

ROUNDTABLE: TRANSNATIONAL PATRIOTISM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN,  
1800–1850

## The Mediterranean Napoleonic Crisis That Did Not End and Got Tongues Wagging

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*Transnational patriotism in the Mediterranean, 1800–1850: stammering the nation.*  
By Konstantina Zanou. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xviii + 248.  
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Konstantina Zanou's *Transnational patriotism in the Mediterranean* starts with the raucous last carnival in Serenissima Venice in 1797 and ends with a café brawl in British Corfu in 1853. Let's just admit it: Zanou is not really drawn to settling subjects. Most of the people encapsulated in the pages of her book remembered the Venetian empire as it parted its way to demise, and almost all of them watched the Napoleonic wars throw their Ionian islands back and forth between Russian, French, British, Ottoman, and Habsburg imperial guardianship. This dizzying experience set her characters loose, leading most of them to disperse around the Mediterranean and much of Europe, looking for a way to make a Greek home out of these imperial fractures.

This is a special story, a story that has been covered up under tales of sick men of Europe, national liberation campaigns, and all the violence and corruptions that those stories entailed. It is also a special story because it recentres the timeline drastically of how empires started tottering towards constitutions and nation-states, putting a different heart to the springtime of peoples narrative. For Zanou, it is not the Paris sneezes of the 1830s and 1840s, but instead the Bourbon upsets and Carbonari schemers of the 1820s that changed and reshaped the history of Europe. This is significant because these 1820s disruptions are usually discussed as failed, fumbling 'proto' campaigns of what would later come to be, rather than as consequential rumblings in their own right. Put in a different way, if many historians are now arguing that the First World War did not end when treaties were signed, in many similar (though less paramilitary) ways Zanou's book shows that the Napoleonic wars did

not really end with the Congress of Vienna either – at least not for the Mediterranean.<sup>1</sup>

Zanou's book is not just a special story because it is one that we have not been telling; it is an important one because it answers some key questions whose prior answers never really made much sense. After reading this beautifully written collection of comparative, contextualized, cross-continental biographies, I think I have fewer of those nagging interrogatives surrounding the Greek revolution that haunt me every time I prepare my lectures on the early nineteenth century: 'Why did the Greek revolution happen so early?'; 'Why were some in Britain so stubbornly Philhellenist?'; 'In what sense are Russian military officers in present-day Romania a Greek revolution?'; 'Why is Kapodistrias the father of a nation?' For purely selfish reasons, I am glad that this book is around, so that I can awe my students a little more – surely one of the most enjoyable parts of teaching if we are being honest about it. And the fact that I can do so through telling the stories of people in the world rather than relying on broad, abstract concepts and impersonal forces like 'religion', 'Western civilization', and 'warships' will undoubtedly make my students want to send Zanou some flowers. Actually, now that I think of it, maybe they would send her some hate mail, as many of my students really love the warships arguments, to my ever-increasing distress.

But what I most appreciate about this book is how it has helped to confront a problem that troubled me during the research for my first book.<sup>2</sup> The conundrum was the following: why was Corfu treated as a hallmark for Adriatic multi-nationalism, only then to be transformed into a representation of its hell? This is a question that has long needed me. But I say this not to suggest that Zanou's thesis is one that I had already conceived. Quite the contrary. I bring this up because throughout my Dalmatian, Triestine, and Venetian sources there are traces of the world she has brought to life. Traces, but ones that I found incomprehensible. It is a testament to Zanou's creativity, her research skills, and her capacious imagination that she draws our attention to places as far apart as St Petersburg, Naples, and Livorno, and underscores the importance of processes such as the Orthodox enlightenment or the bashful stammering of creole language practices. Zanou has resolved a geo-structural problem I did not understand and she has done so by bringing the greater Mediterranean vividly to life.

With the exception of Niccolò Tommaseo, the figures whose lives Zanou reconstructs are not the same as those I examined in my work. But her subjects and mine were often best friends, best mentors, or best now-enemies because – as was often the case – egos were too large for friendships to last long. So, in some ways, our two books plunged into intersecting worlds and revealed similar stories. All our subjects wrangled with the promises and problems of multilingualism and nation. However, her research uncovered something else: a deep engagement with – and psychological shame around – 'stammering'.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Gerwarth, *The vanquished: why the First World War failed to end* (New York, NY, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Dominique Kirchner Reill, *Nationalists who feared the nation: Adriatic multi-nationalism in Habsburg Dalmatia, Trieste, and Venice* (Stanford, CA, 2012).

Her analysis of what it meant to write half in the Italian alphabet and half in the Greek alphabet evokes the choices and regrets involved in nationalizing a world of creole languages and transnational attachments. In this sense, her book gives us something I did not see and did not imagine.

It has now been three years since *Transnational patriotism in the Mediterranean* saw the light of day. The book has won many well-deserved awards, and it will hopefully soon appear in paperback, so that we can assign it in our classes. When I think about teaching the book, I am aware that there are certain features that I wish were there: I would like my students to have a bit more space to imagine the people who were not ashamed of their dialects and language practices, those who did not force themselves into stammering, the non-elites whose world so stubbornly did not transform as quickly, passionately, or consciously as Zanou's protagonists wanted it to. No book can do everything, and this book already does much more than most. But for the future, I hope we can delve ever more deeply into seeing the interconnections between the social world unconcerned by national shame and the activist world of those propelled by it. *Transnational patriotism in the Mediterranean* sets us on a course for that, one that hopefully will continue to bear ever richer fruits.

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