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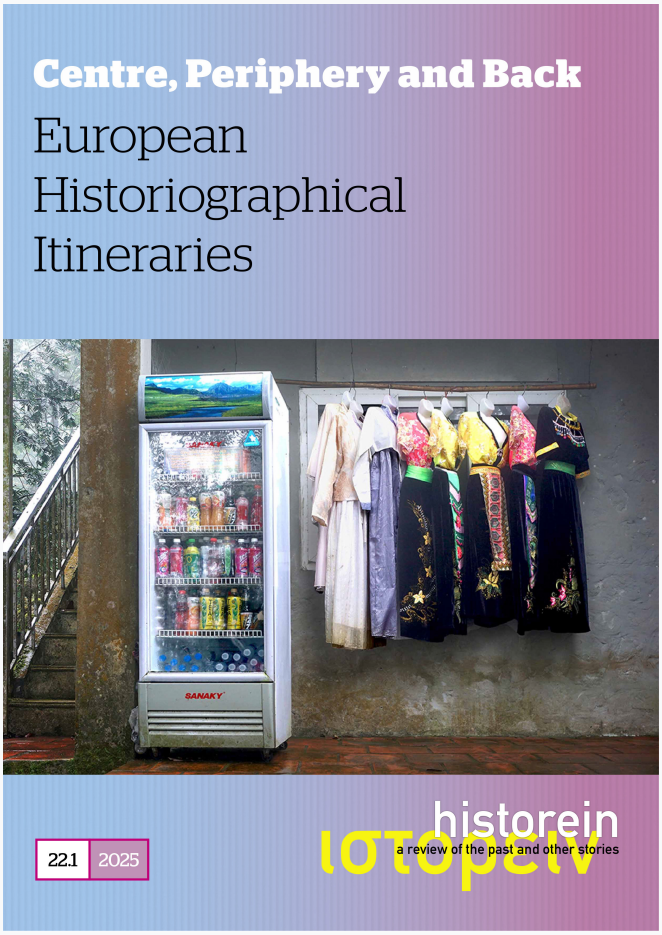

Review of Effi Gazi, Άγνωστη χώρα: Ελλάδα και Δύση στις αρχές του 20ού αιώνα

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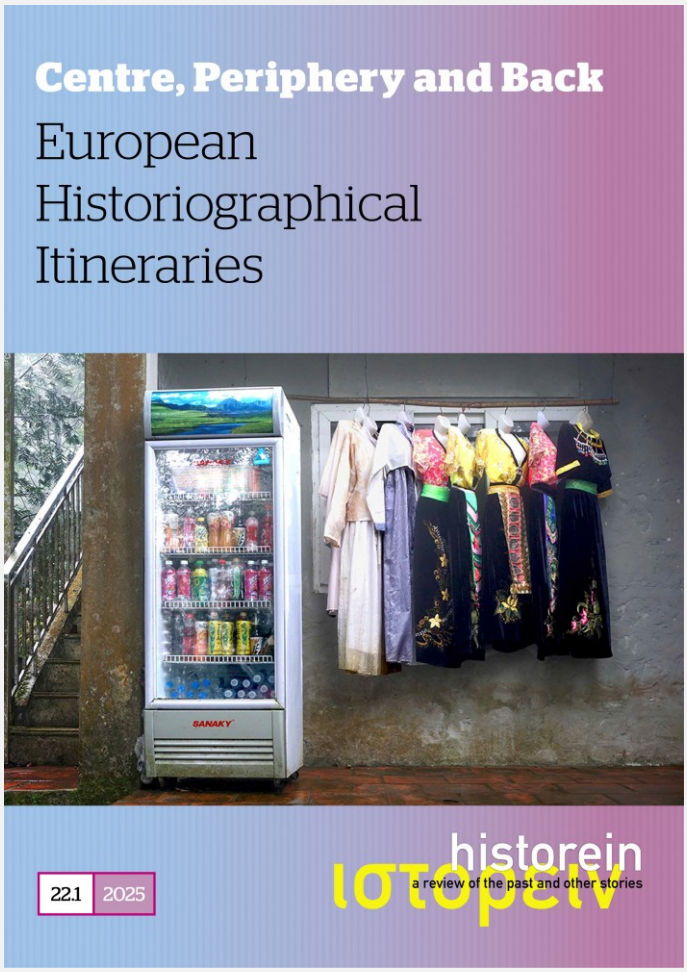

Effi Gazi, *Άγνωστη χώρα: Ελλάδα και Δύση στις αρχές του 20ού αιώνα* [Unknown country: Greece and the West at the beginning of the 20th century]

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Effi Gazi

Άγνωστη χώρα: Ελλάδα και Δύση στις αρχές του 20ού αιώνα

[Unknown country: Greece and the West at the beginning of the 20th century]

Athens: Polis, 2020. 368 pp.

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Effi Gazi has a notable track record of significant studies in nineteenth- and twentieth-century intellectual history, where the analysis of the Greek case tends to be at least partially informed by the knowledge of international phenomena. In her latest book, the position of Greece in a transnational setting provides not only analytical tools but the very subject of examination. Its pithy title ("Unknown country"), which is taken from a namesake 1899 article by Pericles Yannopoulos, is unpacked in the subtitle as a question of national self-awareness that was tackled in the early twentieth century by means of interrogating Greece's relation to the West.

The book can be placed in the research area of the turn-of-the-century intellectual history of Greek nationalism. Scholarly discussion of this area, which started in earnest in the early post-junta period,[1] appears to be picking up some steam again.[2] The ideational production of the few years around the turn of the century played an outsized role in the cultural and ideological development of the hundred years or so that followed. Those few years were also permeated with similar questions of identity and relation with Europe as the ones that have pressingly resurfaced recently. Is the relation one of participation or subordination? Is Greece part of Europe or the Other of Europe? And if the relationship between Europe and Greece is one of difference, which one is higher in the hierarchy of value that the notion of difference tends to entail in binary conceptualisations?

The book sets out to explore a set of ideas on the relationship between Greece and Europe, East and West, that were articulated around the fin de siècle. In this exploration, three major intellectual figures of the period are taken as case studies: Argyris Eftaliotis (1849–1923), Pericles Yannopoulos (1869–1910) and Ion Dragoumis (1878–1920). While acknowledging their differences, Gazi sees the intellectuals she brings together in this monograph as figures that co-shaped a particular ideological trend characterised by opposition to the mimicry of Occidental models, a quest for a distinct Neohellenic

civilisation/culture, and the reappraisal of the Great Idea. In her analysis, she links these ideas to earlier domestic political, religious, and cultural critiques of the West and to contemporaneous ideological developments within the West itself.

The main part of the monograph has a tripartite structure, with a long chapter for each of the three case studies. It starts with Eftaliotis ("Histories of Romanity," 27–121), moves on to Yannopoulos ("The Greek Line," 125–97) and concludes with Dragoumis ("Hellenism and the Greeks," 201–98). Each chapter is divided into three sections that usually tackle a distinct bundle of ideas constellating around crucial notions and conceptual pairs like xenomania, Hellenism and Greeks, and empire vs protectorate, or specific works such as Eftaliotis' *Ιστορία της Ρωμιοσύνης* (History of Romanity, 1901) and Yannopoulos' *Νέον Πνεύμα* (New spirit, 1906).

More specifically, the first chapter looks at Eftaliotis' critique of xenomania and his attempt to promote an idealised Greekness. Eftaliotis' love for the homeland remains a love from afar, a mythicisation caught between nostalgia and imagination. Despite his critique of the West, he is not only influenced by Western thinkers such as Ernest Renan, Hippolyte Taine and Maurice Barrès but he chooses to stay abroad even when his professional activity does not require him to do so. Particularly Renan, Yiannis Psycharis' father-in-law, is discussed at length, while the chapter moreover goes into Eftaliotis' embeddedness in Greek diasporic networks, his overall "patriotic work" with a focus on the *History of Romanity*, and the reception of that work in Greece.

Among the three case studies, it could be argued that it is this first one which stands out as a subject matter. Most monographs dealing with the intellectual landscape of turn-of-the-century Greece, at least over the past few decades, do take up the cases of Yannopoulos and Dragoumis. Eftaliotis, on the other hand, is usually either not examined at all or only examined in the context of the Language Question and his links with Psycharis. Of course, Psycharis is far from absent here as well, but Eftaliotis emerges more clearly as an autonomous intellectual rather than merely being placed in the shadow of a master figure. What is more, the emphasis is not on his linguistic views but on his historiographical endeavours. The inclusion of Eftaliotis in Gazi's discussion of the nationalist ideological ferment of that period is definitely among the main strongpoints of the book.

The second chapter about Yannopoulos starts with articles that the (in)famous nationalist essayist published in 1899 with the penname "Neo-Hellene/Modern Greek" (Νεοέλλην), which itself is a springboard for a discussion of his ideological composition. The chapter delves into Yannopoulos' aesthetic ideology and the binaries that constitute it (Greek vs European, culture vs barbarism, nature vs city). A significant portion of the chapter expressly addresses his relevant ideas about space: the Greek land as the foundation of national aesthetics and blueprint for its people, the aesthetic and symbolic value of the landscape, the grounding of culture in the natural environment where it grows,

and so on. The analysis goes again into the Western –primarily French – sources of Greek anti-Westernism but also devotes ample attention to the indigenous lineage of anti-Westernism, focusing on Yannopoulos' own family and the writings of his uncle Manouil Chairetis. For all his foreign influences, Yannopoulos does not simply replicate but creates a fusion of his own. The differences are sometimes spelt out by the author, as in her juxtaposition of Taine's determinism to Yannopoulos' normativity: "Artistic and cultural life was not influenced by Greek nature, nor was it determined by its character. It had to be adapted to it" (152).

Like the entire main part, this chapter can be read in some measure as an autonomous analysis of the case study, supplemented with occasional links to other chapters, which slowly propagate as the book proceeds. For example, a link is made between Yannopoulos and Eftaliotis based on their common assault on xenomania, while the chapter closes with the ideological and personal link between Yannopoulos and Dragoumis.

Dragoumis is at the epicentre of the last chapter of the main part. The chapter revolves around his beliefs on the relations between Greece and the West, nation and state, modern culture and tradition. Many threads make up the tapestry of these relations, but one perhaps could identify two main strands. One is mostly related to how these beliefs take shape and comprises Dragoumis' personal and intellectual contact with Barrès, his networks and experiences within Greek communities of the Ottoman Empire, the (attested or likely) impact of family members, Greek friends and acquaintances. The other regards the manifestation of these beliefs and comprises his attitude towards and reflections on the form of the Great Idea, nationalism and nationism, the disintegration of the Byzantine Empire, the creation of Greek civilisation, dependence on Western powers and imperialism, and, finally, socialism.

It is worth noting that the first line of analysis runs through the book, with both transnational and Greek intellectual "sources" examined primarily from a personal and family perspective. Some indicative examples are the attention paid to the ideas and writings of Renan, with whom Eftaliotis had a personal relationship, partly through Psycharis, Yannopoulos' maternal uncle Manouil Chairetis and Dragoumis' father Stefanos or his friend Athanasios Souliotis-Nikolaidis.

Gazi makes the grade in presenting the transnational networks and flows of ideas that defined these explicitly Hellenocentric intellectuals. Further research could elucidate how the Greek intellectual landscape was not simply rearranged in part by feeding on non-Greek sources but how these reconfigurations fit into a broader international trend that affected many countries around the turn of the century – that is, a modernist revisiting of nationalism which frequently appropriated tools from the very ideological or cultural systems it sought to attack. It is additionally made rather clear that the Hellenocentrism of the intellectuals under examination was coupled with various hues of anti-Westernism, but it would be fascinating to read the author's take on whether all three case studies could be

associated with a particular conceptual model or ideological tradition such as what Michael Herzfeld defines as "Romeic" or what Dimitris Kitsikis labels as the "Eastern camp" (*Anatoliki Parataxi[s]*). Even if these categories (particularly that of Kitsikis) may be considered problematic, engagement with them might have enriched the analysis rather than detracting from it.

As its title indicates, the book tackles Greek attitudes vis-a-vis the West and its models but also spatial categories. Since Greece was seen as subject to a sort of cultural colonialism that had political ramifications, cultural critique was undertaken as a political practice. Pertinently, Gazi claims that "anti-European and anti-Western discourses and argumentations were studied in this book as *mirroring processes* and *mechanisms for contemplating the 'national self'*" (307, emphasis in the original), or, one could say, as a means to search for and map the "unknown land".

In their effort to define this "unknown country" and the identity of its inhabitants, the intellectuals in consideration not only treated space but, moreover, delved into questions of time. It could be argued that their entire project aimed at national regeneration in the present – a quest that tied in with the wider goal of *Anorthosi(s)* that permeated public discourse around the same years. Present regeneration was predicated on a renegotiation of the national past and the charting of a different road map for the future of Greek society and the Greek state. Gazi pays particular attention to their ideas and writings on history and the different eras they chose to focus on – usually shifting the centre of gravity from the classical to the Byzantine and post-Byzantine past. This is because she rightly sees their approach to the past as a core issue of national identity. In keeping with the nationalist standpoint from which they attacked cultural colonialism, these intellectuals did not seek to *tout court* tear down the discursive construction of Greece on the basis of an idealised past. Instead, they sought to replace the Western-imposed stranglehold of classical Greece with another mythicised time in "national history", that is, Byzantium, a point which could have been further addressed in the book.

While the intellectuals under consideration resorted to alternative "usable pasts" and views on the relation of Greece to the West, their contribution was mostly in that they constituted themselves alternative "usable pasts". Their impact, Gazi seems to argue, was rather diachronic than synchronic.

If there is something in which the book particularly falls short, it is the engagement with the literature on imagined geographies and postcolonialism. Gazi employs the term "cultural colonialism" from early on (with the word "colonialism" enclosed in quotation marks) but does not grapple with it adequately, while she mentions the term "cryptocolonialism" only in a footnote in the epilogue (304). Although at points her analysis is reminiscent of relevant concepts, there is no explicit application of such a conceptual framework. For instance, the following sentence could be read against a much-debated

concept in postcolonial theory, that of hybridity, but the term is absent: “Appropriation was an active and creative process, with interesting as well as oftentimes unexpected admixtures, osmoses, adjustments and resignifications” (305).

Like most of Gazi’s writings, this book makes for pleasant reading. Unlike her previous monographs, it is less dense in jargon. As such, it serves as an accessible introduction to the period and the questions under consideration.

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[1] For example, Gerasimos Augustinos, *Consciousness and History: Nationalist Critics of Greek Society, 1897–1914* (Boulder: East European Quarterly, distributed by Columbia University Press, 1977); Dimitris Tziovas, *The Nationism of the Demoticists and its Impact on Their Literary Theory (1880–1930): An Analysis Based on Their Literary Criticism and Essays* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1986).

[2] For example, Pantelis Voutouris, *Ιδέες της σκληρότητας και της καλοσύνης: Εθνικισμός, σοσιαλισμός, ρατσισμός (1897–1922)* [Ideas of cruelty and kindness: Nationalism, socialism, racism (1897–1922)] (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2017); Paraskevas Matalas, *Κοσμοπολίτες εθνικιστές: Ο Μωρίς Μπαρρές και οι ανά τον κόσμο “μαθητές” του* [Cosmopolitan nationalists: Maurice Barrès and his “disciples” around the globe] (Iraklio: Crete University Press, 2021).