The final section looks at efforts by diasporic scholars to develop a canon of works giving their contemporaries access to Greek history and culture, with special attention to post-classical continuities.

The Adriatic region does not loom large in anglophone histories of Europe, so Zanou has to do heroic work scene-setting: introducing readers to a region of which they may know little, in a period marked by geopolitical upheaval. She makes a serious effort to rise to this challenge. However, I do not want to linger here on her account of the context, but rather to comment on the central project of the book, that of using rich sketches of Adriatic lives to explore diverse themes and arguments. I will first highlight three themes I found especially engaging, before identifying three related issues that the book left me wanting to know or think more about.

Zanou has a good eye for recurring words. One of those is the word 'stammer', which appears in the subtitle, and which was used by several of her subjects to describe their efforts to express themselves in languages in which they were not confident. Another is 'patria'. Many of her subjects formulated some of their thoughts and aspirations in relation to the word 'patria'. (We have to assume this was the word they used, or some close equivalent; we cannot always be sure what *exactly* they said, as the cited passages do not give the original.) It is notable that they gave this concept some discursive importance. But more interesting still is the fact that they did not seem to think that every natal place is a patria. Patria emerges in Zanou's account as an almost republican concept – in both its cultural and political senses. A patria seems to be a place distinguished by the collective action of its people, such that, in this period, now Italy, now Greece, became (sometimes only temporarily) a place that it was possible to conceive of as a patria. It follows that belonging to a patria was a matter of choice – a choice to dedicate oneself to such a collectivity. But the field for choice was restricted: a region might fail to constitute itself effectively as a patria, and therefore be unavailable to the would-be member or supporter.

The experience of being an exile was not, in this context, just a matter of being away from one's natal place: it involved being estranged from a desired object of attachment. To be an exile, then, was immiserating. But this was also a state defined by aspiration – the aspiration that there should be a place to which one could confidently return. Zanou writes interestingly if intermittently about the construction of the persona of the 'exile' in this period, and she suggests that Alfieri and Foscolo provided literary models. There are, after all, other ways in which one might conceive of the experience of being away from a natal place: in terms, for example, of joining a community of cosmopolitan patriots, as some did during the French Revolution. However, Zanou judiciously calls her subjects not cosmopolitan but 'transnational' patriots. The nation was their preferred object of attachment. Yet the complex and changing character of the region in which they lived made it possible for them to define themselves in relation to more than one potential patria – to be an enthusiastic participant in, or dejected exile from, more than one at once.

This is the first theme I found interesting – that of patria, belonging, and exile. Second, and closely related, is the theme of language. Again, Zanou writes interestingly about languages as things in the making, things which people in this region at this time could conceive of themselves as helping to make. Of course, there then existed neither a standardized modern Italian nor a standardized modern Greek. But the language issue was not peculiar

to fragmented nations. The project of making one's language fit for modern use was a humanist project, revived in the eighteenth century, when French was often posited as a model. The challenge was to displace French as the hegemonic modern European language. That challenge was one with which Germans and Russians had already engaged – and, as the German example suggests, political unity was not a prerequisite for such attempts. The theme is well worn, but, by acknowledging it, and by showing us her protagonists 'stammering' in precariously mastered tongues, Zanou adds to her general picture of flux and uncertainty, or, to put it more positively, of scope for creativity. I also found especially interesting her observation that Greeks and Italians learnt things from each other about *how* to craft new modern languages (p. 176).

A third theme I found interesting was Zanou's tracing of Russian influences over Ionian islanders. Again, this is not a new theme, and it has recently been highlighted in Lucien Frary's *Russia and the making of modern Greek identity*.¹ But I was drawn to her examination of its importance in the lives of Ionians in the Italian diaspora – which, among other things, helps make intelligible the proposal that the tsar should mediate between government and revolutionaries in Turin in 1821.

However – and this is the first, and least important, of the points on which I was left brooding – I missed some account of how the Russian language featured in this Venetian world. Did Greeks in Russia function in Russian (or perhaps in French)? And if they did express themselves in Russian, how had they acquired the language? To what extent were they interested in Russia's own linguistic and cultural projects? Zanou readily admits to not having Russian at her disposal, so she is less well placed to advance scholarship in this regard. Nevertheless, one might have wanted a little more detail here, particularly given her stress on the importance of Russian influence, and on the intersection of identity and language.

Two other points also relate to themes that I have already highlighted. The first concerns the disintegration of the Venetian imperial world, and the loyalties and identities that arose in its place. Zanou frames her period as one of transition between an age of empires and one of nation-states. But does this perhaps involve too much teleology? Italy did not become a nation-state in her period (down to 1850), nor was it clearly on its way to becoming one, rather than, say, a federation of republics. Greece became an independent state embodying a national idea, but most contemporaries thought the new kingdom geographically (and in other ways) inadequate to the nation it claimed to represent, fuelling the development of vigorously promoted diasporic versions of citizenship, as well as irredentist projects. Certainly, just over the book's horizon, more plausible nation-states would be founded in both Italy and Greece, as well as elsewhere in the Balkans, providing the context for the canonization of 'national poets' with which the book begins. But is there not a danger in relation to the preceding period that teleology might distort our view of an at-that-point-still-indeterminate course of development? Might it not be better to prise the nation away from the 'nation-state', and

¹ Lucien Frary, *Russia and the making of modern Greek identity* (Oxford, 2015).

explore, more open-endedly, what ‘nations’ then meant, and what kinds of existence it then seemed possible and desirable for them to have?

Finally, I was interested in the content of Zanou’s arguments about the existence of an under-recognized ‘Orthodox enlightenment’, as well as of a Russian-oriented liberalism, typified, she suggests, by Kapodistrias – and especially by her discussion, in the penultimate chapter, of the ‘Orthodox enlightenment’ project of developing histories of Greek culture which did not dismiss the Byzantine past, but identified continuities between it and Greece’s present. Yet, at a more general, taxonomic level I was left uncertain what stake she has in calling these things ‘enlightened’ and ‘liberal’. Kapodistrias was a constitutionalist, but does that suffice to make him a ‘liberal’? I would like to know more about how he labelled himself. As for enlightenment: enlightenments, especially peripheral enlightenments, are proliferating, and in some ways I welcome that. But if using the term entails more than just bidding for other scholars’ attention, what is entailed in the claim that something was an ‘enlightenment’? No one definition is going to wipe all others off the floor, but I think it is helpful for an author to explain what they mean when they push another contender into the ring.

The ‘Orthodox enlightenment’ about which Zanou writes looks to my mind more humanist in its content, or like something that might figure in what Laurence Brockliss calls ‘the republic of letters’ as distinct from the contemporaneous ‘enlightenment’.² Zanou’s ‘enlightened’ protagonists seem less engaged with typical Enlightenment themes than, say, Herder, with whom they shared some common ground. I do not say this to deny these Greek scholars coevalness, or to imply that they were out of synch and running behind the rest of Europe.³ But unless we are willing to call all eighteenth-century intellectual life ‘enlightened’, we need to characterize the different kinds of projects that co-existed, and place this among them. Actually, it is notable that the Orthodox enlightenment described here seems mainly to have been a nineteenth-century phenomenon: what larger map of intellectual possibilities in different eras does that imply? And where does the ‘romantic’, which loomed large in discussions of the (proto-)national poets, fit? Chapter 11 informs us that subsequent chapters will tell us much more about transnational ‘romantic’ patriotism, but I do not think that that phrase appears in chapters 12 or 13. I think it is a mistake to invest too much intellectual energy in taxonomies, but the substance of Zanou’s discussion raises questions about these taxonomies which deserve further thought.

Of course, the fact that the book both engaged me and set me brooding is to its credit, and reflects the wider resonance of the subjects it tackles, and the significance of its contribution.

² Laurence Brockliss, *Calvet’s web: enlightenment and the republic of letters in eighteenth-century France* (Oxford, 2002).

³ Johannes Fabian’s concept, given a prominent place in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: post-colonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton, NJ, 2000).