



Colonial and Postcolonial Cyprus: Transportal Literatures of Empire, Nationalism, and Sectarianism

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Book Review

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Colonial and Postcolonial Cyprus analyses colonial and postcolonial writings about Cyprus, before and after its independence from the British Empire in 1960. Nunziata uses a postcolonial lens to address Cyprus's history as a "strategically located Mediterranean island that has had a distinct experience of major world events" (Huggan 2). Cyprus is a postcolonial space, an island in the East Mediterranean in between Africa, Asia and Europe; as such it is referred to as being part of the Middle East, ceded by the Ottomans to the British in 1878 and independent with a divided capital since 1960s. Despite 1960 being the year of independence the UK maintains two sizeable military bases on the island, the British overseas territories Akrotiri and Dhekelia. In addition, after the island gained independence, intracommunal conflict broke out between Greek speakers and Turkish speakers still feeling the impact of British divide of politics from the preceded decades. These events culminated in the events of 1974 leaving the island divided by a buffer zone which was in view partial opened in 2003. Most Turkish speakers now live in the north of the island whereas Greek speakers live in the south. Thousands became refugees during this new part of the twentieth century.

The purpose of Nunziata's research was to explore the degree to which Cyprus has adapted to its literary representations. He asks questions about how different writers relate to Cyprus, how they depict the island's past and attempt to predict its future. He examines the language form, genre and translation of Cypriot literature through the lens of postcolonial literary studies to observe the ways that Cypriot history aligns with established theories of the discipline while

also offering contextual differences which forces the readers to reconsider the assumptions of postcolonial Cyprus. While some postcolonial theorists examine the model of the center in relation to the periphery, such as the relationships that the British metropole used to have with a specific colony and post-colony, Nunziata attempts to showcase the ways in which Cyprus has a center-periphery relationship to three metropolitan spaces; the UK, Greece and Turkey. Even though these three nation-states were given the role of guarantor power over the island in 1960, Cyprus has not been fully decolonized. Its cultural production has been largely affected by its colonial status.

In chapter one, British colonial travel logs, inspired by the Prime Minister Benjamin Israeli and his promise to queen Victoria, are analyzed. This language of keys, doorways, gateways and liminality commences a literary history of Cyprus being seen as a transportal location between languages, continents and religions. This is evident in the orientalist travel logs whose writing was in the time of the colonial violence of the 1950s. The first chapter is a significant study because it provides a “fruitful model for understanding other sites of conflict and division” in a globalized world (Nunziata 1).

In chapter two, Nunziata further explores the term ‘transportal’. Many writers connected Cyprus to new forms of travel writing but often in ways to modify the conventions of genre. For this reason, Nunziata coined the term transportal literatures when defining writing about Cyprus. Transportal literatures is the name of the genre typified by a sense of movement, instability and transportation between various states. The works analyzed in the book fall under the ‘transportal literature’ genre, as they explore how colonialism hinders the freedom of the island. Nunziata compares how the kind of privileged movements enacted by British colonial writers is very different from the forced movements of Cypriot refugees from the 1950s- to the 1970s and it is the opposite of the lack of movement created by the division of the communities living in the north and the south. The movement of British colonizers is the antithesis of a non-movement experienced by displacedness, an inability to return to ancestral homes.

In chapter three, Nunziata analyzes the writing of Cypriot writers such as Costas Montis, who use transportal modes of prose to write back to the British imperial discourse. He explores the literature written by contemporary Cypriot writers whose work has been challenged from British colonialism and various nationalist forces making claims on the island today. These writers use transportal motives to represent the trauma of Cypriot refugees and destabilize fixed distinctions between Cypriots based on language, religion, gender or national identity. Nunziata asks why some Cypriot writers compose their writing in English instead of in Cypriot Greek, or Cypriot Turkish to understand how they aim to open up readership to people living on the so-called other side of the buffer zone. This often involves writers forming acts of self-translation in

order to come to terms with whether they see themselves as producers of Cypriot literature for a Cypriot audience or whether they see their work as belonging to other national or linguistic categories of cultural production. Most of the authors discussed in this chapter, use the transnational forms of literature to push against the boundaries of the long division which separates Cypriots along ethnic lines, particularly a line division which has been complicit in sectarian violence for decades. It was vital to Nunziata to introduce Cypriots who speak Greek, or Turkish, or Armenian and to listen to voices from the island's different linguistic communities which are deeply interconnected but often severely divided.

Nunziata concludes by showing the points of commonality between contemporary Cypriot authors and the use of transnational texts in interrelated ways to combat nationalism. He further builds on the conversation that Yiannis Papadakis has started about the relationship between the politics of the empire and the politics of space. The ultimate aim of Nunziata is to add more attention to Cyprus within pre-existing postcolonial literary studies. This book is unique as it examines the hegemonic relationship Cyprus has with Greece, Turkey and England, metropolitan centers with which it is directly in dialogue with. This intricate relationship is explored by contemporary Cypriot writers who address Cyprus' unique positioning in order to grapple with their deferred postcoloniality.

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BIO

Marietta Kosma is a second year DPhil student in English at the University of Oxford at Lady Margaret Hall. Her academic background includes a master in English from JSU and a master in Ancient Greek Theater from the University of the Aegean. Her research interests lie in twentieth-century American literature, post colonialism and gender studies. Her research has been published internationally in books as well as peer-reviewed journals and magazines. She has been cited in journal articles and books and presented in academic conferences.