

## Book Review

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Konstantina Zanou, *Transnational patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800–1850*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, 270pp., ISBN: 9780198788706

This book has rightly won widespread praise. It traces the multi-sited regional emergence of nationalisms and thus avoids from the outset the internalism that so many histories of national movements fall into: explaining the emergence of nationalism from within the bosom of the pre-existing national community as it responded to its circumstances and challenges.

The chosen case here is that of the Adriatic coastlands, specifically Italy and Greece. This is at first sight seem surprising, since the two are not obviously neighbouring or closely connected countries; it may even bring, unhappily, *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* to mind. But a closer historical look will make us realize that this is a presentist misapprehension, because at the time the old Adriatic connections of Venice were still operative, notably in the Ionian Islands. A Venetian enlightenment culture had affected the ethnically Hellenic population, to the extent even that a theatre had operated in Corfu in the 18th century, where occasional Greek-themed plays were put on (e.g. a heroic history play on the last Paleologos emperor). Greek only became the official language after Corfu moved under British rule in 1815, and a British-run institute of higher learning was in operation there from 1824 until 1864.

People from the Ionian islands could contribute to national movements in either direction. For the Greeks, there was the poet Dionysios Solomos, author of the Greek national anthem; for the Italians, there was Ugo Foscolo. Yet, tellingly, Solomos spoke in Italian when he delivered a

eulogy at Foscolo's funeral. And the fact that a first cosmopolitan foothold in Foscolo's roaming career was provided by the Venetian *salonnière* Isabella Theotoki-Albrizzi (herself of Ionian extraction) is indicative of the networked connections that fanned out over the Adriatic coastlands.

The importance of the Venetian connection is well known in certain instances. They provided a relay station for the communication of kleptotic songs to the French collector and philhellene Claude Fauriel, also through the mediation of the novelist Alessandro Manzoni, and with the local antiquary Andrea Mustoxidi becoming a go-to-contact for many French and Genevan philhellenes. The outreach not only rippled as far as Paris, where Fauriel worked, but also to St. Petersburg, where the Corfu-born politician and statesman Kapodistrias canvassed Romanov support for the Greek cause.

All these names are duly, indeed lovingly noted here, besides many more and they add up to historical narrative that is at the same time fine-grained and suggestive of general socio-political patterns. Indeed, one of the things to admire in this book is the analysis of national movements by means of what one might call a cultural prosopography — something reminiscent of Miroslav Hroch's 'Protagonists' approach, but more individually specific and applied to the national consciousness-raisers in Hroch's 'Phase A'. What emerges very clearly is that these romantic poets, intellectuals and activists lived their national ideals in a setting that was as yet wholly pre-national, imperial — phase A indeed. Hence the use of 'stammering' in the book's subtitle: culled from a letter where Foscolo admits to his difficulties with Italian, Zanou sees this as the condition of people of this generation, trying to articulate something that was only beginning to take shape. What this a tragic predicament? Probably not as much as Zanou sometimes seems to suggest; multilingualism was (and is) a fact of life for many, and like most facts of life it is not mastered without putting some effort into it. Foscolo

certainly mastered, eventually, his Italian! On the same note: Zanou identifies the condition of these multicultural protagonists as ‘diasporic’ — a notion that comes easy to the study of Greek history, but that in this case does not altogether convince me. Diaspora to me is a group condition, usually characterized by an exilic nostalgia for the lost homeland kept alive among displaced communities and (to paraphrase Gellner) usually better off economically and educationally than the population left behind in that homeland. What we see in these lives is, rather, the standard pattern of social and territorial mobility of individual young romantic talents making their way in the world — most sensationally exemplified by the wanderings of Byron, Madame de Staël, or Garibaldi.

Zanou repeatedly gestures at the poignancy that these men, working from an area of cultural interpenetration that enabled their unique role in the nation-building process, were in later years largely marginalized and forgotten, as their home ground became a mere border periphery in the national cultures that emerged subsequently — a crater left after the volcano’s eruption. The epilogue describes the falling-out of Mustoxidi and the Dalmatian-born Niccolò Tommaseo over their conflicting loyalties in the context of the Crimean War. The new Greek state was to draw the Ionian islands in a monocultural, exclusively Hellenic nation, with little room for diversity or hybridity. (The Ionian Academy was closed down as the University of Athens was founded.) We may add that for their part, the Italians would voice increasingly aggressive, irredentist claims on these outlying Adriatic territories — and Tommaseo certainly played into that process.

At this point Zanou’s book reads as a complement to Dominique Kirchner Reill’s *Nationalists who Feared the Nation: Adriatic Multi-Nationalism in Habsburg, Trieste, and Venice* (2012), in which Tommaseo features prominently. Zanou duly notes that study but to this reviewer the complementarity between these two books is more deeply suggestive. It

is indeed an achievement both of Zanou and of Kirchner Reill that national internalism is surmounted, and that we focus on the presently-marginalized borderlands that, like the fault lines between tectonic plates, triggered the seismic realignments of Europe in the century of nation-building. But those borderlands will inevitably be more than one-dimensional, situated neatly on the line between this nation and that. The break-up of *ancien régime* empires and the conglomerative growth of the new nation-states were truly multidirectional processes. Tommaseo, Dalmatian-born, took refuge in Corfu after 1840, and later studied Italian culture in Corsica. In the Ionian Academy in Corfu, Nikolaos Pikkolos taught, a Greek-writing Bulgarian educated at St. Sava's College in Bucharest. The name of Cesarotti, mentioned repeatedly here, becomes much more resonant in the light of Alberto Fortis's Dalmatian voyage as studied in Larry Wolff's classic *Venice and the Slavs* (2001). Zanou herself draws attention to the wandering lives of many exiled revolutionaries and how places like the Ionian Isles and Malta were stepping stones in a Mediterranean corridor for the transnational movement of wandering activists, much like the salons of Isabella Theotoki in Venice (for Foscolo) and Madame de Staël in Coppet (for Mustoxidi).

It would be unfair to say that this rich study of transnational patterns should need an even wider, polygonal or rhizomatic scope. One might easily lose focus in the process; and as it is, Zanou's study has plenty of peripheral vision. But for me this study is not just a corrective to mono-national studies of Greek or Italian nation-building but, even more so, an alluring example of what we can gain from a truly transnational and macro-regional approach. And it is in that respect that I most warmly salute her approach by means of interweaving personal lifelines.