

Historein

Vol 19, No 2 (2021)

From the Greek Revolution of 1821 to the Metapolitefsi: Historiographical Debates in Greece across Two Centuries



Konstantina Zanou, Transnational Patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800–1850: Stammering the Nation

Christine M. Philliou

doi: [10.12681/historein.24179](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.24179)

Copyright © 2021, Christine M Philliou



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Philliou, C. M. (2021). Konstantina Zanou, Transnational Patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800–1850: Stammering the Nation. *Historein*, 19(2). <https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.24179>



Konstantina Zanou,
Transnational Patriotism in the
Mediterranean, 1800–1850:
Stammering the Nation

Christine Philliou

doi: 10.12681/historein.24179

To cite this article:

Philliou, Christine. 2021. "Konstantina Zanou, *Transnational Patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800–1850: Stammering the Nation*". *Historein* 19 (2).
<https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.24179>.

Konstantina Zanou, *Transnational Patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800–1850: Stammering the Nation*

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 272 pp.

Christine Philliou

University of California, Berkeley

For many, the bicentennial of the Greek War of Independence has been an occasion for nationalist self-congratulation and uncritical celebration, reinforcing the assumptions and exigencies of the national history that Greeks know so well. For scholars, and for historians in particular, this is instead the opportunity to reflect, reconsider and reappraise not only the war of independence itself, but the significance, specificities, context and consequences of modern Greek statehood, achieved after a decade of military and political conflict. Konstantina Zanou's 2018 *Transnational Patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800–1850: Stammering the Nation* is an interesting and important book to think with about these issues. Like the best revisionist histories, it takes us outside the confines of national history, but only just outside, so that we can gain a different perspective on the Greek national project in its early and, as she shows us, indeterminate years of intellectual and political formation. Rather than problematising the eastern flank of the Greek world and looking at Greek life in the Ottoman Empire, she takes us west, to the interface between things, and thoughts Greek and Italian (and British and Russian and Austrian) in a larger context of Enlightenment and Restoration. Her goal, we may presume, is encapsulated in the book's subtitle, *Stammering the Nation*, for the focus of her study was a generation of itinerant writers and poets trying out new and different affiliations, unsure of itself, and not yet belonging to neatly delineated national canons, whether Greek or Italian. While the book is not concerned directly with the politics of the age, it is implicitly an attempt to grasp the predicament of intellectuals that would eventually be implicated in those politics.

Zanou's is an intellectual history, taking up a series of individuals and juxtaposing their itineraries, biographies, sensibilities, affiliations and works. Her method is both exciting, and a mirror of her argument: she presents us with a new intellectual geography, which is the post-Venetian Adriatic, running alongside and between the processes of consolidation of Italy and Greece as nation-states in the first half of the nineteenth century. She uses a language of theatre to lay out her study. She sets the "stage" by describing this post-Venetian space as a space of protracted flux, where states fell (Venice: 1797; 1798; 1800; 1807) and rose (Italy) and were created ex nihilo (Heptanesian Republic; Kingdom of

Greece), all against the backdrop of the diffuse umbrella of Venice, now fading from the scene but leaving an important imprint on intellectual life and affiliations. New states enter the fray to effect and influence the flux: Russia, tipping the balance towards Orthodox Christians and away from Catholicism; Britain, always attempting to counteract Russia; Napoleonic, and then post-Napoleonic France. In other words, we are looking at the greater Adriatic region in the paradoxical age of European Restoration, where liberalism and monarchy tensely coexisted, and where nationalism had not yet fully formed as a comprehensive set of political, intellectual, cultural, and institutional projects.

The main characters of the drama are an array of “transnational patriots”, a deliberate contradiction in terms. They all operate, migrate, think, translate and compose literature in this ambiguous space between the incipient nation-states of Greece and Italy. The study is divided into four parts, or acts, to follow the analogy of a theatrical production. First, Zanou takes up three poets from the island of Zakynthos, all of whom had important connections to both Greek and Italian language and culture, and each of whom was later claimed by one or the other nation-state, becoming deeply ingrained in the respective national consciousness of Italy and Greece. These are Ugo Foscolo (1778–1827), claimed by Italy; and Andreas Kalvos (1792–1869) and Dionysios Solomos (1798–1857), claimed by Greece, and the latter even the author of a poem that became adopted as the Greek national anthem. The more indoctrinated one is into the Italian or Greek national identity, the more arresting Zanou’s story of cultural and linguistic indeterminacy is, and the more urgent the task becomes to confront the disjunctures and erasures of both national canons.

Part Two, “Imperial Nationalism between Religion and Revolution”, takes us on a different tour, to “an intellectual environment that developed within a geographical and cultural zone spanning the Ionian Islands, the Danubian Principalities, and Russia” to show us “a trend of thought in the post-Napoleonic years which was deeply religious and counter-revolutionary, devoted nonetheless to philhellenism and to the Greek revolution” (69). With these words she sets off, exploring the attempt among some intellectuals between the Heptanesian islands and Russia to square Greek nationalism with the “Christian ecumene and the traditional world of empires” (70). In this act, Phanariots, having fled from their homes in the Danubian Principalities and Istanbul to Russia, such as the Stourdza family, even make a cameo appearance, allowing us to draw connections from the Ottoman to the Venetian spheres of Greek life.

Part Three, “Memoirs of Lives Suspended between Patrias”, turns to the question of narration and self-fashioning for diasporic intellectuals who were not folded into any national canon, but instead erased from history. Finally, Part Four, “Intellectuals as ‘Bridges’ across the Sea”, brings us to the resolution of the indeterminacy, which is also the breach between the categories of Italian and Greek, in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. The protagonist in this final act is Andreas Mustoxidis, who made the transition “from Italian to

Greek letters”, and served under the Kapodistrian administration in Greece as the first ephor. Zanou juxtaposes his story with the denouement of the Greek community of Venice, and the effort by Mustoxidis and others to document the intellectual life and achievements of Greeks before the nation-state, adding a layer of national consciousness and construction of history, and ending with the project to conceptualise a national history before the nation-state, which we are now so familiar with. Zanou certainly achieves her goal of providing us with a vivid portrait of a world – the Venetian Adriatic just after the fall of Venice – in flux, of intellectuals on the move who had not worked out who they were and where they belonged because there was – still – no nation-state with which to affiliate, or at least not one that yet demanded their singular allegiance. What role these intellectuals may have had, or not had, in bringing those nation-states into being is not addressed, nor does it seem to be part of the project of this book to address.

Politics make up the backdrop to Zanou’s drama, but one wonders if lived politics could be brought into the plot of the performance more forcefully. What, after all, determined these intellectuals’ choices to move when and where they did? Kapodistrias, we all know, was steeped in the politics of the Great Powers, and embedded within the Russian administration as well as British Heptanesia, before his arrival in the new Republic of Greece. We do not get a sense of what those politics meant – and whether, perhaps, politics across all of these states was more similar than different if the same person could flourish in each of them in succession. We only get a sense of flux and indeterminacy, of wanderings and exiles, and of subsequent claims on these men and their ideas from nation-states more well-defined. Politics is elided with political sensibilities, or with protoideology (romantics, liberals, conservatives) rather than discussed as an arena of power, conflict and hierarchy. Zanou does make the very convincing case, however, that this world of intellectuals and writers was thriving, and implicated many figures, some of whom walk on and off stage quickly, others of whom pause under the spotlight for many pages. And it is striking how lost that world became after the consolidation of the Greek and Italian nation-states – Zanou likens the Adriatic to a “sunken world”, and she brings it back to life very forcefully.

One of the larger questions this book forces us to consider is: Where is Greece? Not in the sense of the geography of the Greek Kingdom or even of political imaginary, but that of literary and cultural imaginary. Certainly the reality of the diminutive Greek Kingdom did not embody the entirety of Greece in the imagination. And that Greece, too, was not just the Greece of the Megali Idea, focusing always eastward towards Constantinople and the resurrection of a Byzantine imperium. Instead, there was a quieter corner of the Greek cultural imagination, perhaps even a distant remnant of Greco-Roman world before even the Ottomans, Byzantines or Venetians laid claim to the Mediterranean. The fact that this Greco-Roman, then Greco-Italian confluence continued all the way until the 1850s is unsurprising, only if one remains outside the confines of national histories and canons on either side of the modern divide between Greek and Italian.

Overall, Zanou's book is an important contribution to conversations about Greek – and Italian – nation-state formation and national canon formation, the relationships between politics and culture therein, but also to larger debates about the unity and diversity of the Mediterranean world, the meanings – political and cultural – of liberalism in the first half of the nineteenth century, and to transnational study of the Adriatic region, implicated in some histories and fully contained in none. And the vehicle she uses to make interventions in all of these conversations is the – somewhat tragic, and certainly melancholic – figure of the itinerant intellectual, wandering, exiled, sometimes in the service of one or another state, and caught between all of them, but fortunately (for us) writing about his trials along the way. Her argument does not threaten the fundamentals of Greek or Italian national history or identity so much as complicate them by decentring them at the moment of their inception. And for that reason one would hope her findings will be generative for the conversations commemorating the start of the Greek Revolution 200 long years ago.