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Review of Efi Kanner's Έμφυλες κοινωνικές διεκδικήσεις από την Οθωμανική Αυτοκρατορία στην Ελλάδα και στην Τουρκία. Ο κόσμος μιας ελληνίδας χριστιανής δασκάλας [Gendered social demands from the Ottoman Empire to Greece and Turkey]

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Efi Kanner

Έμφυλες κοινωνικές διεκδικήσεις από την Οθωμανική Αυτοκρατορία στην Ελλάδα και στην Τουρκία. Ο κόσμος μιας ελληνίδας χριστιανής δασκάλας

[Gender-based social demands from the Ottoman Empire to Greece and Turkey: The world of a Greek Christian female teacher]

Athens: Papazisis, 2012. pp. 390

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Efi Kanner's latest book fills an important gap in the Greek historiography of gender. Through a comparative study of women's collective initiatives and movements in the Ottoman, Turkish and wider Balkan territories from the late nineteenth century to the interwar period, she studies the multiple ways in which the basic concepts that emerged acquired new significance as they passed from one community and territory to another. The starting point of this journey is one individual and her family, as well as her social and professional environment: a teacher named Sotiria Aliberti (nee Cleomenous) and her colleagues, who comprise the teaching staff of the Zappeion school in Constantinople, from 1875 to the late 1880s. The study of this group on a microscopic level offers Kanner the opportunity to probe methodical questions regarding the formation of middle-class subjectivity and agentive action, in relation to the dominant discourses of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. At the same time, applying the analytical tools of microhistory and social networks, she extensively discusses her story's main characters' family, love, friendly and professional relationships.

This interesting and ambitious book is based on an impressive corpus, both in its extent and scope, of primary archival sources, which is roughly divided into two categories: on the one hand, the daily and periodical press of Constantinople (both Greek Orthodox and Ottoman), the Greek press of Bucharest and Greek and Turkish women magazines; on the other, Aliberti's private correspondence with people in her environment, which is held in her personal archive in the Hellenic Literary and Historical Archive (Elia). Historical research in Greece has not taken advantage of autobiographical discourses (letters, diaries, autobiographies, memoirs) in a systematic way. These first-person narratives are valuable historical sources, to the extent that they reveal the unlimited ways in which the subjects themselves not only represent, but eventually (re-)construct, their identity and the world they live in. Kanner's choice to extensively use private correspondence is both innovative and stimulating, and definitely constitutes one of the merits of this historical piece of work.

But let me briefly explore, navigated by Kanner herself, the worlds of a Greek Christian teacher – since the plural form, I believe, encapsulates the book's discussions more accurately. The first chapter is a detailed account of Aliberti's family environment and the routes she followed in time and space (Athens–Italy–Paris–Constantinople–Giurgiu–Athens–Leros) in order to be educated and, subsequently, work as a teacher. During the second half of the nineteenth century, middle-class Athenian houses turned into sites of public activity with the hostess located at their very centre. Kanner exposes the ways in which the network of social relations that constitute the mother and the daughter consciously shifts towards the direction of enhancing the family's social status, through professional and marital strategies that follow. At this point, the author artic-

ulates one of her main arguments, which has already been posed in the introduction and repeats itself throughout the book: individualism, a prevalent Enlightenment value, serves the purpose of teaching people how to have faith in the personal ability to achieve individual goals – of social mobility mostly – through rational planning for the future (see, indicatively, 112 and 114). In that sense, relationships among the members of Aliberti's family are determined by constant anxiety over preserving, and if possible, enhancing its social status.

The second chapter of the book takes us to the territory of the sultan, Constantinople and the Zappeion girls' school in particular, where Aliberti, among other teachers, began working in 1875. Within the context of additional professional opportunities arising from women's education, a new form of middle-class femininity was inaugurated and the Zappeion teachers represented this new form of femininity. Their social prestige was neither stable nor given; it was rather an object of constant negotiation, which was often conducted in gendered terms. The Zappeion teachers were perceived as proof of the interaction with the west and, at the same time, they constituted the connective links of a network which bonded the literate community of the Greek state with the Ottoman and the wider Balkan regions. On a personal level, and despite the conflicts over prestige that took place in their professional environment, these women invested a great deal in their vocation, since it was their job that offered financial support to their families and helped them climb the social ladder.

The third chapter brings to light a particularly innovative subject, for Greek historiography at least: it studies an emotion, love, within the framework of the middle-class family. Kanner bases this enquiry on the letters exchanged between Sotiria and Ioannis Alibertis, before

and after their marriage, an ideal material to investigate the ways in which the fragile language of emotions describes and constitutes human relationships. At this point, Kanner argues that the aspects that set the terms of their relationship, as they emerge from their letter exchange, invoke romantic love, a spiritual relationship par excellence. Romanticism contributes to the construction of individuality, as it is opposed to the notion of the social. Ioannis and Sotiria proceed with a rational planning of their future, seeking to start a nuclear family and climb the social ladder. Romantic love is, by definition, the privilege of intellectuals, one that differentiates them from the rest of society. Moreover, it is the field where the inner self is expressed and thus the need to control one's emotions arises. The deep communication that was established between the couple comprised an emotional shelter. It is within this context that the importance of the nuclear family emerges as an antidote to the harshness of the world of the market as well as the instability caused by the newly established national economy. However, the pursuit of spiritual communication in marriage is not only desired by Greek Orthodox women, but by other ethnoreligious groups in Ottoman Empire and the wider Balkan region as well.

In the fourth chapter, Kanner engages with several feminist initiatives. Some of them are already known and studied in the Greek context, namely *Efimeris ton Kyron* [*Ladies' Newspaper*] and the *Enosi ton Ellinidon* [Union of Greek Women], while others, such as *Ergani Athena* [Industrious Athena] and *Panelinios Syllogos Gynaikon* [Panhellenic Association of Women], are systematically explored for the first time. The extensive participation of – mainly educated – middle-class women in these actions is perceived as a systematic and conscious attempt to establish a distinct social pole against bourgeois women. At this

point, Kanner confirms older findings of Greek historians of gender, namely the fact that the diverse collective activities in which middle-class women were involved impeded them to constitute a cohesive, collective identity; in other words, to form gender consciousness. Kanner, in particular, most clearly extends the ideal of the self-made man to the female gender and documents the self-made woman. This is a particularly significant contribution, presenting the educated working woman as active and conscious in the private as well as in the public domain.

In the last chapter, social networks and travelling concepts theories methodologically underpin Kanner's creative and innovative examination of the *Efimeris ton Kyrion* and *Ergani Athena*, as the outcome of a multilayered communication among men and women in the Ottoman Empire, the Balkans and the west. On the one hand she includes them in a generalised dialogue around the women's question which is conducted in the "east"; on the other hand she examines the underlying changes that occur within each separate ethnoreligious group. Since the reformation period, all ethnoreligious groups of the Ottoman Empire participated in the public debate on the women's question, albeit without expressing their views equally audibly and radically throughout time. Concepts such as the "women's question", "feminism", "society" and "nation" travelled on the basis of common ideological references and underwent multiple transformations in relation to the diverse environments in which they were repostulated. At this point, Kanner's adept analysis shows how this dialogue and the meanings it mobilised were linked to wider political questions, as they were shaped in distinct areas of the Balkans and the Ottoman state, primarily in relation to the growth of national movements (310 onwards). In this context, it was Bulgar-

ian and Armenian women who emerged as early radicals. The significance of the connection of the women's question to wider political objectives becomes more evident from 1908 onwards when the women's press radicalised its positions.

Before concluding this review, some crucial questions need to be mentioned. The first one involves the precise ways by which we link small stories to the big ones in historical narratives. The quest for this link, an absolutely correct, not to mention necessary, one, is particularly evident in this work. However, the suggested resolutions are not always persuasive. Let me make this suggestion clearer: when one works with texts which bear the sign of the personal (as private correspondence does), one needs to clearly declare the standpoint from which one is approaching the central question of "representativity". In other words, one needs to legitimise or/and account for the shift to broader interpretations that transcend the microcosm of the subjects in question, and can be subsumed into broader interpretative schemes. There are obviously many roads to Rome and Kanner resolves this question following the historiographical tradition of microhistory, which she defines as a study of the ways in which "individuals produce the social", following Roger Chartier's reasoning (26). However, her bidirectional reductions – from the small story to the big story and vice versa – often constitute logical leaps. This is particularly the case when a number of the thoughts and behaviours documented in the letters she studies are collectively and without intermediate stages or alternative interpretations reduced to the imperatives of the culture of the Enlightenment, usually to the ideal of rationality and the faith in personal merit. In short, what is often missing from her work is the intermediate links which make this process coherent, the detours, the crossroads, the

deviant routes... As a result, the inclusion of the small story (the history of Sotiria and her world) in the big story (the history of the impact of Enlightenment ideas on the wider Balkan region in the nineteenth century) sometimes gives the impression of being a big deviation or an unjustified generalisation.

For instance, the relationship which Ioannis Alibertis and Sotiria gradually build up is attributed to the effects of romanticism and to romantic love. In my assessment it is directly reminiscent of the (middle-class) companionate marriage model, a powerful one during this age and thereafter. In that sense, the relationship's contents, as documented in the letters that the couple exchanges (186: a feeling of identification, mutual appreciation, emotional expression, constitution of a common front for the confrontation of life's difficulties) are, more or less, indications of the internalisation of the era's dominant discourses. What is more, I believe that a comparative analysis with the era's normative discourses around the form that familial and conjugal relations had would have been more productive than the reduction to the ideals of romanticism. The repetition of one of the basic concepts of the book, namely the reinforcement of individuality, and the role of reason as a tool for social climbing (192 *passim*) rather intensifies this uneasy feeling of a deficient connection than proves its veracity.

Let me turn to the second question that preoccupied me while reading Kanner's book, which has to do with the use of personal correspondence in historical research or, paraphrasing J.L. Austin, *how people do things with letters*. I will take most of my examples from the third chapter, which engages with romantic love in middle-class families, and which, in my opinion, is the most innovative and interesting part of the book. Although Kanner is innovative in using

private letters in her work, she is often led to a literal reading of the texts, which I would attribute to the absence of a systematic theoretical and methodological questioning of the practice of epistolarity. For instance, it is not always clear whether the narrative voice belongs to the considered subjects or the author, since their voices often identify with each other. The bibliography, which from a historical point of view engages with questions concerning self-writing, life writings or autobiographics – to mention just a few terms that have been suggested by scholars – has been prolific in the past two decades. Within this framework, historians now take the textual, narrative and fictional dimensions of epistolarity into serious consideration. However, Kanner sometimes seems to be reading the letters through a lens of truth and sincerity; that is as if she were looking into a world of original, unmediated meanings through an open window. This viewpoint becomes already evident in her first references to epistolarity as a "genre", when she declares that in the letters she uses as sources "there is not the problem of concealment" of truth (93). Actually, underestimating the criterion of the constructedness of reality (of the self, the other, the relation that links one to another, the world that surrounds them, and so on), sometimes leads her either to perceive everything that is said as an objective, unassailable truth or to subsuming it as granted to the interpretative scheme of individualism and romanticism that informs the study. Epistolary discourse has been systematically linked to the process of the constitution of the self. Indeed, Kanner explicitly declares (190) that the exchange of letters between Sotiria and Ioannis contributes to the further emergence of their individuality. Yet, the constitution of the self is a much more complex, ambivalent and persistent process than what is implied in the book, as Kanner most of the time links it to the emergence of individuality, which is often restricted to the strategies de-

veloped by subjects in order to achieve the constantly desired social climbing. The emphasis on individuality and on the overbearingly conscious and ceaseless effort to serve personal interests is sometimes more reminiscent of arrivism rather than of the constitution of the self (for example, 112–115).

Epistolarity has its own history; it is a social and cultural practice and thus needs to be placed in wider contexts as such. In this sense, Kanner interprets expressions like “I kiss you softly” or “I kiss your lips and eyes” as potent evidence of sexual desire (200). However, it is possible for one to encounter such wordings in a great number of nineteenth-century family letters addressing by no means sexual partners exclusively. In other words, they are standardised hearty letter greetings, not only recommended for family letters by the most renowned model correspondence books of the era, but also actually used in letters throughout the nineteenth century. What is more, all the characteristics of the couple’s letters listed on p. 201 in order to be consequently attributed to the constitution of the romantic self are, in fact, common characteristics of epistolary discourse and practice.

Let me conclude this review with some thoughts, by way of a dialogue, on romantic love, one of the main analytical concepts Kanner uses in examining the relationship between Sotiria and Ioannis. I presume, hopefully not mistakenly, that the phrasing of “romantic love” belongs to the author herself, since no reference to love as sexual affection/desire (*eros*, see below), love as emotional affection, let alone romantic love, can be found in the extensive citations of letters included in the edition. It rather seems that the only reference Aliberti makes to romanticism is a belittling one, as she equates it to cowardice and indecisiveness (205), a fact that Kanner herself comments on.

I feel that “romantic love”, as exposed in the considered analysis, arguably triggers some questions concerning the comprehension of the particular emotion. For instance, Kanner’s romantic love as an exclusive prerogative of intellectuals (191, 197) and as an emotion emanating from the impact of romanticism, is represented as contributing to the structuring of individuality and to the individual’s self-placement against the hostile society. The couple who are romantically in love with each other, bearing the objective of starting a nuclear family and climbing the social ladder, plan their future based on rationality, which is also a key characteristic of (western) Enlightenment culture (indicatively, 202 *passim*). Nevertheless, this enclosed scheme, i.e. the exclusive connection of “romantic love” with the enlightened west, automatically exempts all non-western subjects (whatever may be signified by that term in each case), an exception which, according to other comparative historical studies (Goody, 2010), has been proven arbitrary.¹ Similarly, the privileging connection between “romantic love” and intellectuals indeed exempts all the other social categories. Finally, I wonder whether the naming of this emotion is a word-for-word translation of the English term “romantic love”. In Greek, there are two different words available to signify the main two meanings of “love”, namely *eros* (sexual affection/desire) and *agapi* (emotional affection). On the contrary, in English there is one noun (love) signifying both feelings, which is the reason why the attributive adjective “romantic” accompanies the noun “love”, in order to signify sexual affection in distinction to emotional affection.² In this sense, a word-for-word translation of “romantic love” in Greek is a redundancy, which can easily lead to exaggerated interpretations of the term.

A final observation that the book series editor and the publisher should take note of: typing

errors are among the very few features of a book for which the author bears no responsibility. Quite obviously, the need to reduce costs led to the decision that the text should not be edited by a professional proofreader. As a result, the reader's attention is constantly distracted by typographical oversights. I hope that in the book's second edition, which I fervently wish for, the necessary proofreading will not be neglected.

Nevertheless, such omissions do not detract from an otherwise important study that persuasively reorients its field. Its comparative perspective in particular provides a new insight into the formations and transformations of women's initiatives and movements in the Ottoman, Turkish and wider Balkan territories. Kanner's study is a rich book offering fresh knowledge and is open to critique and dialogue, as it constantly raises new questions. In other words, it is an intellectually challenging work.

NOTES

- 1 Jack Goody, "Love and religion: comparative comments," in Luisa Passerini, Liliana Ellena and Alexander C.T. Geppert (eds), *New Dangerous Liaisons: Discourses on Europe and Love in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Berghahn, 2010, 21–32.
- 2 William M. Reddy, "The rule of love: the history of western romantic love in comparative perspective", in Passerini, Ellena and Geppert (eds), *New Dangerous Liaisons*, 33–57.

Choman Hardi

Gendered Experiences of Genocide: Anfal Survivors in Kurdistan-Iraq

Farnham: Ashgate, 2010. xii + 217pp.

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Conceptualising the situation of Anfal surviving women must involve an appreciation of the dialectic involved in each moment. Survival confronts victimisation. Creation faces up to destruction. Voice talks down to silence. Reconnectivity bridges dislocation. (197)

Choman Hardi's book addresses the aforementioned dialectics, which became part and parcel of what constituted life for women survivors of the "Anfal campaign". The term Al-Anfal, taken from the eighth chapter of the Qur'an, literally means the "spoils of war" (14), as the author denotes in the first chapter. Hardi explains that this term remains mostly unknown in the western world, even though it became associated in 1988 with the horror caused by a military operation launched by Saddam Hussein, which mainly targeted Kurdish and non-Muslim villages in six different geographical areas in northern Iraq. The Anfal operation lasted for six-and-a-half months, from February to September 1988, and entailed mass offensives, aerial bombings, chemical warfare, the destruction of buildings and water resources, and the looting of property; leading to mass deportation, hunger, poverty, illness, psychological and physical trauma as well as vast numbers of deaths and disappearances.

During the eight stages of this operation, people were forced to flee from their villages. If