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Women's fatherlands: the polysemy of patriotism during the Greek Revolution

In this paper, I examine discourses on patriotism as these were developed by female thinkers who described themselves as *Hellenides* at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Focusing on a set of diverse sources (translations, memoirs, treatises, correspondence), I will reconstruct their understanding of what their fatherland was, where Greece was, and who belonged to the Greek *genos*. My aim is to show how the intellectual worlds of the Greek Revolution were much wider than commonly acknowledged, by including women who lived in areas not encompassed in the Greek nation-state after its inception, and who did not necessarily use the Greek language for their writings. Most of these thinkers have been largely disregarded in Greek historiography. Yet, as is often the case at a time of revolution, they were inspired by the possibilities of a new type of polity and convinced that enlightened ideas would offer them inclusion. They imagined a community in which they could craft their own personhood. From Elisavet Martinengou, who lived a life of utter seclusion in her house in Zante, and Evanthia Kairi, who respected contemporary expectations of modesty by never signing her work, to Isabella Teotochi-Albrizzi, the “Queen of Venetian salons” and Roxandra Stourdza, the confidant of the Russian emperor, many different *patrides* emerged in many distinct locations. At the core of these varied conceptualizations of a fatherland lies the polysemic character of patriotism. Greekness was not an exclusive quality. One could lament the fate of the Greek fatherland “under the Ottoman yoke” and a few pages later talk about Russia as their homeland with equal passion and devotion. Because the geographies surrounding them were transforming, so too must we extend our gaze to a broader geographical space to tell the history of these women's Greek patriotism.

This paper thus examines the relationship between gender and patriotism through the methodological lenses of spatial history, women's intellectual history and historical biography. The military, political, and intellectual events in the early nineteenth century took place in and over spaces that were contested and continuously adjusted in the shadow of the power struggles of six empires. Examining the lives and writings of individuals in a time of such radical reconfiguration of political space sheds light on spatial and temporal categories that transgress the strictures of both Eurocentrism and nation-centrism. The Greek Revolution can be contextualized in various frameworks, as recently demonstrated by scholars, including the Age of Revolutions, and the post-Napoleonic era, the Ottoman Empire, Europe, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean. Within this framework, the paper reconstructs women's experiences during the Greek Revolution, drawing on insights from Maurizio Isabella and Konstantina Zanou's research about the early nineteenth century Mediterranean. The result is a nuanced understanding of the relationship between women's lived experiences, their ideas of the nation, and the revolution, as influenced by their positions within webs of gender power relations.

Elisavet Papalexopoulou is a PhD candidate at the European University Institute in Florence and a recipient of the National Greek Grant Authority scholarship (IKY). Her dissertation, supervised by Professor Emerita Ann Thomson, is titled “Tracing the 'political' in women's work: Women of Letters in the Greek cultural space 1800-1832”. Before her PhD, she studied English Language and Literature at the National Kapodistrian University of Athens and completed her MA at the UCL Institute of Education. Her current research focuses on Intellectual History at the Age of Revolutions, with an emphasis on gender. She uses historical and intellectual biographies to contextualize ideas and texts within material circumstances and lived experiences.