

Intersubjective Histories in the Mediterranean and Beyond:  
The Poetics of Self in Postcolonial Autobiography

by

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...μας είπαν “να, τώρα ταξιδεύετε”

Και δεν ταξιδεύαμε.

...μας είπαν “να, τώρα είσαστε αυτό, είσαστε εκείνο”

Και δεν είμαστε ούτε αυτό, ούτε εκείνο...

Κι η ιστορία δεν ήταν ιστορία.

[...they told us, “you are traveling now”

And we were not traveling.

...they told us, “now, you are this, now, you are that”

And we were neither this nor that...

And history was not history].

Costas Montis 1972

But though his power, the given mandate, extended

From tangerine daybreaks to star-apple dusks,

His hand could not dam that ceaseless torrent to dust

That carried the shacks of the poor, to their root-rock music.

Derek Walcott, 1979

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## **Dedication**

It is with the deepest gratitude that I dedicate this work to my beloved parents, Tasos and Ntina. Their experiences inspired me to examine what it means to be silenced by history, while their love and support accompanied me on even my loneliest travels.

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## Abstract

This dissertation brings together autobiographies from the postcolonial nations of Saint Lucia, Cyprus, Palestine/Israel, and Algeria to highlight a rethinking of subjectivity as “islanded” in the Mediterranean and Caribbean contexts. The texts analyzed are “The Schooner *Flight*” and “The Hotel Normandie Pool” (Derek Walcott), *Arabesques* (Anton Shammas), *Women of Kerinia* (Rina Katselli), *Afentis Batistas* (Costas Montis) and *L’Amour, la fantasia* (Assia Djebar). The question it asks is twofold: how autobiography responds to the Mediterranean and the “American Mediterranean” as particular legacies of empire, which are disguised as unions, and what role islands play in these unions. The dissertation engages with a critical reading of the Mediterranean histories of Fernand Braudel and Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell as grand and agentless narratives that efface the individual and instead favor a network of connectivities within which the history of the individual takes place. In this sense, the Mediterranean as a unified space, as posed by these historians, is reconsidered as a colonial category. Unions disguise the exploitation of colonial spaces by emphasizing their need to adhere themselves to unifying political and administrative entities for the sake of their survival. It finds that islands, such as Cyprus and Saint Lucia, have been especially vulnerable entities reinforcing the unionist project of empire. Beyond their geographical definition, islands are metaphors for spaces the empire has constructed as insular and dependent. As a response, the dissertation proposes that islands are the missing links on the chain of Western historical narratives. Autobiography responds poetically to the project of unions by posing the self as a riddle that seeks its own unity. The set of autobiographies analyzed are disguised as fiction and, conversely, history disguised as personal story creatively responding to imperial disguise of unions. They use the power of invention to fuse stories of personal life with national, local, and historiographical stories complicating official historical narratives but also offer a deeper sense of the lived

historical experience of former colonial subjects. It contributes to the exploration of forms of personal history in the Mediterranean and the multiple histories collectively defining the rich, layered patina of life.

# **Chapter 1**

## **History As Life**

### **A Nicosian Sense of History**

In the old town of Nicosia, with its narrow passageways between old houses, one is struck by the many different histories which saturate the present moment. The place is charged with echoes from the past: a bar is a former house, a passageway a former yard. Past and present merge in the lived moment or, rather, the past becomes part of the lived present. Writing the history of the city thus entails writing the subject's own life; and conversely, life writing involves the writing of history. Individual experience shapes the history of a space and vice versa. Interactions with British, Venetians, Frankish, Crusaders, Arabs, Romans, Byzantines, and Greeks in the form of settlement, feudalism, and colonialism have produced a layered backdrop that the living subject experiences at an oblique angle.

The history presented by textbooks is one which left behind an estranging residue of the activities of great conquerors and powers. The Greek Cypriot history textbooks, echoing the historiography of Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos (1815—1891), emphasized an unbroken tradition, a continuity of the past with the present, with ancient Greeks as the

ancestral origin of Greek Cypriots.<sup>1</sup> This (ancient) Greekness became a trans-historical, overarching category which always prevailed over the histories of other rulers, empires and settlements, overlooking the longevity of their settlement in Cyprus.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, official histories of Greek Cyprus echoed the idea of Greece's "destiny as the birthplace of Western civilization, sentinel of liberty and defender of Christianity" (Stephanides 2007, 13). In addition, in the Greek Cypriot history textbooks, the Ottoman Empire was presented as the ultimate enemy of Greeks, both at the center and periphery of mainland Greece. Other neighboring Mediterranean countries and their connections with Cyprus were almost nonexistent; Cyprus was thus isolated from its actual neighbors. In history or in the collective memory, Cyprus came to be seen as having links with great Empires of the West and the East but was not as having been connected to its actual neighbors.

The estranging residue of history—as presented in textbooks—echoed what Sir George Hill (1867–1948), the first historiographer of modern Cyprus, wrote in 1940:

Cyprus has had no continuous history of its own except to some degree the Lusignan period; [its history] is chiefly a . . . reflection from the activities of great powers which from age to age have found it necessary to deal with it on their way to some more important objective [elsewhere]. (Hill 1940, iv)

As Hill's colonial history informs us in its preface, foreign powers have been the protagonists of a Cypriot colonial historiography. Centrally and strategically placed on Mediterranean trade routes from the past to the present, Cyprus bears witness to layers of the past. In this colonial history, the local populations feel like guests. Echoing aspects of

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<sup>1</sup> Historian Ioannis Stephanides describes Paparrigopoulos as "the leading light of Greek historicism, [who] managed to combine the ancient Greek, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman past in a seamless narrative. When Byzantine and Ottoman periods found their place in the nation's history, an underlying hierarchy of the past persisted, which always treated classical antiquity as the golden age of eternal *Hellas*" (Stephanides 2007, 12-3).

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of histories of Cyprus see Papadakis and Hatay 2012 p. 29. For a discussion of history textbooks in Cyprus see Philippou Stavroula (2012).

colonial historiography, the local Cypriot population came to think of itself as a people destined to link to different empires or mainland regions such as, recently, Greece and Turkey. This, in a way, became an inseparable aspect of the Cypriots' islanded identity.

Like their island, Cypriots have been seen for what they had to offer, for what they produced, rather than who they were: as channels and distributors, but otherwise invisible.<sup>3</sup>

In his autobiography, *Afentis Batistas* (1987), echoing in dismay the colonial gaze over the Cypriot subjects, Costas Montis (1914-2004) describes his grandmother in the following way, as if his own gaze has borrowed the colonial framework:

Είναι περίεργο που θυμάμαι όσα συνδέονταν με τη γιαγιά εκτός απ' την ίδια, λες και την απορρόφησαν εκείνα, λες και διανεμήθηκε σ' εκείνα κι έσβησε.

[It is strange that I tend to remember all sorts of things connecting to grandmother except grandmother herself. It is as though those other things absorbed her. It is as though she was distributed in them and erased]. (Montis 1987, 1317 my translation)

The grandmother in this story is like the Cypriots in their colonial history: absorbed by others, distributed and erased. Against this colonial historical backdrop, writers in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, such as Montis, engage with autobiographical modes,

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<sup>3</sup> See indicatively the travelogues by British colonials W.H Mallock, Sir Samuel White Baker, and W. Hepworth Dixon and the ways in which they either dismiss Cypriots completely or perceive them as human labor, taxpayers, or uncivilized. Cypriots, Dixon says, "live on ... like creatures of the lower types, clinging to life for life's own sake ... holding on by simple animal tenacity through tempests which have wrecked the nobler of races" (Dixon 1879, 28). Dixon also portrayed the Cypriots as "natives of the soil" (1879, 25). Another traveler who came to Cyprus at the end of the nineteenth century, Samuel White Baker described Cypriots in the following way: "Cypriots somewhat resembled the frogs in the fable when the king Log arrived with a tremendous splash which created waves of hope upon the surface of the pool, but subsided into disappointment .... The calm apathy of a Cypriote is not easily disturbed; he is generally tolerably sober, or if drunk, he is seldom the "worse for liquor" .... There are no people more affectionate in their immediate domestic circle, or more generally courteous and gentle, than the Cypriotes, but like a good many English people, they have an aversion to increased taxation" (Baker 1879, 404-5 his emphasis). According to Mallock, Cypriots are a "curious specimen." Referring to a woman who was a servant in a house of one of the colonials, he says: "Metaphora is a specimen of a native Cypriote. She is one of our servants .... She was none other than the curious bouncing creature whose ... moments had caught my attention" (Mallock 1892, 191). For a discussion of Mallock's travelogue and his depiction of the Cypriots see my talk at the ACLA 2014 conference.

striving to find a place to articulate their authoritative voices, “to enact the authority to assert themselves and to claim the right to speak” (Smith and Watson 2010, 237) over and above the activities of great powers that colonial and national historiographies feature. They strive for a kind of authenticity—that the story they tell is true (Smith and Watson 2010, 237). These authentic voices represent their experience as they partake in, but also move beyond, colonial history.

In this chapter I begin my discussion with national history and its dependence on European colonial history and move to the critical responses to the institution of national and colonial history by postcolonial critics Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak. I then turn to Mediterranean historiography, and specifically to the histories of Fernand Braudel and Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, to show that these historiographies echo a colonialist mentality of unions and divisions, a distinction which, I argue, has been at the core of European historiography from the past to the present.

### **National and Colonial History**

The history of Cyprus and other nation states that were once part of a sequence of large empires, followed by colonial rule, is a history of their perpetual absorption in, break from, division into, and reabsorption in political, administrative and geographical units, from islands to archipelagos to continental regions to entire continents or supra-continental masses, representing the universality of the imperial mission.<sup>4</sup> Each time

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<sup>4</sup> See for example the African Union (est. 2001), a discussion of which can be found in Timothy Murithi, 2005; the American Union (Bonsal 1912), a discussion of which follows in chapter 2; the European Union;

those sovereign units failed, they were reabsorbed, until in the mid-twentieth century they were granted their own independent state. And when that state failed to actualize or when it was partitioned, as with Palestine/Israel and Cyprus, for example, then another round of efforts to create new units began, this time in the form of re-unification by way of a forced symbiosis of partitioned parts. All these unions, partitions, and re-unifications constitute some of the most complex moments in Western history, which historiographers of different kinds have converted into their own narratives of national or imperial triumph/failure.

Although the distinction between islands and continents seems to be of secondary consequence in a unified world it is, in fact, at the core of the invention of unions. For as we shall see, the idea of union emerges from the moment a colonizer or a ruler travels to a remote place, an island for example, and desires to control it by unifying it with the mainland. This is why the history of islands today constitutes one of the most central components for the delineation of this most uncovered aspect of European history. Islands are at the heart of the colonial project.<sup>5</sup>

In this dissertation, history works on a number of levels simultaneously and distinctly: the national, the colonial, the Mediterranean, and what I am calling individual history. The category of individual history is the history of the self told by the human subject: it is history as life. I discuss this form of history-writing at the end of this chapter and analyze it extensively over the course of my project. This history, with the individual as a historian of today, moves along the lines of Francoise Hartog's idea that "The

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the Atlantic Union (see Atlantic Union Resolution, 1966), the union between France and its previous colonies (1946), the "Grand Idea" in Greece. Also, the United Nations, the Commonwealth, NATO, the G8, and the recent, still in the making, Euro-Mediterranean Union (Barcelona 1995).

<sup>5</sup> See also Christy Constantakopoulou, *The Dance of the Islands: Insularity, Networks, the Athenian Empire, and the Aegean World* (2010).

historian's task is the reading of marks left by forgotten, repressed, aborted past against the background of the present" (Hartog 1994, 2).

National history is the history taught in schools and shared by a group of people who identify with its subjects as a nation. It selects and narrates past events, claiming to define a unified identity and ethnicity. The main thrust of national history, following that of certain traditions of Western historiography, has been to create a linear narrative that would sustain the linkage of past, present and future, aiming in this way to form a universal perception of the progression of national homogeneous time.<sup>6</sup> Such history creates the expectation that whatever happened in the past continues in the present and will do so in the future (Benjamin 1969; Kosseleck 2004; Hobsbawm 1981; Hartog 1994; Anderson 2006). "When the past no longer sheds light on the future, the mind walks in darkness."<sup>7</sup> In the nineteenth century the future was expected to shed light on the past. The future would make sense of the past; it would be the starting-point for the writing of history.<sup>8</sup> History offered a collection of examples for the instruction of readers and primarily of rulers. The general idea was that history was made for those who were supposed to make it (Hartog 1994, 1). From this point of view, Cypriots, for example, began their history as Greeks and therefore are and will always be a Greek nation—and in no sense a Turkish one—just as, conversely, the Turkish Cypriot narrative downplays the Greek past and focuses on preserving the legacy of the Ottoman Empire. As Julien Gracq said, "history has become essentially an ultimatum issued by the future to the

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<sup>6</sup> See Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (2008).

<sup>7</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville in Francois Hartog, "An End and a Beginning," 1994, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Tocqueville, who articulates the quoted phrase here is a witness to this reversal. In order to understand France's past he travelled towards or even into the future, sailing to America to portray the "new" i.e. democratic, society there (Hartog 1994, 1).

present.”<sup>9</sup> This ultimatum, according to Francois Hartog, “also extended to the past and fell on historians...the medium of the ultimatum was national history—the nation having of course been the outstanding phenomenon of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Any history worth the name was bound to reconsider the past in terms of the nation, searching for its origins, celebrating its past and future glories, and all too often surrendering to its mystique” (Hartog 1994, 2).

This notion of national history became the subject of critical debate among Western Marxist philosophers and historians of the twentieth century, who challenged the idea that history unfolds according to certain laws of economics and nature (Young 2004, 55-6, & 110, 112).<sup>10</sup> As an extension of these Eurocentric Marxist philosophies of history, as Robert Young argues, anti-colonial movements developed and “translated Marxism out of its Western framework for the needs of national liberation and the reconstruction for local cultures” (Young 2004, 30). Postcolonial nations, which combat the residue of colonial ventures often unwittingly incorporate colonial ways of understanding history into their national way of thinking about history. During colonialism, many European historians wrote their histories in the colonies, or rather, the histories *of* their colonies (see Sir George Hill as an example). The colonizer, according to Franz Fanon (1925-1961), was making the history of his mother country from a distance, for “he himself [was] the extension of [his] mother country.”<sup>11</sup> This colonial desire for the unity of colony with the motherland/metropolis was actualized in forms of

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<sup>9</sup> Cited in Hartog 1994 p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> These Eurocentric Marxist philosophies of history were given, indicatively, by Sartre, Levinas, Adorno, Lukacs, Althusser, Merleau-Ponty, followed by Derrida, Foucault and eventually by postcolonial theorists Said, Bhabha, Spivak. For a detailed analysis of these debates see Robert Young, *White Mythologies* (2004).

<sup>11</sup> Fanon was caustic: “The history which he writes is not the history of the country which he plunders but the history of his own nation in regard to all that she skims off, all that she violates and starves” (Fanon 1967, 40 cited in Young 2004, 159).

not only colonial history but also of national self-determination. A striking example is that of Cypriot nationalism. The tendency of both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot nationalisms during the 1950s and 1960s was to desire a political union with the respective “motherlands” of Greece and Turkey. As ironic as it may be, the Cypriot anticolonial struggle (1955-59) against the British colonizers, which took the form of a unionist movement of Cyprus with Greece, was, in fact, a reproduction of the colonial discourse of the unity, totality, and universality of history.

Along with Franz Fanon, postcolonial critics Edward Said (1935-2003), Homi Bhabha (1949—), and Gayatri Spivak (1942—) joined in the critique of those colonial historiographical traditions that overshadowed the historiography of postcolonial nations. Edward Said came to criticize the institution of Orientalism, the philological study of the orient by Western scholars, as a de-historicizing project. According to Said, Orientalist scholars constructed their own, derogatory representation of the Orient, under the pressure of forming a universal historical narrative, producing racial and other hierarchies that placed them over and above Oriental subjects and in control of their representation.

Orientalism is a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts...It is...a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases, control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world...Orientalism, has less to do with the orient than it does with “our” world. (Said 1979, 12)

As a response to this orientalizing dehistoricization, Homi Bhabha does not offer “a history of colonial discourse, nor even a simple historical account of it—for such historicization makes the very basis of Europeanizing claims he is trying to invert” (Young 2004, 187). Bhabha also argued for the placing of textual material in its historical moment in order to shift from any single determination of linear development (Young

2004, 187). Moreover, Bhabha extended his argument from history to theory, which, in his determination, needed to be syncretic to avoid the dominant Western paradigm of historicist narrative. A new conception of history must be, according to Bhabha, almost unrecognizable as “history” (Young 2004, 198). Gayatri Spivak shifts the question of history to the question of the effects of the *writing* of history on the present. She suggested that history is not simply the disinterested production of facts, but is rather a process of “epistemic violence” (Spivak 1985a, 250). She pointed out that the imperialist account of history aims to create a narrative of the Third World nations that is “true” not only for the West but for the nations themselves (Spivak 1985b, 243).<sup>12</sup>

### **Mediterranean History**

Mediterranean history is another kind of historical narrative, produced from various perspectives, most recently from those who would move beyond the constraints of national, regional, or modern European history, with its national partitions, to consider the continuous reshaping of large human and other habitats over a vast environmental plane. According to Hartog, Mediterranean history, and Fernand Braudel’s history “is inspired by economists’ models organized as cycles and conjunctures, and is sensitive to the recurrences, the enduring features of history—ending up with different layers of temporality and, with Fernand Braudel’s concept of the *longue durée*, long-term structures and trends” (Hartog 1994, 2).

Within the larger project of a Mediterranean history there lie questions having to do with the projected unity of the Mediterranean, such as: What is the Mediterranean? What are its boundaries? What countries does the Mediterranean include? What elements

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<sup>12</sup> For further discussion of Spivak’s critique of Western historiography, see Robert Young 2004, 199-218.

constitute a Mediterranean culture? Who is Mediterranean? It should be noted that, these questions echo similar ones that pertain to the project of the European Union: Who is European? Who should join the European Union? What elements constitute a European culture? In regard to the Mediterranean union, not yet exactly political, but cultural and geographical, Iain Chambers writes, “If there is a unity in the Mediterranean, it is perhaps a hidden, critical ‘unity’ where the sea itself, as the site of dispersion and drift, exposes the fragility of inherited configurations” (2007, 149). In other words, the geographical fluidity and “connectivity” of the sea tends toward making unions.<sup>13</sup>

The sea has made the vision of the European Union and the pending “Euro-Mediterranean” possible.<sup>14</sup> The fluidity and pervasiveness of its boundaries, has made viable the expansion of European hegemony.<sup>15</sup> The sea is also the reason that historians of the Mediterranean have not only envisioned a Mediterranean unity, but also conceived of the Mediterranean as part of an unbreakable historical continuity from the past to the present, which makes one of the “merit[s] of Mediterranean history” (Horden & Purcell 2000, 326). Because of imaginative and uncertain projections (“Who is Mediterranean?”), the Mediterranean becomes an enabling theoretical category, as it is a geographical one, especially because its history is written, as Horden and Purcell explicitly say, “from the outside in” (2000, 523). Historical narrative and the fluidity of the sea, as connecting the fragmentation of the various Mediterranean topographies, become modes of producing connectivity of those topographies. In this respect historical narrative and the sea are equivalent. As Horden and Purcell reveal:

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<sup>13</sup> A discussion of “connectivity” follows but the term is from Horden and Purcell.

<sup>14</sup> See Stephania Panebianco, *A New Euro-Mediterranean Cultural Identity* (2003) and the official E.U. publication *Euromed Heritage, Creating a Future that Cares for the Past* (2002).

<sup>15</sup> See also Peter Serracino Inglott, “The law of the Sea ...,” 1979.

We have identified extreme topographical fragmentation as one of the two key environmental ingredients—along with the connectivity of the sea itself—in a distinctively Mediterranean history.... The core of Mediterranean history is the control and harmonization of chaotic variability that should manifest in the history of food production. (2000, 123)

Islands, and island colonial imagination, are at the heart of the colonial project as previously said. Rhetorically, too, geography—sea, islands, mainlands—becomes a tool for the expansion of European hegemony, for these geographies are characterized, in their natural sense, by an almost agentless uncontrollability. The sea, for example, is reversible: it can connect but also isolate; it can create proximity but also distance; it can be a rigid border, a buffer zone, but also a fluid means of communication and exchange; it can unify but also divide. The meaning of the sea, of course, depends on the agent of a desired act. As the sea and other geographies take their rhetorical roles as parts of political projects of unions, the making of history becomes a “natural” process. For geography, as a natural phenomenon, is inevitably ungovernable. If we understand the political and rhetorical usage of geography, however, then we not only know that history will repeat itself, but we can also predict its outcomes.

The distinction of unity and partition become integral elements as “connectivity” and “fragmentation” in *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (2000), a major work covering ecological history in regions of the Mediterranean from antiquity to 1500, by Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell. As the authors write, “the dyad of extreme fragmentation of the land and the connectivity of the sea provide the two key ingredients of a distinctively Mediterranean history” (2000, 175). Horden and Purcell make a distinction between history *of* the Mediterranean and history *in* the Mediterranean. For these historians of medieval and ancient history, respectively, are

interested in the history of the whole region *of* the Mediterranean, rather than in particular histories *in* the Mediterranean. This presupposes an understanding of the whole natural, geological, and maritime environment, as well as, surprisingly, the people—who are included as part of the Mediterranean ecology. The authors’ attempt at a history *of* the Mediterranean identifies the region’s underlying unities without succumbing to superficial similarities or effacing diversity (Algazi 2005, 227). In so doing Horden and Purcell deploy the rather inclusive category of “microecology,” i.e. a small ecological unit that works in contrast to regions, countries, or other large areas. Larger areas are made up of a mosaic of microecologies, each of which has its own nature, yet is connected in essential ways with the microecologies around it, both near and far (Algazi 2005, 227). These units may vary in size, from a mere gathering of a few farms, to whole towns, to the whole Mediterranean. As part of their “microecological” methodology, focusing on different “settlements,” Horden and Purcell find it “sensible, if arbitrary, to restrict study to the ‘upper reaches’ of the hierarchy: the larger, dense, more diverse instances...out of heuristic convenience” (2000, 97). For it is necessary for them to place a narrow focus on specific variables/features of a “micro-region” in order to isolate and display it (2000, 98).

An earlier Mediterranean historian, Fernand Braudel (1902–1985), emphasized a view of history as multilayered. In his *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World at the Age of Philip II* (1972), Braudel had taken a geographical rather than ecological approach. Braudel rendered the history of the Mediterranean on three levels of time: the *longue durée*, referring to geological time, geography, and culture; the *moyenne durée*, referring to economic and social time; and the *courte durée*, referring to political and

diplomatic time (Hexter 1972, 533; Pagden 2002, 256). Braudel represented these three levels with metaphors of the sea, such as the deep unmoving water of the ocean, the slow movement of the tides, and the froth of the waves (Braudel 1977, 40; Goldstone 2002, 169; McFarlane 1996, 2). He also used another set of geological metaphors: deep rocks, middle soils, the surface stones: flora and fauna metaphors and, lastly, architectural metaphors, such as buildings with floors or levels (McFarlane 1996, 2). Braudel's aim was to bring together in all their multiplicity the different measures of time past, to be acquainted with their coexistence, their conflicts and contradictions, and the richness of experience they hold (Braudel 1995, 123). As Jacques Ranciere has argued, Braudel's Mediterranean history replaced the centrality of kings and politics in the rise of modern historiography, but in so doing, it also decreed the death of its own subject: the history of the Mediterranean world (Ranciere 1994, 82 cited in Fogu 2010). As Claudio Fogu says, Braudel's history

seemed to suggest that the geographical unity of that world had at last found political unification under the great Spanish king Philip II, but that with his death in 1598 this same unity had ceased to exist. Northern European powers had entered the sea and the epicenters of both History—with capital H—and history in the Mediterranean had shifted to the Atlantic and its powerful nation states. (2010, 2)

Horde and Purcell parallel the Atlantic and the Mediterranean as spaces of migration and specifically of slavery. As they argue, the Mediterranean slave trade anticipated the larger sea-borne migration across the Atlantic Ocean: “Mediterranean slaves, men and women alike, were employed on the plantations of Crete and other islands—a dress rehearsal, so to speak, for their introduction on to the plantations of the New World” (Stuard 1995 cited in Horde and Purcell 2000, 389). Islands, according to

the two authors, played a prominent part in the history of Mediterranean slavery. This history of Mediterranean slavery, they say, should be seen “in the context of the *normal* networks of *redistribution*” (2000, 390, my emphasis). Slavery, according to them, needs to be seen as part of the ecological picture of Mediterranean history, rather than as part of a particular period of specific settlement or empire: “As with other examples of the varying degrees of commoditization...the different modalities of buying and selling people can be fitted into a single overall ecological picture of Mediterranean history; they do not make useful markers for its periodization” (2000, 391).

Considering these statements from the perspective of subjectivity and autobiography, I find them striking. The use of the passive voice, this type of obfuscation in terms of who bought and sold and who was a slave to whom in the Mediterranean, and the situating of slaves as part of a larger “ecology,” are reminders, arguably, of one of the greatest problems that the individuals living *in* the Mediterranean are faced with reflecting questions of identity, autonomy and interdependence. While Horden and Purcell seem at pains to understand the complexity of the Mediterranean peoples over the course of 3000 years, from prehistory to the Middle Ages, the people themselves, in contrast, are concerned to ask who they are, who they have been, and who their ancestors are, beyond ancestors constructed by colonizers from the West.

Considering the peculiar turn to metaphor and literariness in modern historiography, especially after Hayden White’s *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973), the question that motivates my research comes from the perspective of literature in general, and autobiography in particular, with a specific focus on the human subject. How does autobiography deal with the multitude of

levels of history within the region specified today as the Mediterranean? Beyond the historians' reading of the past, how does the individual subject read the past? To what extent do human beings, in this case autobiographical subjects, have the ability to intervene in established narratives of the past, national or other, and how do they reinvent the historical process when writing the history of their own lives? If historians such as Horden and Purcell, or Braudel, have reinvented the historical process through metaphors, such as connectivity and fragmentation, in the one case, and architecture and sea, in the other, the question then becomes: how do people telling their own stories reinvent and re-imagine the historical process in the context of their lives?<sup>16</sup> The embracing of literariness and metaphoric language in these histories suggests an integration or employment of literature as part of history, an instance that this dissertation is interested to delineate as part of its larger scope.

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<sup>16</sup> See also in Horden and Purcell the use of literary figures Aristotle (11), Ibn Khaldun (19, 72, 83), Momigliano (23), and other Greek and Roman writers, who take their place as part of the Mediterranean historical narrative.

## Islands

As noted previously, the geographical distinction between islands and continents reflects the historical distinction between unity and partition. This is why the history of islands today constitutes a central component for the delineation of unions as an uncovered aspect of European history and its ramifications and expressions in national histories and political ideologies in the Mediterranean. In the case of Cyprus, which is the point of reference in my dissertation, the demand for the union of Cyprus with Greece in the midst of the twentieth century—which also subsequently led to the demand for a union with Turkey—echoes the union of Ireland to Britain and the union of the British Ionian islands (1810—1862) to Greece in 1862.

In the case of the Ionian Islands, located in the Ionian archipelago in the South of Greece, the British colonial government compared the Ionians with the Irish. The British came up with an interesting metaphor: that the Ionians are the “Mediterranean Irish” (Gallant 2002, 41). This characterization was the outcome of multiple factors, but the most important one for our discussion was the demand for unification (*enosis*) of the islanders with the Kingdom of Greece from 1832 (the date of the establishment of the Kingdom of Greece) onwards. This is something that historian Thomas W. Gallant pointed out when he said that the British considered *enosis* to be exactly like the Irish Repeal movement and they predicated their response to the Greek case of comparison (Gallant 2002, 41-42). As Gallant tells us, in 1848, the year of European revolutions, the revolution that broke out in the Ionian Islands had—as with most of the 1848–9 revolutions—no single elements that unified all of the participants. For some peasants,

the uprising presented an opportunity for them to get back at exploitative landlords, others took arms of the behest of patrons or protectors, and for religious elements the revolution was the start of a holy war of liberation against the infidel (Gallant 2002, 12). The British superimposed their interpretation of the Repeal movement in Ireland onto the Greek enosis movement. “The Greeks were just like the Irish” (Gallant 2002, 42). The British colonial imaginary construction of the Ionians as Mediterranean Irish, as Gallant says, had a direct impact on how colonial officials understood and reacted to enosis (Gallant 2002, 42). The employment of “Mediterranean” here is significant, as it associates Mediterranean with union. If, according to Gallant, these Greeks on the islands were constructed as Mediterranean Irish, then how were the Greeks of the mainland conceived? Considering, on the one hand, the derogatory ways with which the British confronted the Irish—and the Ionians—and on the other, their idealizing view of Greece as the center of European civilization, it would look as though it is the *islanders* rather than Greeks, who were constructed as Irish, which subsequently leaves us with Greece, as Kingdom and as mainland, as another “Mediterranean England,” to fulfill the sequence of this Mediterranean metaphor. The similarity between the union of the periphery of the Kingdom of Greece and the union of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales as part of the United Kingdom is striking.<sup>17</sup>

In Cyprus the coming of the British colonials in 1878 was welcomed by Greek-identifying Cypriots with the hope that Great Britain would help Cyprus to be united with

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<sup>17</sup> Also, the Union Jack, the flag of the United Kingdom, may be seen in parallel to the Greek flag and the type of union that it symbolizes. In other words, the continued use of the Greek flag in Cyprus and in other Greek peripheries would seem to indicate that the Greek flag is a flag of the Grand/Great Idea (notice the similarity in the name with *Great Britain* and *Great Idea*), the Union. While this observation may seem preliminary, it is significant in order to gloss the use of the Mediterranean as a unionist term in the context of these islands.

Greece (Alastos 1955, 331).<sup>18</sup> A memorandum forwarded to the British government as early as 1881 stated:

The Cypriots, mindful of their history, have never forgotten their Hellenic origin. Relying on the magnanimity of the British nation, they hope that in due time favorable consideration will be given...to their only aspiration, the Union with their mother-country Greece in accordance with the precedent of the Ionian Islands. (Alastos 1955, 331)

The union of Cyprus with Greece is generally situated by historians as “the latest phase of the long march towards the national unification of Hellenism [the Great Idea or Idea of Irredentism]” (Stephanides 2007, 93). The “Great Idea developed into a grand design of uniting all historical Greek lands within a single state, a new Eastern empire...and was cultivated as the principal factor of cohesion for a geographically, culturally and politically fragmented nation” (Stephanides 2007, 17).<sup>19</sup> A veteran of the irredentist campaigns, Evangelos Savvopoulos (1917—1995), claimed that the “dream of enosis was the secret desire of the entire Greek people; once a motive of this sort lost its force, the dream that leads from barbarism to civilization fades and disappears” (Stephanides 2007, 100). The union of Cyprus with Greece was a matter of the “nation’s existence,” said Panayiotis Kanellopoulos, Prime Minister of Greece in 1950 (Stephanides 2007, 111).<sup>20</sup> Had the enosis campaign failed, said Bishop Spyridon of Apameia (1907—1988), “the Greeks would not only appear unworthy of their three thousand year old civilization but might even forfeit their right to exist as a race” (Stephanides 2007, 111). As these references to the Union (or Grand Idea) make evident, the union of Cyprus with Greece, echoing that of the Ionian Union with Greece, was primarily focused on the preservation

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<sup>18</sup> For a graphic description of the arrival of the British in Cyprus see Andrekos Varnava, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> See also Kitromilides 1998, 25-33 and Clogg 1988, 253ff as instructed by Stephanides.

<sup>20</sup> It seems that the Kingdom of Greece, which then became the Greek nation, was conceived as a union of the remote to its center regions, and thus imitating the model of the Kingdom of England. But again this is something that needs to be supported by additional evidence as part of a future project.

of the Greek race and nationhood, as well as the sovereignty of the Greek Kingdom/Nation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

What makes the Cypriot Union movement complicated for us is the fact that it coincided with a global anticolonial movement, which came to adhere to the Cypriot Union movement. Those people advocating enosis for Cypriots justified their unionist claim in the context of European civilization “as part of a European people, who had for centuries been at a level of civilization much higher than the colored colonial average” (Stephanides 2007, 94). When the Greek Cypriot claim, as an anticolonial claim, was posed in international arenas such as the United Nations, for example, it was not presented as a unionist claim but as a claim of self-determination, as was often the claim made by other recently colonized countries. “As a synonym of secession and annexation, Enosis was unpalatable to [newly established postcolonial] governments striving to maintain national cohesion” (Stephanides 2007, 94). As Georgios Papandreou, ex-deputy prime minister of Greece (1950-1952) explained the ensuing variation in terminology, “self determination” was the term to be used abroad, while enosis with mother Greece was destined for domestic use (Stephanides 2007, 94).

The government, the parliament, the universities, and the multifarious Cyprus lobby of Greece bombarded opinion-makers abroad with press material. Almost inevitably, emphasis was given to historical and cultural arguments confirming the Greek identity of the Cypriots from time immemorial (2007, 94). A resolution of the University of Athens read:

Since the remotest antiquity Cyprus is part of the national hearth of the Greek race, a bastion of the Greek nation, a beacon of Greek civilization in the

Mediterranean, therefore, the prolongation of its colonial status would be a stain on European civilization. (2007, 96)<sup>21</sup>

Greece “as a European outpost in the Mediterranean...had withstood successive waves of Eastern invaders for thousands of years” (Stephanides 2007, 114). Greece was rendered “the guardian of the Aegean and a bastion of Western defense” (Stephanides 2007, 114). On the eve of the 1956 elections, Prime Minister Karamanlis declared: “For many centuries the Greek nation is posted at this corner of the earth protecting and guarding the highest human ideals. At this historic crossroads, Hellenism fought alone, without the aid of kindred neighbors” (Stephanides 2007, 115). On another occasion he explained those kindred nations to be the Arabs, Slavs and Latins (Stephanides 2007, 115). “Free besieged now and then and always have been and will be the Greeks; because we are racially isolated and geographically hemmed and bounded,” Karamanlis said in 1957 (Stephanides 2007, 115).

As it emerges from these references, the unionist movement was an expansionist movement. An anonymous author in the newspaper *Gnoseis* (November 1958) had said that history provided irrefutable proof that Hellenism flourished whenever it expanded in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean (Stephanides 2007, 121). “The unresolved Cyprus problem proved the incompleteness of Greece’s national restitution” (Stephanides 2007, 113).<sup>22</sup> Greek writer and lawyer Yorgos Theotokas, one of the most prominent intellectuals of the 1930s generation, envisioned Greece as part of a united, democratic European community. He acknowledged that the Greek self partly rested upon the East,

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<sup>21</sup> Also in the newspaper *Ta Nea* 17, 25 May; 22 June 1954.

<sup>22</sup> To add to the idea that the sea is a link, in the following excerpt the sea in literary imagination is perceived as such: “In Holderlin’s ‘The Archipelago’ the sea is a unifying factor linking the personified daughters of the Archipelago, those ‘mothers of heroes, the islands,’ that have survived since the heyday of a Greece unified and blossoming after the Persian wars (Guthenke 2008, 83).

or rather the Near East, an area comprising the Balkans, the Black Sea, Asia Minor to the Caucasus, and Mesopotamia and the entire Eastern Mediterranean littoral. Above all, however, he considered his country an integral part of the European world, partaking not only of its geography but also of its historical experience (Stephanides 2007, 130). A united Europe, he claimed, might prove a positive alternative to the old “Grand Idea.” Hellenism, he insisted, had nothing to fear, be it in a self-ruled Cyprus or as part of an integrated Europe; its roots going deep in its ancestral lands, it was never assimilated but was capable of assimilating others (Stephanides 2007, 130).

The examples of the Ionian Islands and Cyprus and their respective unions show us that the desire for union derives as much from the islands as it does from the mainland. These two examples also show that in their essence, projects of union/unity aim at expansion and connectivity, as it is a necessity of these islands, isolated geographically, to attach themselves, as fragments of a larger whole, in order to feel adequately sovereign. In the specific example of Greece, the union project has consequences for her. As Guthenke argues, Greece accumulates “a multiplicity of tensions” and becomes a “placeholder, standing in for its past or someone else’s present, and not quite ‘itself’” (Guthenke 2008, 242).<sup>23</sup>

Islands, in global history, are marked by a specific dualism, their isolation and connectivity (see Chapter 2). I would like to argue, however, that this dualism is a product of the Western imagination imposed onto islands. With the comparative perspective I offer in this work between autobiography in Cyprus and in other post-

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<sup>23</sup> See also Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation* (1996), Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology and the Making of Modern Greece* (1986); *Anthropology Through the Looking Glass* (1989); *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation State* (2005) and Artemis Leontis, *Topographies of Hellenism: Mapping the Homeland* (1995).

colonial nations (Algeria, Palestine, Saint Lucia), I also suggest that isolation/connectivity may apply not only to island spaces but also to other places, mainland and littoral, especially when they are subjected to colonial or imperial settlement.<sup>24</sup> In that sense, islands may be broader categories that capture the colonial desire to control that which is uncontrollable, by inventing its “connectivity.” Islands, as a broader category, capture the colonial desire to control the histories and political life of those spaces that do not align with the universal and totalitarian geographic and historical continuities of global domination. In global history, islands, especially small islands and their effaced histories, constitute the missing link for the delineation of Western hegemony. Islands are supplements in the Derridean sense, in that they are the details that come to illuminate the whole. As the missing details of history, they may be seen in parallel to the missing individuals from the narratives of history, global, colonial, or national. Derek Walcott’s verse line “either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation” is revealing in this respect (Walcott 1987, 345). Unless islands become nations, or part of a mainland, to adjust to the structures of the West, they are dismissed as unimportant.

Western imagination, as it has been shaped by practices of travel and tourism since the mid-nineteenth century, perceives islands through a number of stereotypes as exotic, paradisiac, and touristic. As isolated entities, islands are constructed as needing to connect to continents for their survival and political stability.

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<sup>24</sup> It would also be possible to see Greece as an island in the colonial sense, and even more so, from the examples of its own literary production. See, for example, Constanze Guttenke’s concluding remarks in *Placing Modern Greece* (2008) where she writes, “the Greek place in the framework of European Hellenism works best when seen on the ground, but still from a distance, as it were... Translating such distance onto the Greek writers’ position, the passages in their works that pay particular attention to landscape and spatial environment are motivated by a context of either of paralysis before fatal exit (Solomos’ free besieged) or of flight (Soutsos’ restless wayfarers)” (2008, 243).

Islandness and landing is an external imposition of characteristics that are not inherent to islands themselves, and represents instead the enforcement of a certain view of islands and their inhabitants prevalent in colonials. Islands are transferred into the dial locales to materialize the colonial will, free from undesirable alien influences emanating from neighboring territories. (Soares 2011, 171)

Paradoxically, islands are simultaneously viewed as spaces complete unto themselves and as ideal metaphors for a unified and unitary identity (Bongie 1998, 18). They have been imagined as uniquely sovereign spaces with sea channels that serve as natural shields against unwanted visitors, protecting a divinely ordained sovereignty and unity (McCusker & Soares 2011, xii). The sea is seen to define the unity of the island and to enshrine the inevitability of self-possession and self-determination (McCusker & Soares 2011, xii).<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Deloughery argues that, “these imposed concepts of remoteness and isolation are closely aligned to the colonial imperative to erase islands’ migratory histories, particularly their maritime capacities” (Deloughery 2004, 301).

In the Western imagination, as John R. Gillis argues in *Islands of the Mind*, “Islands...continue to be extraordinarily valuable symbolic resources, a treasure trove of images through which the West understands itself and its relations with the larger world” (Gillis 2004, 3). Gillis observes that islands are mental categories specifically constructed as isolated spaces. This is an aftereffect of Western settlers’ experience that, upon settling in a particular region, the settler society was secluded from the surrounding mainland. This was the case up until the eighteenth century, when settler societies were seen as islands inside the mainland (Gillis 2004, 2). Islands have held a metaphorical meaning since antiquity. Cities were seen as islands and empires as a conglomeration of islands.

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<sup>25</sup> See also Guthenke as she points out the ways in which Western travel literature saw the Greek archipelago as a motif, as closer to nature, and thus without much law-making or science (Guthenke 2008, 67). The Greek archipelago was “endowed with great residual as well as potential freedom [which] continue[d] to feature strongly in the writings surrounding the Greek war of Independence” (2008, 67).

The Greek city-states have been described as “islands on dry land,” and Greece itself as a “pattern of islands” (Gillis 2004, 9).<sup>26</sup> Rome saw itself as an island, and it built its empire archipelagically as a series of island-like garrison towns (Gillis 2004, 14). Plato’s notion of the polis was insular (Gillis 2004, 14): he invented a large island, Atlantis, to make his political point about the superiority of the small, well-governed city-state over the large empire (Gillis 2004, 21). After the collapse of the Roman Empire, feudal settlements were carried out in island-like enclaves. And before these settlements were actualized, they were islands in the minds of the settlers (Gillis 2004, 14). By the thirteenth century, Europe comprised of thousands of discrete insular territories. When the crusades extended European frontiers to the eastern Mediterranean, the Christian states of the Holy Land were perceived as islands in a Muslim sea, autonomous enclaves held as fiefs or trade concessions (Gillis 2004, 15). This model of control of the geography and of the inhabitants provided the template for later colonization of the western Mediterranean and the near Atlantic. Carried to the New World, “islands” would remain the dominant mode of European settlement until the eighteenth century, when monarchs finally replaced settler archipelagos with territorial states (Gillis 2004, 15). In the words of Gillis, “islands and continents are but names we give to different parts of one interconnected world” (Gillis 2004, 2).

Similarly, Ralph Crane moves away from the antinomy of land and sea that is often used to define islands and suggests that islands can be seen through the category of *enclave*, an enclosed habitat that isolates and sustains its inhabitants. The enclave is an island, but not one surrounded by water (Crane 2011, 127). Crane builds on Gillian

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<sup>26</sup> See also Christy Constantakopoulou, *The Dance of the Islands: Insularity, Networks, the Athenian Empire, and the Aegean World* (2010).

Beer's idea that "islands...need not be only parcels of land; they can be...ponds or lakes, clearings in the wood, or clusters of trees on the plain. That is...islands are enclosures within which...relations prevail and from which their population cannot escape and survive" (Beer 2003, 33). Beer asserts islands' difference from the surrounding environment: the distinctiveness of the island habitat makes of it both a fruitful ecosystem for a limited range of species and an enclosure that may hasten extinction (Beer 1989, 17 cited in Crane 128).<sup>27</sup>

It is through Gillis's and Crane's lens that I situate my own reading of islands. Through this reading, we can also understand what Horden and Purcell mean by "microecologies" and their subsequent "connectivity," in their *Corrupting Sea*.<sup>28</sup> "Microecologies," as they are developed in *The Corrupting Sea*, are effectively islands. And their "connectivity" is another word for empire. Horden's and Purcell's microregions need to be understood always, as they say, with reference to some wider setting. Microregions may even be urban settlements, mountain areas and forests (2000, 123, 81, 186).<sup>29</sup> And "ecology," as it is worked into Horden's and Purcell's examples, is another word for social institutions or processes (2000, 98).

In offering their methodology for reading the Mediterranean as a "kaleidoscopic mosaic," Horden and Purcell define microecology as a locality, a definite place, with a distinctive identity derived from the set of available productive opportunities and the particular interplay of human responses to them in different periods (2000, 80).

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<sup>27</sup> See Chapter 4 for Rina Katselli's dismal realization that if Cypriots lose "their" history they will become extinct.

<sup>28</sup> Also given the names "microregions," "micro environments," and "micro foundations."

<sup>29</sup> Mountain microecologies, for example, like almost all microecologies, are parts of greater ecological networks. Mountains can seem hostile and marginal areas, yet they are actually closely integrated into the patterns of production and communication that abut them (2000, 81).

Microregions are defined by their “interaction of opportunities: for animal husbandry, foraging, hunting, intrusive agriculture, forest management, horticulture, fishing, or whatever.” But most importantly, and as a last ingredient to the definition of microregions, beyond opportunity, interplay, and interaction, Horden and Purcell add that microecologies are engaged in larger networks of redistribution (2000, 80).

Microecologies are smaller ecological units within a larger whole that particularly serve themselves, as well as the larger whole, by connecting or adhering to larger networks of power.

In their discussion of “towns,” which for them “are rather like mountains” and which “like ports, can be seen as ‘epiphenomenal’ to larger ecological processes” (2000, 90), Horden and Purcell claim that a historian’s description of towns should not be about the town itself, but about the town’s interaction with other places. Towns, as they say, should *not* be seen as islands. “No longer seen by medievalists as ‘islands in a feudal sea,’ towns should perhaps not be conceived in insular terms at all (any more, we argue, than real islands should)...In short, nothing is achieved by considering urban-based activity in isolation from the wider economic world” (2000, 97). Isolation, through the metaphor of islands, and connectivity, as the opposite of islands, constitute inevitably the core of their historiography. And while Horden and Purcell draw most, if not all, of their evidence from antiquity and the Middle Ages to make their historical claims, which are, in any case, *about* ancient and medieval history, towns which were indeed viewed as “islands in a feudal sea” are explicitly excluded from their analysis. And even more, while on the one hand they reject the medieval view of islands, in the paragraph that

immediately follows they adapt medieval views to read towns as spaces of capitalism and economics (2000, 97).

In contrast to the isolationist view that they do not desire to adopt for their microecologies, Horden and Purcell are more inclined toward an expansionist view of networks and communications. As with microecologies themselves, those networks are also inclusive. The networks can be of redistribution, power, cooperation, allegiance, and/or dependence (2000, 88). In other words, colonization, settlement, feudalism, pirates, merchants, Bedouins, and slaves are all equally mutable self-distributing units. This view clearly neglects the power dynamics of empire and colonialism, while it supposedly allows “empowering” networks of “free” people to cultivate their land or distribute their products. Their systematic analytical framework of microregions is even more inclusive than this. “Microregions...may be accommodated within a single analytical framework...of cities, families, bodies... We place no special emphasis on routes conceived as grand commercial links that can be mapped with clear sweeping lines” (2000, 90). In other words, the content of microregions is effaced in favor of their “connectivity,” and their history becomes one with those “networks” that supposedly constitute them. Cities, families, and bodies become channels of communication and as such they remain a part of an archipelagic microregional/corrupting-sea/empire.

Here I recall the passage by Cypriot author Montis, quoted earlier, in which his grandmother Kalomoira is a body that became a channel, effaced for the sake of her connectivity and her distribution of the history of the colonizer.

Είναι περίεργο που θυμάμαι όσα συνδέονταν με τη γιαγιά εκτός απ' την ίδια, λες και την απορρόφησαν εκείνα, λες και διανεμήθηκε σ' εκείνα κι έσβησε.

[It is strange that I tend to remember all sorts of things connecting to grandmother except for grandmother herself. It is as though those other things absorbed her. It is as though she was distributed in them and erased]. (Montis 1987, 1317 my translation)

Grandmother Kalomoira, Montis tells us, would always sit in a corner by herself, isolated from everyone else, since her room in the house was in an elevated corner. Everyone knew of her presence in the room, but no one could really see her. As her grandchildren passed by her room, they greeted her, but before she had even answered, they would be gone.

Το δωμάτιο της, ένα μικρό μετζανώγι, ήταν στην άκρια του στενόμακρου διαδρόμου, εκεί που στρίβαμε να πάμε στα δικά μας δωμάτια. Μπαινοβγαίνοντας περνούσαμε μπροστά απ' την ξύλινη σκάλα του και χωρίς να βλέπουμε τη γιαγιά τη χαιρετούσαμε...έστω κι αν δεν τη βλέπ[αμε]. ...Ανέβαινε αυτόματος, αυθόρμητος και συχνά άχρους κι αφηρημένος ο χαιρετισμός μας στο στρίψιμο του διαδρόμου.... Κι ακουγόταν αδύναμη, ξεθωριασμένη η απάντηση που τις περισσότερες φορές δεν μας πρόφτανε, που δεν κοντοστεκόμαστε ούτε τόσο δα να την περιμένουμε. (Montis 1987, 1317)

[Her room, a small mezzanine, was at the end of a long and narrow corridor, right where we turned to go to our own rooms. Going in and out of the house, we would pass in front of its wooden staircase and, without seeing grandmother, we would greet her, even if [we] couldn't see her.... Our greeting would come out automatic, spontaneous, and often colorless, absent minded.... Her response was heard feeble, faded, and most times didn't even reach us. And we wouldn't even wait for a bit to listen to her response]. (Monti 2006, 2)

Grandmother Kalomoira used to live with the family of her son, Montis's father. As Montis says, they considered her to be an "integral part of the family" (Montis 1987, 1381). But she thought of herself as being a burden on them. That's why she was scolded away for feeling this way. "Την νιώθαμε αναπόσπαστο μέλος της οικογένειας κι ας στεναχωριόταν πως μας ήταν βάρος. Τόλεγε στον πατέρα και ο πατέρας τη μάλωνε" [We felt her to be an integral part of our family, even if she felt unhappy with herself for being a burden to us] (Montis 1987, 1318). But Grandmother would insist, "Κρεμάστηκα

τσαμπί απάνω σας” [I am hanging on you, like a bunch of grapes] (Montis 1987, 1391). This specific expression is unmistakably and graphically revealing of her labor or, at least, residence in vine estates owned by the Venetians who had resided in Cyprus in the past.<sup>30</sup> Historian Doros Alastos tells us that “the majority of the people on Cyprus during the Venetian conquest were serfs to the nobles and devoid of any rights whatsoever” (Alastos 1955, 226). The stories his grandmother told, the stories of a Venetian *afenti* *Batistas*—also the title of Montis’s autobiography—were the stories of landowners whom she came to think of as somewhat related to her through kin despite the history that separated her from them.

Montis confesses from the outset of his autobiography that he only remembers all the stories connected with his grandmother, and little of the grandmother herself. This realization is revealing of the fact that the colonial links, “connectivities” and the “distributions” in the form of stories, overshadowed and absorbed her identity even in her own stories. In a way, Montis’s text suggests that the local population adapted these connectivities and distributions even in their most intimate relationships, such as the relationship of grandchildren to their grandmother whose personal existence they almost ignore. As Montis describes her, “Κ’ ήταν σα ναρχόταν απ’ άλλο κόσμο. Άλλωστε σαν άλλο κόσμο είχαμε τη γιαγιά. Απ’ εδώ εμείς, κι απ’ εκεί η γιαγιά” [She was from another world. Actually, it was as if she herself *was* another world. And we all were on one side and she on the other] (Montis 1987, 1318 my emphasis). It is only after Kalomoira’s death that Montis realizes that he knows almost nothing about his grandmother: “(Η γιαγιά μου; Ποιά ήταν;)” [(My grandmother? Who was she?)] (Montis 1987, 1381).

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<sup>30</sup> For a detailed description of Venetian monocultures of vines in Cyprus and other islands, as well as a detailed history of the Venetian empire see Rothman (2012) and Braudel 1995, 155.

Montis catches himself in an inadvertent Orientalist moment. “Orientalist” here must be broadly defined, for Montis does not himself impose a representation onto his grandmother. Rather the opposite: Montis stumbles on the gaze that he had adopted for his grandmother as a child and comes through his autobiography to undo it. Orientalism, as Said informs us, is a system of representation which “distributes” and “redistributes” “‘knowledge’—never raw, unmediated, or simply objective” (Said 1979, 273).

Orientalism provides a society, in this case Montis’s Cypriot society, with representations of the Orient. These representations have a number of salient features, as Said says. They bear the Orientalist’s distinctive imprint. They illustrate his conception of what the Orient can or ought to be. Orientalism consciously contests any alternative view of the Orient. It provides a society with the representations which, at that moment, it seems most in need of. And these representations respond to certain cultural, professional, national, political, and economic requirements of the epoch (Said 1979, 273-4). The main characteristic of this “knowledge” is that it disseminates and diffuses in the larger society and has direct or indirect influence on the people who may receive it.

Montis’s autobiography brings awareness of this knowledge and its mechanisms by asking a simple, and yet life-changing, question: who is my grandmother? His question is accompanied by the following statement:

*Κ’ είν’ επίσης περίεργο που δεν είχα ποτέ μου καμιά απορία, που εξακολουθώ να τις αντιπαρέρχομαι όλες κι όταν αναπολώ τη γιαγιά δεν έχω ερωτήματα, είμαι πλήρως ικανοποιημένος απ’ ότι βλέπω χωρίς να βλέπω σχεδόν τίποτα με τον καθιερωμένο τρόπο που ξέρουμε. (Η γιαγιά. Τίποτ’ άλλο. Φτάνει). (Montis 1987, 1318)*

[It is even more bizarre that I never had any questions and still don’t, for I slurred all those questions. And even when I reminisce about grandmother I still don’t have questions. I am completely satisfied with what I see without seeing anything

with the conventional way that people see. (Grandmother. Nothing more. That suffices)]. (My translation)

By saying these, Montis deconstructs the colonial or Orientalist gaze via the individual, *himself*, by writing his autobiography. Within this personal moment of realization, Montis is able to delineate the colonial historical process and give us a truer version of history. Autobiography, in that sense, becomes a discovery and a revelation of thus-far unquestioned colonial “knowledge.”

Kalomoira constitutes the most crucial link both to colonials and to Montis’s pasts, presents, and futures. She overflows with stories of others or of herself in relation to them. Her role is crucial for the colonizer, because she disseminates his history to the new generation. This act may also be seen as a way of coping with a new oppression. In any case, for Montis the role of Kalomoira is crucial because of his recognition that his grandmother is an isolated figure, felt herself extraneous, felt “islanded.” Montis sees or comes to know history as life, the lived history of Kalomoira, as someone who was absorbed, distributed, and erased. His realization that he knows nothing about his grandmother contains the revelation of a discovery of the deeply rooted and perpetually erased colonial subject. Kalomoira is the most crucial link and at the same time she is a missing link, ignored as a link to the history that Montis sought, of himself and of his people. Kalomoira is an island—the missing but the most crucial link to the knowledge of individual history. To know nothing about a place or an individual, to become aware of his/her absence, while also this person or place is hauntingly present, is to know an island, what it is, how it is treated, what its history is.

In autobiography the distinction of island/continent is transposed by way of a doubling, distinguishing between an old oblivious self and a new self. The old self is the

self that dismisses the details or marginalia of his/her existence that, when taken into account, make a difference in who that person actually is. The new self emerges after the revelation of those marginalia, which become an integral part of the autobiographical narrative, if not the reason for actually writing one. From the incorporation of those details in autobiography, there emerges a possibility for a new life that will be more liberating than the previous. In contrast to the Western perception of islands as isolated and of humans as islands who need to connect to the whole in order to survive, islands are the missing details about one's life that, when they are discovered, change one's knowledge about that life. To be an island in the isolated/connectivity sense is to partake in the ignorance imposed by colonialism and its institutions, national discourses, and other forms of power. The autobiographies studied in this dissertation show us what happens when individuals come to realize themselves as individuals who have, thus far, been islands. The doubling of the self also reflects two types of histories. As new life emerges, an individual history emerges as well, an autobiography.

### **Symbiosis**

*Symbiosis* is another word for unity, and it has been used in a series of official political narratives and historiographies in and of the Mediterranean. Symbiosis has also been used in the context of the official European Union and its Euro-Mediterranean project, which is interested in the integration of European and Mediterranean countries. In post-partition Palestine/Israel and Cyprus, symbiosis has even created the general political and historiographical framework of the post-partition state.<sup>31</sup> I discuss symbiosis

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<sup>31</sup> For Cypriot historiography and the use of symbiosis as peaceful coexistence of Greek and Turkish Cypriots see Paschalis Kitromilides, Michalis Attalides, and Kostas Kyrris, all published in 1977 in

in Chapter 3, in relation to the autobiographies of Rina Katselli and Anton Shamma. Here I primarily demonstrate its use as it is encountered in the history of the Mediterranean by Horden and Purcell. I focus on symbiosis in order to move toward the reading of autobiography as a kind of history that both appropriates and resists notions of symbiosis.

Before I move on to the use of symbiosis by Horden and Purcell, I first give an overview of its use as part of the Euro-Med project. This overview will provide us with insight into the appropriation of the term as a form of unity/union. As part of its Euro-Mediterranean partnership project, the European Union declared the alliance between European and Mediterranean countries as an innovative project which is “based on the principles of joint ownership, dialogue and co-operation, seeking to create a Mediterranean region of peace, security and shared prosperity.”<sup>32</sup> Echoing this dialogic, cooperative, and joint effort aiming to unite the two regions, Anat Lapidot-Firilla said that the Mediterranean is “a greenhouse for cultural symbiosis between religions and cultures along the Mediterranean shores, from Andalusia to Istanbul in the north-east and

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Southern Cyprus, and the *Kibris Tarihi 2 & 3* [History of Cyprus], produced under the auspices of the Republican Turkish Party in Northern Cyprus (in Papadakis & Hatay, 2012). Also Stella Soulioti (2006, 4-5) presents this symbiotic framework. For Israel/Palestine, the historiographies of S.D. Goitein (1995), Ammiel Alcalay (1993) and Steve Wasserstrom (1995) are discussed in Chapter 3. Also Non Profit Organizations (NGOs) have adapted the symbiotic framework in Cyprus and Palestine/Israel as part of their efforts to promote peaceful coexistence of previously conceived “enemies.” See the Home of Cooperation in Cyprus and the Valley of Peace in Palestine/Israel, even though the two are not exactly equivalent. The Home of Cooperation focuses on cultural and historical projects, while the Valley of Peace includes a variety of projects, some of which focus on economic development through collaboration of Arab and Jewish entrepreneurs. State officials have endorsed those projects. Beyond Cyprus and Palestine/Israel, in Thessaloniki the Symbiosis foundation “works towards establishing partnerships among civil society organizations, collectivities and networks focusing on equality, participatory democracy and social justice and on combatting discrimination based on ethnic and religious affiliation, gender and social conditions. Symbiosis advocates for the political, social and economic participation of migrants and vulnerable communities at the local, the national and the European levels and for the inclusion of marginalized groups and the youth in the public sphere” <http://www.symbiosis.org.gr/en/symbiosis> 06.08.2014 Web.

<sup>32</sup> Official European parliament website entitled “The Barcelona Process” which includes references on the Barcelona Declaration 1995, European Neighborhood Policy 2004, and Euro-Med Partnership 2008. 05.06.2014 [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/barcelona\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/barcelona_en.htm) Web

Alexandria in the south-east” (Lapidot-Firilla 2010, 76).<sup>33</sup> As symbiosis constitutes the essence for the creation of cooperation within the Mediterranean shores, it is at the same time employed, in the same article by Lapidot-Firilla, to mark the relationship of Europe and the Mediterranean. “The greatest challenge today is how to create Mediterraneanism which does not deny its ties to the East—the Arab, Turkish or Israeli cultures—but instead delineates flexible, fluid conceptual and physical borders that allow a symbiotic relationship with the West” (Lapidot-Firilla 2010, 78).

As we can see from these references, the idea of coexistence by way of flexibility of borders, cultural and religious, as part of the European–Mediterranean Union, takes on political dimensions. In pointing out this European political dimension of symbiosis, I by no means aim to diminish sharing and exchange as a cultural process amongst humans and their cultures, which is an inevitable merit of multicultural societies. Nevertheless, when placed in the larger context of European hegemony and unification, symbiosis emerges as a concept the ramifications of which are worth our deliberation.

In Horden’s and Purcell’s Mediterranean history symbiosis is explicitly used to refer to the relationships of Mediterranean communities to the ecological disasters and transformations of the Mediterranean landscape. The reaction of the Mediterranean peoples to those ecological disasters is perceived by the two historians as symbiotic. Horden and Purcell consider symbiosis as a “peculiar characteristic of the Mediterranean world” (2000, 324). Within their ecological-historical context, symbiosis refers to the relationship of human behavior in the shaping of the Mediterranean environment. Horden

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<sup>33</sup> Anat Lapidot-Firilla’s article “The Euro-Mediterranean as a Cognitive Map” is included in the “Euromed Intercultural Trends 2010 Report.” A publication sponsored by the Anna Lindh Foundation. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/empa/dv/cult20100930\\_05\\_/cult20100930\\_05\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/empa/dv/cult20100930_05_/cult20100930_05_en.pdf) 06.06.2014 Web.

and Purcell saw the relationship between “human communities and the environment as a *relatively* stable symbiosis” (2000, 339, their emphasis). They are reluctant to use the notion of “catastrophe” to characterize what they point out are long-term phenomena. Such phenomena as “the erosion of the land, the expansion of human agriculture, the post-glacial rise in sea-level, and the instability of the deep structures of Mediterranean geology are *normal* because they have been endlessly recurrent and frequently repeated” (2000, 327, my emphasis). Critically, Horden and Purcell argued that these constant environmental shifts “have diminished the impact of the shocks and crises of the natural world on human societies” (2000, 341). In other words, humans in the Mediterranean are presented as reconciled to environmental changes, such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters.<sup>34</sup> People’s response to catastrophe has been to accept it, to live with it. They have learned to coexist with nature’s sweeping disasters. What Horden and Purcell neglect, however, is that the resilience of the Mediterranean peoples in the face of natural disasters may be read in parallel with their resilience in the face of multiple colonizations throughout history however “naturalized” these seem to be. Be that as it may, a question arises. In history were humans ever reconciled to disasters? And, if they were, what were their nuanced reactions to the violent, “symbiotic” enemy, which here appears to be “nature”? If Horden and Purcell emphasize the stability and resilience of humans to nature’s disasters, the texts of this

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<sup>34</sup> See how this idea is informed by Montis’ poem: “Χρόνια σκλαβικίες ατέλειωτες τον πάτσον τζαι τον κλώτσον τους εμείς τζιαμαί, ελιές τζαι τερατσιές πάνω στον ρότσον τους.” [Years upon years of endless slavery, we received their slaps and their kicks, but we, we stay rooted, like olive trees and carob trees on their rock]. See also, the popular proverb, included in Rina Katselli’s text: “Ο άνθρωπος εν ο τόπος, τζι ο τόπος γερημιά” [The human being is the land, and the land is a desert/wilderness]. What these proverbs mean is that without the people to cultivate the land, there is no land, there is not produce. The rootedness of these poems refers to the labor of the land by the local people. These poetic instances, which the local population find empowering and inspiring, are nevertheless, sadly, echoing their masters’ praise for their symbiotic, hard work with (their) land.

dissertation point to a reaction to the disasters of war, invasion, uprootedness, and armed conflict, all violent “symbiotic” enemies which appear “natural.”

Even though Horden’s and Purcell’s symbiosis does not seem to have direct political ramifications, it nevertheless moves on the axis of unity and partition, connectivity and microregional ecology. In their view, unity amongst microregions in the Mediterranean derives “less from its network of routes in the Braudelian sense than from the more general connectivity of its microregions” (2000, 90). By way of example, Horden and Purcell emphasize the symbiosis between pastoralists and agriculturalists.

[Pastoralism] can rarely exist in isolation, it must involve *united* sophisticated *connections* with its surrounding worlds of production and exchange. Some of those connections may involve the pastoralist in *violence* and *predation*; yet it should be remembered that *accusation* on that score may be less a reflection of actual provocation than of the agriculturalist’s view of the pastoralist’s place in the social hierarchy... This *symbiosis* [between pastoralists and agriculturalists] should be recognized as extremely responsive to changing economic opportunities. (2000, 84, my emphasis)

In other words, the pastoralist and agriculturalist can be in symbiosis, but the agriculturalist is hierarchically superior to the pastoralist. The moment when this relationship may become violent is when economic opportunities arise. Applied to the partition of Palestinians/Israelis and Greek/Turkish Cypriots this symbiosis can mean that these groups can live together, with one being hierarchically distinct from the other, unless there is an economic situation that will lead them to violence. From a natural symbiosis of humans and the environment, Horden and Purcell move through an economic and hierarchical “ecology.” In the excerpt quoted above, pastoralists and agriculturalists, in an ecology of ancient capitalism, compete for economic opportunities. Moreover, these symbiotic, opportunistic, ecological units utilize “united sophisticated

connections” in capturing those products before others are able to. Sometimes they may fail and as a result engage in violent acts. But Horden and Purcell caution the reader not to rush and make any accusations against the agriculturalist because he looks down upon the pastoralist for his lower social hierarchy. However, they continue, “pastoralists and agriculturalists must, *first* of all, [that is before they are envisioned as violent] be envisaged as far more likely to have functioned in symbiosis than in isolation” (2000, 84, their emphasis). These symbioses or isolations happen of course, in the work of Horden and Purcell, under the auspices of an agentless and invisible network of connectivity.

In Syria, Horden and Purcell say, there had been a “political competition across the centuries, for broadly unchanging *human resources*: for the allegiance of small, highly *elastic local* familial and political groups who managed the diverse microecologies pastoral or agricultural, upon which any larger power ultimately depended” (2000, 88 my emphasis). This is also what is happening in the Lebanese city of Bīqa. The elastic family groups, compared to inflexible larger powers, cultivated “their” microecological land. The macroecological power depended on the Bīqas’ local labor or “human resources.” This constructed isolation of the Bīqas and other microecologies constitutes an *island*—a microregion in isolation, exploited by a large power. Bīqa, in other words is an island. But, as they say, these islands provide resources, human and other, to the empire, which depends on them. Horden and Purcell quote Marfoe, who observes:

The [Lebanese] Bīqa was a political no-man’s-land, characterized by a diffuse assortment of political leaders and allegiances, ethnic identities, economic relations, and sociocultural syncretisms. In effect, each rival nullified any degree of administrative or economic disequilibrium of the lowlands, this was seldom difficult. Thus the *penetration* of *bedouin tribes* into the settled zone is explained

not so much by aggression on their part as by the absence of local authority and the decline of rural settlements. (Marfoe 1979 cited in Horden and Purcell 88, my emphasis)

Their objection to Marfoe's observation about Biqa is not that Marfoe talks about the "penetration of Bedouin tribes" as "rival" to multicultural Biqa, but that Marfoe's interpretation of the Biqa situation

can *only tentatively link* that political instability of the Biqa lowlands within tense local variability of the macroecologies there... But it does point to the ways in which political and ecological change can be bound up with each other; and it emphasizes the contribution that a study of micro environments might make to the broader understanding of the Mediterranean history. (2000, 88, my emphasis)

According to Horden and Purcell, these microecologies, which can be cities, islands, or even the whole Mediterranean region, move towards a permanent link: unity. In this movement, the Bedouin constitutes a rival penetrator. In marginalizing violent conquest by colonizers and empires and, instead, emphasizing the violent natural disasters as normal Horden and Purcell present a history whereby social hierarchy is more important than the invasion of the land by larger force.

The view of Horden and Purcell that repeated natural disasters did not constitute a shock or a crisis for the local population, which gradually assimilated change, also pervades their view of history, which forgoes explanations that point to sudden major and irreversible discontinuities. They insist, "Aggregate changes have come about in so piecemeal a way that it is not even possible to assign them to periods, let alone to moments: and they have mostly been susceptible to reversal" (2000, 339). Historians and archaeologists, according to Horden and Purcell, are prone to "over-periodizing"—searching for phases of pivotal importance, usually catastrophic, with which to divide up

the past. “Mediterranean history, however, sturdily resists those errors” (2000, 326). Instead, echoing Braudel's *longue durée*, Horden and Purcell argue that events should be studied “on a *smooth* scale stretching into the distant past” (2000, 326, my emphasis). Indeed, a history of the Mediterranean, such as *The Corrupting Sea*, resists periodization, for it represents an imperial history; its scale is environmental and economic, from the outside in.

Even if we do study the Mediterranean in a *longue durée* (continuity), it remains urgent to account for those continuities in terms of their ramifications in the present, as well as to acknowledge their effect on societies that have been exploited (something that Horden and Purcell point out through their exploration of slavery in their chapter “Mobilities of Goods and People”). And yet in their view slavery contributes to Mediterranean connectivity as an “effective gathering of human resource.” “The forms of slavery which are characteristic of the Mediterranean are shaped by its connectivity... Redistribution between microregions is easy and *normal*. Slavery is therefore indeed ‘a structural feature of Mediterranean society’” (2000, 388 my emphasis). For the sake of a smooth connectivity, Horden and Purcell are reluctant to embrace, even though they acknowledge, the guilt that comes along with slavery:

As in all slave studies, distaste, pity, and guilt pattern the discussion (Bresc 1989; Meillasoux 1991). Yet, in our antipathy, we should not overlook the fact that enslavement was often the best available mechanism of escape, the most effective way of realizing potential mobility, for desperate people in hard times... Slavery occasionally provided a route of voluntary emigration from the medieval Maghreb. Alongside the numerically underrated practice of voluntary slavery, there were the slower but equally effective ways of gathering the human resource. (2000, 388-389)

In *The Corrupting Sea*, even though symbiosis explains the relationship of humans to nature as resilient to disasters, at the same time, it suggests that nature, untamed and disastrous, is the enemy of the population. Subsequently, this also suggests a possible separation of the people from the land for the sake of connectivity, and thus, the original biological meaning of symbiosis as a natural process, is distorted. That is made possible, according to Horden and Purcell, by the peoples' expansion of resources by transporting "their" products or, even, themselves to lands other than their native one.

The authors studied in this dissertation, however, reclaim the Mediterranean land in different terms and propose their own connectivity as a natural outcome of their living conditions and histories. The connectivities they exemplify may be part of colonial networks—connecting with previous rulers as a way to cope with current oppression (Costas Montis, Assia Djebar)—or by countercolonial networks—connecting with people and traditions within their own multivalent ethnicity (Anton Shammas, Rina Katselli). But most importantly, all of these autobiographers remove themselves from a microregional or islandic mentality that encourages them to be dependent and ignorant of the fact of their exploitation. They come to recognize through their autobiographies their constructed isolatedness and regulated connectivity.

### **Toward a Conception of History As Life: Chapter Summary**

The writers studied in this dissertation face complicated questions of historical identity: how to situate their own life story? Where to stand as a national subject when their own home is marked by foreign names? How to understand the story of each

individual self as a unified entity in a historically fragmented world? In contrast to imperialist accounts of history, autobiography, the history of individual life, represents, I will argue, another form of history, seen from a different angle, which is new to the moment. Autobiography as the new angle on history can be true to its writer and to those who identify with it. It may only be as true as the sound of those jingling bracelets of Nicosian women I heard as I sat in the courtyard but it would, at least, be real to its individual writer in the sense that he/she was the one to have produced it.

In order to address these questions, I turn to Edward Said's "Beginnings" (1968), reworked in his major study of literature entitled *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975). A "beginning," Said tells us, is something that makes a difference: it distinguishes a text or a concept as a particular verbal activity not to be mistaken for something else (Said 1975, xvii). "Beginnings" are not associated with "origins," but related to the intentions and novelty of the human work in language (Said 1975, xvii). "Beginnings" acquire meaning as outcomes of human specific utterance. "The beginning is the first step in the intentional production of meaning" (Said 1975, 5). Moreover, Said argues, scholarly work should conceive of itself as an "intentional production of meaning."

Following Said's methodological model, I read "history" as a "beginning" in order to relocate it anew in the context of autobiographical works that accommodate history as lived experience. Because Said's "beginnings" are not origins, to "begin" with "history" is to ask, "how does it work?" Rather than, "where does it come from?" or "what is it?" I analyze the emergence of history in several literary instances. That is to say, I bracket "history" as a Saidian "beginning," as a term that asks for its redefinition as

the outcome of literary texts. According to Said's formulation, history, conceived of as a "beginning" and emerging in literature, would instantly render itself as "fiction." "The most peculiar thing about such an unknown beginning is that we accept it at the same time that we realize that...it is wrong. It is useless, except when it shows us how much language, with its perpetual memories of silence, can do to summon fiction and reality to an equal space in the mind" (Said 1968, 55). By bracketing history, we also bracket the modern *episteme* and instead conceive of it "as fiction and reality" as a rational, but also an imagined, category, and most importantly, as a category that is self-fashioned and its object, in autobiography, is life itself. History, between fiction and reality, takes its form in the context of the texts in which it is encountered. History becomes a puzzling keyword in the poetry and fiction that I will be discussing shortly. Even though we may conventionally consider beginnings as fictional (or mythical as Said says), they become, in colonial literature and especially in autobiography—which narrates the history of the individual and of the local population whose histories were previously effaced—real rather than fictional. This is especially so when this reality as lived experience is disguised by the autobiographer, so that it cannot be easily appropriated by the colonizer.

History as lived experience has no clearly demarcated strata. It is an amalgam, messy, chaotic, and imbricated, marked by a series of historical overlaps. In autobiography one gets a sense of this messier version of history that is indeed closer to lived experience: formless, unpredictable, mutable, transitory. Thus, autobiography is not simply a genre; it is a practice, one which blends the historical and the literary as a way to destabilize universalist notions of history. It is also an attempt of the autobiographical "I" to be a productive force in the history of the present. To fashion one's life history

poetically is to become a historian, using tools of measuring, evaluating, questioning, interpreting one's own life.

Let me consider just two preliminary examples before I summarize the chapters that follow. In *Women of Kerinia, Istorima* (1997), for example, by the Greek Cypriot writer and politician, Rina Katselli (1938—), personal experience is taken in the widest possible sense, as an amalgam of other non-authoritative accounts including not only the political debates the author knows from parliament, but also the experiences of people she knows from their letters to her as a politician, which she includes as part of her autobiography. Thus while a linear and “authoritative” history acquires its information from elsewhere, relying on prior authority and documentation that has been accrued by others, Katselli incorporates other sources she has collected from local people not into an authoritative narrative but into her own life story. The information from local people becomes evidence of her history. Similarly, *L' Amour, la fantasia* (1985) by Assia Djebar includes not only what Djebar knows from her contact with the French archive, but also the experiences of Berber women silenced by that archive, which she knows from talking to them in person.

When life experience becomes the object of historical investigation and inquiry, as it does in the texts I study, then there are consequences for the structure and form of the historical process. The historical process adjusts to the object it investigates. Rina Katselli investigates her life through the prism of *istorima*. *Istorima* is the Byzantine form of iconographic storytelling—which could conceivably be the predecessor of the modern graphic novel. In *istorima*, through the process of observation of a series of individual images, the observer is able to imagine a cohesive story with a beginning, middle, and

end. The observer needs to imagine the links between these images in order to construct meaning. (Katselli does this with the inclusion of two images that must be linked and deciphered for the reader to capture the totality of her autobiography). In the case of *Women of Kerinia, Istorima*, Katselli is both the storyteller and the object of storytelling. She draws different images/aspects of her life, but because those images are often oppositional or antagonistic to one another, they render her own life story a mystery that the reader and Katselli herself must solve (Katselli 1997, 301). The process of imagining the connections between the images and creating a cohesive story echoes the process of imagining the links of archival material in the historical archive and oneself. The iconographic model of *Women of Kerinia, Istorima*, however, renders the life story historical, not in the factual sense, but in its inquisitive sense, by way of *historein*, a process of knowing by inquiry.

In this dissertation I bring together autobiographies from the postcolonial nations of Cyprus, Algeria, Palestine/Israel, and Saint Lucia to highlight a rethinking of subjectivity in the larger Mediterranean and Caribbean colonial contexts. In the process of writing their autobiographies, these writers meditate in parallel on the idea of history as conceived in the West and as adjusted to their respective nations. The imposition of Western history in their countries has implications for the ways they perceive their national and personal identities. They come to face the reality of their existence as a product of multiple colonizations throughout time. While they come to recognize the problematic historical context of their countries, as effaced by Western colonial history, they also realize that it is difficult to situate themselves outside this history. For this reason, their autobiographies are disguised, taking the form of novels. At the same time,

however, these autobiographies are disguised histories, personal and collective, outside of the Western national model of history.

These autobiographies share the fact that the histories of their respective countries are marked by a multiplicity of colonial pasts, the echoes of which are present in the nation-state. In contrast to histories of the Mediterranean that tend to efface the agency of the individual, these writers perform a cross-temporal and cross-geographical expansion on their own terms and thus replace themselves as agents defining the “connectivity” and “unity” of Mediterranean historiography as it cuts through them. The autobiographers define their community rather than letting the community define them. This community is imagined and constructed by the individual as an act of self-fashioning, rather than the other way around, and the individual’s construction of community becomes an alternative to the national “imagined community” of Benedict Anderson (2006).

In Chapter 2, *Islands: History’s Pathway and Derek Walcott’s Mediterranean*, I introduce the history of islands as pathways for colonial expansion, as well as spaces of exploitation for resources exported to the mainland. Using the example of the Caribbean islands and the efforts of the American government to unify them in an American Union, which also took the name “The American Mediterranean,” I read the Mediterranean as part of a colonial and expansionist logic, which not only takes over the Mediterranean itself, but also travels to other places. I discuss Derek Walcott’s response to such a “Mediterranean,” which undoes islands as pathways, crossroads, and passages of empire and instead relocates them in the physical geography of his cultural experience. Walcott, as a poet and as an autobiographical subject, exemplifies the realization of himself as double, in the sense that in the midst of his life he comes to understand a crucial reality:

that he is not a sovereign and national subject like other Western subjects. Walcott proposes the reconciliation of the subject with the fact that he is not completely sovereign as a form of personal salvation. Thus he counters colonial efforts to unify the Caribbean islands as spaces that need to depend on the mainland for their survival.

In Chapter 3, *Invisible Crossings: Rina Katselli and Anton Shammas*, I discuss texts from partitioned Cyprus and Palestine/Israel. I demonstrate how writers of these two partitioned countries perceive their identities in contrast, or in relation, to the “other.” Secluded, or even exiled in this binary thinking of self and other, their communities are constructed as islands, or even more, as enclaves. The West seeks to re-unify them so as to acquire economic and political sovereignty over them. Symbiosis, as peaceful coexistence is an invented mechanism for the reconciliation of Palestinians and Israelis and Greek and Turks. The prospect of reconciliation is projected into the past, and specifically into the Middle Ages, in which Arabs and Jews, Muslims and Christians lived “symbiotically.” Anton Shammas (1950—) works against both binary opposition and invented mechanisms of reconciliation by conveying life narrative as an *arabesque*. An *arabesque* is an artistic arrangement in imaginatively intertwined, symmetrical geometrical patterns. In Shammas’ narrative the artistic pattern of *arabesque* actualizes in a set of interwoven stories, the threats and agency of which are dispersed in different agent-characters from different generations. Shammas’ *arabesque*-like life story requires an *arabesque*-like historical investigation to resolve the interwoven, multigenerational stories that could lead to the solution of the riddle of his life story. These histories are histories of *human* links and connectivities. Both Shammas and Rina Katselli disguise their autobiographies as novels, so that deciphering the exactness of their

autobiographical elements becomes very complex. They multiply themselves by having two or more lives; they speak through others; and thus, they exemplify by subversion the effect of colonialism of the psychology on the local people. The crucial realization for these autobiographies is that their writers and countries are “orphans,” motherless and homeless. The *gift* that they make to themselves is their own autobiography which offers them the possibility of coming to terms with the reality of their lives, as islands to be reborn.

In Chapter 4, *Unregistered Genealogies: Costas Montis and Assia Djebar*, I show that bifurcating grand narratives between Greek and Turk, Arab and Berber in Cyprus and Algeria, respectively construct these communities as “islands.” Against this imposed isolation Costas Montis and Assia Djebar create their own unregistered connectivities, various types of lineages, such as genealogy, tradition and kinship, and present them as culminations of complex, intertwined and oppositional identities. Like the other writers studied here, Montis and Djebar present their autobiographies in disguise. This is because, similarly to Walcott, these two authors come to realize themselves as double, or even multiple. But the difference of these narratives from Walcott’s is that the official narratives of their countries’ histories have not yet come to terms with the fact that their ancestors were deeply oppressed by harsh tenant farming. The history these narratives portray is a history of the lives of local Cypriots and Algerians from the point of view of oppression, rather than a history that sustains them in a false image of sovereignty equal to those in the Western world.

In *L’Amour, la fantasia* Djebar investigates her life through the prism of previous writers, Augustine and Ibn Khaldun. Their intertexts broaden the historical span of her

story. Their inclusions in Djébar's text, as I argue, should not only be studied on the basis of their content, but also on the merits of the writers' own biographies and the complex traditions in which they belong. Djébar's choice to incorporate *them*, and not others, in addition to the voices of the women of her era whose stories she records, speaks to her alignment with what she, as a writer, represents the cohabitation of conflictual and oppositional constituencies. Costas Montis investigates his life through the prism of the character *afentis* Batistas, a supposed family ancestor. Afentis Batistas is the combination of the Ottoman Muslim *effendi* and the Venetian Catholic *baptista*. Even though it may initially seem as if Montis is tormented by the question of how this Muslim-Catholic Venetian Batistas could be his ancestor, the actual question that emerges for him is: who is my grandmother, who is this woman whose own story I missed? The subject of Montis' history, even though disguised as a colonial history, it is actually the history of Kalomoira, the local Cypriot grandmother who may also represent all other Cypriot "grandmothers" who experienced the violence of colonialism. The grandmother's history is that she herself has effaced her own history for the sake of the Venetian landlord Batistas for whom she labored. For Montis, the colonial link, afenti Batistas, is replaced by another more crucial link, Kalomoira. Montis comes to understand that Kalomoira, through her stories, perpetuated colonialist narratives without even realizing it. Kalomoira, as just "the grandmother," had made herself into an island. Her history becomes the center of Montis' autobiography.

In the Epilogue, *The Beginning of History*, I discuss autobiography in the Mediterranean as a genre that moves towards history writing and place this in the context of other postcolonial autobiography studies which taken on the question of history in

different ways. Autobiography becomes the space where the truer history of these countries is written. I specifically argue, borrowing from Walcott's poem "The Sea is History" (Walcott 1987, 364) and his idea that history is a beginning, that autobiography emerging from islands is a beginning of histories not yet written. This autobiographical process is historical in the sense that inquiry, knowledge, fact and fiction become outcomes of personal investigation.

## Chapter 2

### Islands: History's Pathway and Derek Walcott's Mediterranean

[Port of Spain] would be so racially various that the cultures of the world—the Asiatic, the Mediterranean, the European, the African—would be represented in it; its humane variety more exciting than Joyce's Dublin. Its citizens would intermarry as they chose, from instinct, not tradition, until their children find it increasingly futile to trace that genealogy.... This is Port of Spain to me, a city ideal in its commercial and human proportions, where a citizen is a walker and not a pedestrian, and this is how Athens may have been before it became a cultural echo.

Derek Walcott "The Antilles" 1992

Derek Walcott's vision of Port of Spain, the capital of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, is that of a multicultural city. A key reference point in his description is Athens, which appears as a "cultural echo," a notion of the city Walcott rejects.<sup>35</sup> In contrast to the phantom, disembodied state of Athens as an "echo" of its classical past, Walcott's multicultural city is "enlivening," a place where citizens are "walkers"—lively, exuberant and free—rather than "pedestrians"—the prosaic, unimaginative, and dull subjects of Empire.<sup>36</sup> Athens as a "cultural echo" represents in Walcott's poetics a

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<sup>35</sup> A similar phrase "the echo of Greece" is also the title of the book by Edith Hamilton (1867-1963), characterized as the "greatest woman classicist." Hamilton published *The Echo of Greece* in 1964 in the era of American imperialism after the Second World War.

<sup>36</sup> The term "enlivening," along with "enriching," was employed by Michael Herzfeld against Horden's and Purcell's use of "corrupting" (Herzfeld 2005, 54).

Western colonial imaginary link that unifies ancient Greece and the Caribbean.<sup>37</sup> Walcott tries to break the tie further by opening up other lines of connection, with multiple fissures—thus difficult to trace. His reference to the city’s citizens as humans who “intermarry as they chose, from instinct, not tradition” is key, as reproducing part of an “instinctive” human tendency rather than something regulated by tradition. Walcott’s imagined multicultural capital emerges out of the city’s “commercial and human proportions.” Instead of being the outcome of settlement, whereby diverse white populations retained their commitment to the old-world nationalisms, Walcott’s imagined multiculturalism develops “its human variety” from natural human activity, which becomes so mixed that it is “impossible to trace,” outside the regulation colonial settlers.<sup>38</sup>

From Walcott’s description of the capital we decipher two types of unity: one takes the form of a unity between Europe and the Caribbean, which becomes possible through the “cultural echo” of Athens, the other is a form of connectivity which is unregulated, instinctive, and natural as part of human interactions, as Athens might have been before it became a cultural echo of the West, and similar to Walcott’s multicultural vision of the Port of Spain.

Walcott’s distinction between colonial and human connectivity, Athens as cultural echo and Athens before its Western colonization, refers to a larger historical problem of the political and cultural framing of the Caribbean. The Caribbean at the beginning of the twentieth century came to be called the “American Mediterranean” (Ober 1904, Bonsal

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<sup>37</sup> For this see also Lorna Hardwick, “Postcolonial Studies” in *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*, p. 312-323.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of multiculturalism, see Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (1994).

1912).<sup>39</sup> At that time, the United States saw the Caribbean as a space of potential natural resources and, for this reason suggested the creation of a federation of islands in the Atlantic that would eventually unify with the United States. This union would ultimately promote trade and expand the United States' military interests. In the previous century, United States Navy officer and oceanographer Matthew F. Maury (1806-1873) saw the Mediterranean as something that belonged to or, better yet, was possessed by different continents. Based on this logic, Maury claimed the Caribbean Sea for the Americans. "All the more, too, that the Mediterranean is to Europe, Africa, and Asia, this sea is to America and the world" (Guterl 2008, 12).<sup>40</sup> After this pronouncement, many Americans came to think of the Caribbean as their "Mediterranean," and the term was popularized in the protectorate era of the early twentieth century, when American foreign policy reflected a belief in Americans' obligation to bring "civilization" to these "backward peoples" (Langley 1976, preface). The desire for a colonial union of the islands of the Caribbean bears the mark of a general trend of colonial aspirations to unify sea regions in order to control political and economic activity in the archipelago. Indeed the "American Mediterranean," with its unionist vision of a political and economic federation of islands in the Caribbean sea, has serious implications for the "Classic Mediterranean," as David Abulafia named the Mediterranean to distinguish it from the Caribbean or "Atlantic Mediterranean" (2005, 66). The parallelism of the Caribbean archipelago to the

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<sup>39</sup> The term is used in a series of articles that American correspondent and diplomat Stephen Bonsal (1865-1951), father of the last American ambassador to Cuba, published in American newspapers. A volume collecting his writings entitled *The American Mediterranean* (1912) was published describing his impressions traveling the Caribbean and the West Indies.

<sup>40</sup> "A line from the Delta of the Orinoco to the east end of Cuba is but a thousand miles long; and yet, to the west of it, lies this magnificent basin of water, locked in by a continent that has on its shores the most fertile valleys of the earth. All the more, too, that *the Mediterranean is to Europe, Africa, and Asia, this sea is to America and the world.*" Matthew F. Maury (1806-1873) in Guterl, Matthew Pratt, 2008.

Mediterranean turns our focus to islands as crucial junctions in the “Mediterranean Unity” of the aforementioned historiographers.

And so the Caribbean and the Mediterranean are linked structurally through the colonization of their islands. As I shall show in the first part of this chapter, the connection is not coincidental.<sup>41</sup> As “echoes” of classical antiquity are part of the Western imagination supporting and, indeed, on many levels driving colonial expansionist visions, so ideas of Mediterranean colonizations provided the foundations for the “American Mediterranean” at the beginning of the twentieth century. The connection of the Caribbean and Mediterranean seas, suggested by Walcott’s reference to the city of Athens, is not just an “accidental connection which is a legacy of cartography and travel literature,” as Emily Greenwood argues in *Afro Greeks* (Greenwood 2010, 23, 38). Rather, it represents a historical justification of colonization of the Caribbean. The “path of words” and “classical motifs,” as Greenwood calls them, were “already mapped out in travel writing” (Greenwood 2010, 14).<sup>42</sup> This “path of words” is another way of expressing classical Greece as transferred to the Caribbean as an “echo” both of literary tradition and colonization, as Walcott’s excerpt evokes.

Derek Walcott’s work tries to distance itself from this tradition. What it proposes instead is nothing but the everyday human interaction and intermarriage, in the broadest sense, of people of different races and ethnicities as part of the Caribbean life. In the second part of this chapter, I use Walcott’s autobiographical writing to introduce islands

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<sup>41</sup> According to Theofilo F. Ruiz in “The Mediterranean and the Atlantic,” Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, and Romans all colonized islands of the Mediterranean in ancient times, and in the Middle Ages Castilians, Genoese, and Venetian merchants were active colonizers. Greek traders maintained a trade route between Hellenistic Alexandria and the Atlantic, and the Greek trade network linked both the eastern and western Mediterranean with the North Atlantic (Ruiz 2014, 413). For more on the history of Mediterranean empires in the Atlantic, see Theofilo F. Ruiz, 2014, pp. 411-424.

<sup>42</sup> For travel writing in the Mediterranean, see Pemble (1987).

as a theme in postcolonial autobiography, representing both the pathways for colonial expansion and the efforts of a native to resist to the role of islands as a pathway to such an expansion. Even though islands were the crucial links in what came to be called the history of the West, their role today is kept invisible in the European history—either as part of it, or more sadly, in the islands’ national history itself. For their own national history islands adapt and reiterate the European history as if it is their own, as suggested in Chapter 1. Islands in the Western imagination become receivers of the history of Europe rather than active creators of their own history.

Walcott captures the distinction between histories of others and of one’s own in his work. In his essay “The Muse of History” he writes, “I fear the cathedrals, the music, the weight of history, not because I was alien, but because I felt history to be the burden of others. I was not excited by continuation of its process but by discovery” (Walcott 1998b, 63): Walcott is not necessarily alienated from the history bequeathed to him by Europeans, for he had learned it at school and lived it as part of the island’s architectural environment. At the same time, however, he realizes that this history is not his own or that of the people who live now in his native Saint Lucia. It is a history of other peoples and, as such, becomes burdensome because it stands in the place of the island’s own history. Walcott wishes to discover, to create, to be an innovator of a new history, rather than to continue the tradition and history of others. History for him is a matter not of preservation of the old but of renewal and innovation.

We shall see that Walcott’s poetry, caustic toward the colonial enterprise in the Caribbean, undoes islands as pathways, crossroads, and passages of Empire, and instead, he reestablishes them in their natural geography, ecology, and local population. In his

self-representation Walcott, as someone who lives on the island of Saint Lucia and who loves the sea and its coasts, does not see the sea as connecting or corrupting, nor does he see Saint Lucia as part of a union of other islands. Islands, for him, are fresh places, possibilities for new beginnings. The new fresh history that Walcott imagines and writes about in his poetry is one that speaks things with their real names, refusing to conform to the remote gaze of the colonial imagination that has given foreign names to islands, seas, peoples, and continents.

A meeting point between an old and new self constitutes the autobiographical element of Walcott's work. The old self does not yet understand the fact that he is not a sovereign national subject as other Western subjects are. This self is a false "image," as Walcott calls it, an imitation of the colonizer. The moment of realization of the false "image" is revealing for the subject, a moment of empowering possibility that Walcott calls a beginning. From this liberating meeting point of old and new self emerges a new subject who no longer accepts the illusion of "sovereignty," the illusion that he is completely free. The subject creates meaning out of his new life, which does not exclude the old, but rather merges with it.

## Regulated Connectivities: The “Mediterranean” in the Atlantic

As noted previously, the Western imagination perceived the Mediterranean and its islands as a unified space. This parallelism of the Caribbean to the Mediterranean archipelago turns our focus to islands as crucial junctions in the “Mediterranean unity” of Braudel, Horden, and Purcell. Islands were seen as knots, stations, or links to larger commercial networks. Contemporary historians of the Mediterranean seem to echo this idea of the Mediterranean as a unified space that has its origins in the imperial traditions of antiquity (Horden and Purcell 2000, 25). In fact, historians invent their own unities. For example, Horden and Purcell say historians should “claim the coastlands of the Mediterranean as a political unit, [because the Mediterranean, like Europe, constitutes] a problem whose relevance we should contest.... [T]he political and ethnic untidiness of the Mediterranean could turn out to be inspiring” (Horden and Purcell 2000, 25). The Mediterranean past, as Horden and Purcell aptly summarize it, is a space of “dense fragmentation complemented by a striving towards control of communication” (Horden and Purcell 2000, 25). Building on the Braudelian idea of “Mediterranean unity,” they argue that the Mediterranean region derives unity and cohesion from a general connectivity of its micro-regions (Horden and Purcell 2000, 90).<sup>43</sup>

This imperialist unionist imaginary reflected the vision of a union of the islands of the Atlantic that would ultimately become part of the federation of the United States. The constituent component of this projected need for the unification of the Atlantic islands was their constructed dependency on the mainland. The control of land and ports of

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<sup>43</sup> Clifford Wright’s *A Mediterranean Feast* (1999), following a Braudelian model, sees evidence of “Mediterranean unity” in the region’s culinary history.

islands in the Caribbean led to their actual dependency on the mainland. This idea became embedded in the islanders' imagination and also inscribed in their bodies and lives. Islanders were seen by colonizers as slaves, human resources, laborers. Each island cultivated specific produce and had its own monocultures—Saint Lucia, for example, produced sugar. When the produce from all islands was brought to the mainland, the mainland market offered a rich assortment of fruits, vegetables, and other edibles that the mainland previously lacked. The local population as colonial subjects and citizens felt themselves neglected by the empire, as well as divided between American and British dependence. These islanders, as we will see, were identified by, and ended up identifying themselves by, the names of the fruits that they produced.

Braudel actually brought out this connection between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean as a unified space. The Atlantic, he wrote, is constituted by different Atlantics linked to national histories. But there is another neglected Atlantic that emerges out of these Atlantics, “possibly because it links together these particular sectors, and whose full significance will only become apparent in the comprehensive history of the Atlantic that has yet to be written,” he suggests. “Yet it is the most ancient of all, the Atlantic of the medieval and even classical navigators” (Braudel 1995, 224). The “real” history of the Atlantic is for Braudel a total history of the region that reflects that of the Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean, considered more ancient than the Atlantic, is placed in a position of origins for the Atlantic. The Mediterranean, Braudel continues, “shaped the Atlantic and impressed its own image on the Spanish new world.... This whole new civilization had roots in the Mediterranean” (Braudel 1995, 226). The Atlantic has a

unified history that awaits writing but grows out of the Mediterranean through the intermediary of Spain. David Abulafia seems to adopt a similar view when he spells out the constitutive superiority of the Mediterranean to the Atlantic by referring to the “Atlantic Mediterranean” as “artificial Mediterranean” or “sub Mediterranean,” as compared to the “Classic Mediterranean” that is more ancient, more authentic, and thus, more European (Abulafia 2005, 66, 67). The pretense of ancient authenticity creates a sense of unity.

At the same time that Braudel presents the Atlantic as having been shaped by the Mediterranean, he also asserts that, reciprocally, the survival and prosperity of the Mediterranean, the “classic,” was dependent on the Atlantic. “In the sixteenth century, the Mediterranean had clear vested interest in the western Atlantic. The prosperous trade of the ocean was beneficial to the inland sea” (Braudel 1995, 225). Moreover, he says, “It would be equally reasonable to say that the Mediterranean for a long time dominated its immediate neighbor [the Atlantic] and that its decadence can be explained among other reasons by its loss of its control” (Braudel 1995, 225). The relationship of the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, as this quotation suggests, was one of domination and control, which decays when there is a loss of control. Braudel uses the following statement to describe not only the relationship of the Mediterranean to the Atlantic but also his philosophy of history “History is not made by geographical features, but by men who control or discover them” (Braudel 1995, 225).

Braudel’s unified but yet unwritten history of the Atlantic was anticipated by early-twentieth-century, colonialist political claims. In Stephen Bonsal’s *The American Mediterranean* (1912), “Mediterranean” becomes a substitute for “union.” This

substitution is crucial, because it is through this somewhat innocuous metaphor that the political claim for the American Caribbean union, and thus domination, is made. Using the “Mediterranean” as an overarching metaphor for union, the American government attempted to “Americanize” the Caribbean islands by “Mediterraneanizing” them. This aligns with Braudel’s claim that “history is not made by geographical features, but by men who control or discover them,” positioning travel, discovery, and conquest at the center not only of colonialism but of history as a whole. The union of the Caribbean would be a Braudelian one, the ultimate history-making apogee. The transformation of the islands and their complex geography into a union would indeed be a historic event—historic in the sense that it would fulfill Braudel’s historiographic definition (Braudel 1995, 225). Braudelian history, then, as a unity of geography, routes, movements of men and products, is among other things a rhetoric for control of the produce. As he writes,

The essential task before us is to measure the relationship this network implies [movements of men, the sum of the sea routes, routes along the rivers, the coasts], the coherence of its history, extent to which the movement of boats, pack animals, vehicles and people themselves makes the Mediterranean a unit and gives it a certain uniformity in spite of local resistance. (Braudel 1995, 276-7)

The historical narrative, like a sea that seamlessly unifies colonial accomplishments, is what unifies remote places into one. Unity is at the core of history, both as geography, and as a narrative.<sup>44</sup> Braudel recognizes these oppressive and politically motivated unities by acknowledging the exploitation of the islands as “ravaged by monocultures” (1995, 155), but at the same time his view of the Mediterranean as a unified space perpetuates them.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> For the discussion of the doubtful ecological and economic unity of Braudel, see Jessica Goldberg, *Trade and Institutions in the Medieval Mediterranean* (2012).

<sup>45</sup> More on Braudel’s view on islands in the following section.

Written in the form of a travelogue, Bonsal's *The American Mediterranean* reflects accounts of British travelers who came to the Mediterranean in the nineteenth century. Another name he gives to his "American Mediterranean" is "American Union," reflecting the desire and aim to unite the islands of Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola (Haiti and Saint Domingo), and Puerto Rico, and also of the lesser Antilles—the smaller Caribbean islands—with the United States. In his description of the islands, Bonsal provides an understanding of islands as spaces that have the ability to connect, as links, "insular chains," "island links," and "encircling rims," thus reinforcing the idea that islands are crossroads, passages, pathways.<sup>46</sup> This understanding, in the context of the political agenda of the "American Union," effaces the actual geography of islands as separate Caribbean entities with their own history and culture. Islands, *unlike* continents, are rejected as spaces of cultural originality and reinscribed as spaces of linking: chains of dependency.

Bonsal acknowledges the British rivalry with the Americans over the conquest of the Caribbean islands. The British Empire, which at the time controlled a number of those islands, was pushing forward their own "imperial union" as a "project of a West Indian federation of British crown colonies."<sup>47</sup> As part of this British/American rivalry over the

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<sup>46</sup> "Once this last island [Puerto Rico] sinks down behind the horizon, the insular chain which surrounds the Caribbean waters takes a downward turn extending to the South American coast. The continental shoreline of south and central America, the old Spanish main, from the mouth of Orinoco and the Yucata channel, completes the land boundaries of the *American Mediterranean* on the south and west, and brings us back to Florida waters and our point of departure. The great majority of those *island links*, which are known as the lesser Antilles, belong to England... The vast extent of the American Mediterranean in which I include the gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean sea, the encircling rim of islands and the coast of the old Spanish main, is not indicated by the small scale maps upon which the West Indies are generally drawn. As a matter of fact *our Mediterranean* has a circuit drawn from Cape Sable round to the Bahamas" (Bonsal 1912, 1-3, my emphasis).

<sup>47</sup> "The universal free trade idea was powerful when no rival idea was in the field but it has now encountered one stronger than itself, that of the might and *unity* of the Empire" (Bonsal 1912, 14-5, my emphasis). Bonsal cites "Mr. Holland," a British official from the *National Review*. The British federation,

islands, the islanders were becoming divided by conflicting views as to which of the two unions they would prefer. Commenting on the “West Indian British federation,” Bonsal cites an unnamed island leader of the Antiguans, expressing his disappointment about the island’s exploitation and neglect by the British imperial government. The British, he claimed, used the islands for economic reasons and specifically for the monoculture of sugar. Instead, the islanders needed to be acknowledged as citizens equal to the ones of the British mainland. This is exactly what the unnamed island leader said:

These islands are so many oranges which the mother country has sucked dry, and now we, the peels or the rind, what you will, are thrown away. I hear quite a trade is springing up between Haitian and Dominican ports and the United States in orange peels, but that is commercial not political. You can take it from me that the great majority of the people of England are concerned in the pursuit of the elusive guineas and do not care a penny for political orange peels such as we are. I think it was Froude, was it not, who said the West Indies grew sugar but not men. As we no longer grow even sugar, how can they be interested in us and in our calamitous affairs? (Bonsal 1912, 15-6)

The speaker here names the islands through the metaphor of oranges, and the islanders, neglected by the empire, as peels or rinds that are thrown away. When placed in its historical context, however, these metaphors become an ironic reality, for oranges were products that these islands produced. And in that sense, the speaker portrays the islands and their people not by their humanity, as people, but by the names of their products, a practice I have already referred to. The space of the West Indies as a place that “grew sugar but not men” suggests that these islanders were effaced as “men” and were rather seen only for what they produced and exported to the metropolis—sugar and oranges—terms that they tragically adapted also for themselves.

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with an inter-insular parliament and a governor general appointed by the emperor king, was more elaborate than that of the Americans (Bonsal 1912, 15).

An islander from Jamaica, also unnamed, commented on the British project analyzing its failed politics of unification at a time when the United States had aspirations in the same region:

The whole business [of the federation] is an absurd dream of two or three English faddists who are weakly supported by a few West Indians who have lived so long in London that they are completely out of touch with the islands...It is true that Demerara, and perhaps one or two of the other colonies, have quite made up their minds. They want the federation and are convinced they would prosper mightily once preferential tariff relations with Great Britain were established. They forgot, or do not see, that the government of the United States would be forced to retaliate, and as a result Jamaica, Dominica, and the other islands dependent upon the American markets would be ruined. (Bonsal 1912, 16-17)

Both of these views explicitly show that the islanders learned to attach their survival, political and economic, on other countries or empires, despite their existence as separate geographical entities.

Having presented these two local anti-British views, Bonsal then presents those of an American official, Brooks Adams, with whom Bonsal agrees. The United States painted a bleak picture of the implication of this rivalry should the United States fail to achieve dominance: “Should the future resemble the past and the conditions of competition remain unchanged, the Caribbean archipelago must either be absorbed by the economic system of the United States or lapse into barbarism” (Bonsal 1912, 20). The Americans also saw themselves as part of a colonial civilizing mission for the safety and welfare of the islands. This civilizing mission, however, especially in the context the islands’ neglect by the empire, as the two islanders previously described, is more of a mission of the empire to keep islands as a reserve mechanism. For the Americans to save the islands from the British turned out to be another way to put them aside or to hang on to them, as in the phrases “save money” or “to save for a rainy day” islands, when saved,

become a reserve, a back-up mechanism for the empire. In addition, islands may themselves become the saviors of the empire by protecting it from a rival one.

The American Union was informed by the Mediterranean imaginary of the British aristocracy and the Grand Tour, which, according to Claudio Fogu, “sought to construct ideas of both modernity and the Mediterranean [through travel]” (Fogu 2010, 3).<sup>48</sup> This more innocent literary and romantic imaginary, in combination with the older conquest of the Caribbean by European empires and merchants, laid the foundations for the newly imagined “Mediterranean” in the Atlantic. The mobility and mutability of the term “Mediterranean” from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic reflects the importance of situating these events in the context of imperialist hegemony, rather than only in the framework of ecology, as a way to “tidy” up the “fragmented” geography of the Mediterranean, in Horden’s and Purcell’s terms (Horden and Purcell 2000, 25).

As a response to the Europeans, who were already in control of the “Classic” Mediterranean, Americans appropriated the Atlantic, using the same Mediterranean metaphor. The adaptation of “the Mediterranean” to the Atlantic signifies that the Mediterranean is something beyond its name as a geographical space. The Mediterranean it is, rather, a signifier for the domination of seas and archipelagic areas.<sup>49</sup> The use of “the Mediterranean” in the Atlantic reveals the Mediterranean as a category that underscores a political agenda and rhetoric of unification. Tellingly, references to the Atlantic as “the Mediterranean” faded into oblivion after the rivalry ended. Having been employed as a rhetorical strategy by the Americans against the British, the metaphor of the

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<sup>48</sup> See also John Pemble, *The Mediterranean Passion* (1987).

<sup>49</sup> This may be seen in parallel with our use of islands as metaphors of places that are not actual islands in their geographies but may be seen as such in their isolation.

Mediterranean reflects another feature of what constitutes “the Mediterranean,” a rhetorical term for unity through geographic expansion.

Although, as I have maintained, the “unity” and “connectivity” of islands are colonial constructions aiming to control remote geographical places, these terms are used by the historians of the Mediterranean to denote trading contacts, partnerships, cultural interactions, religious exchange, and the sharing of similar experiences between East and West, “enabl[ing] different cultures to interact with one another across what may at times seem almost impermeable cultural barriers, such as the Christian Muslim divide” (Abulafia 2005, 74 & 92). The sea as a “continuum of experience through which the thought of the Levantine and Greek worlds mingled, the practice of navigation brought into existence another representation of unity of these waters” (Horden & Purcell 11). Unity of waters as part of the historians’ argument is geographic, as it is also cultural and political.

In their history of the Mediterranean, Horden and Purcell consider the sea as an agent of human interaction, production and the development of history through time. Most importantly, as they convey it, the sea is the agent for what they call “connectivity of micro-regions” (Horden and Purcell 2000, 123):

The sea unites the Mediterranean conceptually as well as topographically. It is no barrier to communications but the medium of all human intercourse from one region to another... The sea is also the foundation of our case for the distinctiveness of Mediterranean History: deeply implicated in the unpredictability of the conditions of life, it is also of course the principal agent of connectivity. (Horden and Purcell 2000, 133)

Just as, for Braudel, it is the discovery and control of the geography that makes history, for Horden and Purcell it is the connectivity of the sea. And for them, “connectivity is the

various ways in which micro-regions cohere, both internally but also with another—in aggregates that may range in size from small clusters to something approaching the entire Mediterranean [unity]” (Horden and Purcell 2000, 123). Their historiography, with the sea as the primary agent of communication whereby empires take the second seat, could be seen as an agent-less historiography, whereby the ecology takes over.

The multi-ethnic and multi-religious communities formed in these circumstances need to be studied in the context of colonialism.<sup>50</sup> The origins of these contacts and interactions were exploitative. Islands, as we will see, were the ultimate victims of exploitation, stepping stones for cultural transferability and monocultural development. “Islands ultimately become the places that suffered the colonial burden most intimately and thoroughly” (Baldacchino & Royale 2010, 140).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The Mediterranean, as a space of diversity of religions and ethnicities, then, may as well be another slogan for “united in diversity,” which is the official *motto* of the European Union.

<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, it is only *after* Napoleon’s attempt to isolate Great Britain that insularity began to acquire negative connotations. According to Karla Mallette, insularity began to acquire negative connotations around the midpoint of the eighteenth century. Mallette acknowledged the impact of Great Britain on the negative idea of insularity, through Napoleon’s attempts at that time to isolate her, aiming to consolidate the power of the European states (Mallette 2007, 28).

## History's Orphans<sup>52</sup>

Forgive our desertions, you islands  
Whose names dissolve like sugar  
In a child's mouth.

Derek Walcott, *Another Life*.

The islands of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic were exploited by empires in the Middle Ages, such as Cyprus, Chios, Crete, Corfu, Djerba, Sicily in the Mediterranean and Madeira, the Canaries, the Cape Verde islands and the Azores in the Atlantic.<sup>53</sup> Islanders worked as serfs, and in many instances as slaves, for their monarchs.<sup>54</sup> Islands were places the empire used for cultivation of different monocultures, eventually exported to the metropolis. According to Braudel, “these single crop economies were the result of foreign intervention, artificial and often harmful to what is expressed by *volkswirtschaft* [economics]” (Braudel 1995, 155). The names of islands, metaphorically speaking, are erased from world history, just as sugar dissolves in the mouth of the child who eats it in Walcott’s poem quoted above. Instead the islands became known for their products: wheat in Sicily, mastic in Chios, cotton, vines, and sugar in Cyprus, wine in Crete and Corfu, olives in Djerba. Generally, the cultivation of monocultures often excluded the cultivation of other possible local products, but the island economies that grew sugarcane (which, between the tenth and eleventh centuries,

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<sup>52</sup> An alteration of Walcott’s verse in the poem “The Star-Apple Kingdom:” “But now she held him, as she holds us all, / history-orphaned islands, she to whom / we came late as our muse, our mother, / who suckled the islands” (Walcott 1986, 392).

<sup>53</sup> See related section in *The Caribbean: A History of the Region and its People* (2011) about the expansion of slavery from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. “Old Precedents: Sugar and Slavery in the Mediterranean” pp. 77-79.

<sup>54</sup> For slavery in the Americas see Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (2008).

was brought from India to Egypt to Cyprus to Sicily, before reaching Madeira and other Atlantic sugarcane islands) were “literally ravaged by monoculture[s]” (Braudel 1995, 155).<sup>55</sup>

To give this in detail, I cite Braudel’s historical account of the effects of sugarcane production on the island of Madeira:

Originally a timber island, Madeira rapidly lost the major part of its forest cover to the sugar mills and their need for fuel. This revolution was carried out entirely in the interest of a Europe which was clamoring for this precious commodity, and not in the interests of the islanders themselves. Moreover, the tragedy of sugarcane is that wherever it is grown it prevents the growing of other crops in rotation and restricts the space available for food crops. This new arrival completely upset the old balance and was all the more dangerous because it was protected by a powerful capitalism which in the sixteenth century was lodged in many quarters; in Italy, Lisbon and Antwerp. And it was impossible to offer resistance. In general the island populations were unable to withstand this drain on their resources. In the Canaries, sugar was almost certainly as responsible as the brutalities of the first conquerors for the disappearance of the indigenous natives, the Guanches. And it was the sugar plantations which generalized the use of slave labor, leading to the enslavement, of the Berbers of the African coast and particularly to the slave trade in Negroes from guinea and Angola which in the middle of the century, again because of sugar, reached the shores of the American continent. These are examples from the Atlantic. But there is no shortage of strictly Mediterranean examples. (Braudel 1995, 254)

Islands such as Cyprus and Madeira became “the detritus of crumbling continents or the seeds of new ones, points of ending or of origin” (Edmond and Smith 2003, 1, cited in Goldie 2011, 5).

This connection of island to mainland is in contrast to the image of islands in Western culture. The meditation by John Donne (1572-1631) “No man is an island”

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<sup>55</sup> Sugarcane, which was brought from India to Egypt, passed from Egypt to Cyprus, becoming established there in the tenth century; from Cyprus it soon reached Sicily in the eleventh century and from Sicily it was taken west; Henry the Navigator had some brought from Sicily to send to Medeira, which was the first ‘sugar island’ of the Atlantic; then moved to Azores, the Canaries, the Cape Verde islands and beyond to America (Braudel 1995, 154).

encapsulates in a striking way the place of islands, including the British Isles, in the Western imagination.<sup>56</sup>

No man is an island,  
entire of itself,  
every man is a piece of the continent,  
a part of the main.  
If a clod be washed away by the sea,  
Europe is the less.  
As well as if a promontory were.  
As well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were:  
Any man's death diminishes me,  
Because I am involved in mankind,  
And therefore never send to know  
for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.  
“Meditation XVII,” 1623

The poem presents islands as “entire of themselves;” in contrast, man needs to connect to the whole, to humanity, to a community, like a promontory. If man is separated from the whole, like a promontory washed away by the sea, then this diminishes the whole that considers him a part of itself. The separation is serious however small the unit: a small clod of earth is as important as a promontory, and a single man as important as many. At the end of the meditation, this connection to the whole of humanity takes the form of death, as the individual understands that death is common to all: “And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.” The image of islands invoked here is one of independence, autonomy, and isolation, whereas man is connected to the community of mankind.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> I acknowledge that this was written at the time when Britain, an island, was trying to make a case for her connectivity with Europe and that this is a spiritual poem as well.

<sup>57</sup> Walcott refers to Donne’s poetry in “Ruins of Great House,” in the collection *In a Green Night* (1962) (1986, 19). Elsewhere Walcott states: “poetry is an island that breaks away from the main. The dialects of the archipelago seem as fresh to me as those raindrops on the statue’s forehead, not the sweat made from

Embracing the positive message of John Donne's meditation, namely that humans must not remain isolated but be connected to their community, Paulo De Medeiros argues that, instead of islands being seen as Europe's others, it is rather Europe that needs to be imagined as an assortment of island communities, native and immigrant. "If we imagine Europe as a conglomerate of impure islands, we might come to build bridges between them and the other islands of the world" (Medeiros 2011, 221). Medeiros reads the meditation as an "opening up to the possibility of conceptualizing Europe not as the world but as an aggregate of islands" (Medeiros 2011, 219). Such a view, however, invokes an idea of islands that keeps "unity" and "connectivity" at its core: in contrast to Donne's usage, islands here are incomplete and must be joined to others to form a larger whole. They are presented as meager, secondary, and less human. Only their unity with Europe will allow their fulfillment into full humanity and civility.

Yet these Western-ruled islands served as beginnings of the dissemination of foreign trends—fashion, crops, vegetation—that came from faraway continents to Europe. "It is through islands that colonial expansion starts slowly and expands to other places" (Braudel 1995, 154). In that sense, islands need to be seen as places of gathering and dissemination, at least as important as the metropolises. Braudel illustrates this transfer and dissemination of cultural movements along with things from islands to the metropolises:

The islands played a similar role in the dissemination of...most cultural movements, some of which were extremely complicated. It was by way of Cyprus and the sumptuous courts of the house of Lusignan that there came to the West, more slowly than the light of some stars reaches the earth, the costumes of the ancient bygone China of the T'ang dynasty...that were fashionable in China in the

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classic exertion of frowning marble, but the condensations of the refreshing element, rain and salt" (Walcott 1998, 70).

fifth century. And this distant heritage was passed on to the West by the kings of Cyprus. (Braudel 1995, 154)

In spite of islands' imaginary isolation and marginality in world history, which makes them absent or neutral players in it, islands were not isolated, but actually central components in the history of empires: "it is now widely accepted that even pre modern cultures and societies were engaged in the wider circuits of communication and exchange. There is no reason to believe that islands were any more or less isolated than other areas of the earth" (Dodds & Royle 2003, 489). In Braudel's historiography, islands are explained as spaces that were violently exploited, but also as spaces from which the empire received and then disseminated cultural trends to Europe. "Events of history often lead to the islands. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they make use of them" (Braudel 1995, 254). This "history of great events" occurred via the islands, but without islands being visible protagonists. For they only became pathways "of great sea routes and played a part in international relations" (Braudel 1995, 255). This comes in contrast to Mallette's explanation of islands as places with rich agricultural and cultural productivity—which of course they were. Here is how Mallette presents this idea:

Certainly, mainland kingdoms administered the Mediterranean islands as colonial states throughout much of the Middle Ages. However, the islands were desirable not only from a strategic point of view, but also because of their agricultural and cultural productivity. That is, they might serve as the jewels—to cite a relevant metaphor—in the crown of particularly ambitious monarchs, rather than mere stepping stones between continental states and continental colonies. (Mallette 2007, 29)

Here Mallette points to but does not pause to analyze the tension between "the agricultural productivity" of islands and their exploitation by ambitious colonizers, even though she certainly mentions it. As Braudel informs us, islands led a "precarious,

restricted, and threatened life” in their domestic affairs. But “the role they have played in the forefront of history far exceeds what might be expected from such poor territories” (255). The very possibility of an expansive British Empire was due to the island colonies from the Caribbean to the Pacific, to the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: it was because of them that the sun never set upon the British empire (Deloughery 2004, 301).

Histories of the islands of the Caribbean and the Mediterranean that show their centrality to the growth of the empires that dominate Western history remain to be written. At this point if we wish to ask “who benefits from the persistent myth of island isolation, for there is an irresolvable contradiction that suggests that islands are simultaneously isolated yet deeply susceptible to migration and settlement” (Deloughery 2004, 300), we should turn to the history of islands themselves. I would argue that the history of islands has been written not by a historian but by a poet, Derek Walcott, to whom I now turn. Walcott writes about his life as an answer to the neglect of islanders like him.

### **The Nightmare of History**

“What is Mediterranean history—if anything?” (Kinoshita & Horden 2014, 4).<sup>58</sup>

To this question Walcott’s long narrative poem “The Schooner *Flight*” (1980) would have replied that Mediterranean history is the history of its islands. Having been

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<sup>58</sup> Their question is also followed by a set of similar questions such as: “How should history be pursued—if at all? What definitions of the Mediterranean might appropriately animate it? What should its scope be, in terms of both period and subject matter? On none of these questions is there anything like consensus” (Kinoshita and Horden 2014, 4)

neglected and marginalized from their role as central components in world history, islands lead the way to a new history.

The Antilles, the space where “The Schooner *Flight*” takes place, was a colonial name. *Antilles* means “before-islands” or “lands-before-the-continent.” By calling them Antilles, says Martinique writer Patrick Chamoiseau (1953—), colonists subordinated islanders’ identities to that of the colonizing continent. They did not imagine themselves among real people, with a history and agency (McCusker 2011, 49). The Western imaginary retains this impression of the Antilleans by identifying with the paradisiacal and the touristic aspect of those islands. Once the holiday delights of “sea sun sex zouk” have been consumed, the island becomes for the Westerner a site of projection of a different kind, no longer an object of desire, but isolated and marginalized (McCusker 2011, 49).

Walcott’s poetry is a response to this colonial perspective of the Antilles, still awaiting a historical treatment on their own terms. In “The Schooner *Flight*” Walcott reclaims travel and connectivity simply as instances in the lives of the people of the Caribbean archipelago. He stages himself as someone who escapes his native island, burdened with colonial history and corruption, embarking on a journey as a seaman. His name is Shabine, and the ship is called *The Schooner Flight*. Shabine is Walcott’s persona who says: “I had a sound colonial education, I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me...a rusty head...sea-green eye[s] / that they nickname Shabine / the patois for any red nigger” (1986, 346).<sup>59</sup> While Shabine could have been yet another Odysseus out of the European tradition, he is not. Walcott’s colonial education and mixed race makes him

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<sup>59</sup> Walcott was “the beneficiary of an excellent English education with its many British traditions [and] of mixed ancestry—both English and black West Indian” (Baer 1996, ix).

“any red nigger”: a simple Caribbean man rather than an exceptional or renowned voyager. Similarly, in *Omeros* (1990) Walcott does not reinvent the *Odyssey* in the Caribbean. To have reinvented the *Odyssey* in the Caribbean, Walcott himself says, “would be to humiliate the landscape and say to the Caribbean Sea: ‘You must think of yourself as a second rate Aegean, or, on a good day, you can look like the Mediterranean” (Walcott cited in Breslin 2009, 242). Just as Walcott’s Shabine is not a simple reflection of the *Odyssey*, Walcott’s Antillean Mediterranean is not a reflection of the “classic” one: it is instead that of islands populated by ordinary people, descendants of former slaves, as well as of their masters. By using these classical references Walcott aims to extract them from their imperialist environment and reinstitute them as part of lived experience of ordinary people.

As part of Shabine’s journey, in the section with the title “Shabine encounters the Middle Passage,” the sea emerges as a bearer of the painful colonial history of slavery. Shabine imagines his slave ancestors buried under the sea. Desiring to connect with these deceased slaves, Shabine and his fellow seamen shout their names, but their effort is, of course, in vain. Connecting with ancestors is a futile task. “Our fathers below deck too deep, I suppose, / to hear us shouting. So we stop. / Who knows who his grandfather is?” (1986, 353). Walcott’s question addresses each of the poem’s readers, and in a way he is right: who really knows who their ancestor really was? One only knows *about* the ancestor. The difference is one between ontology and epistemology: knowing *who* someone is and knowing *about* that person. Ancestry, in a national context, is the outcome of the *episteme* of commemoration of linear links from the past to the present.

Slavery seems to be yet another linear link, emanating from European conquest. But Walcott destabilizes this knowledge. The specificity of the names given to people of the past forbids a reinvention of that past that keeps it fixed: “Who knows / who his grandfather is, much less his name?” Moreover, Walcott questions the necessity of knowing one’s ancestors: in other words, what’s past is past.<sup>60</sup> While acknowledging a past of slavery, Walcott opposes national commemorations that transform the tragic past and anger of slavery into an ideology about the African race, for, as he says, “slaves [too] have been [later] corrupted into tyrants” (1998a, 12). Walcott is not ashamed of his ancestral slavery background, but he rejects the fixation on the past:

Yes. But we are all strangers here. The claim we put forward now as Africans is not our inheritance but a bequest, like that of other races, a bill for the condition of our arrival as slaves. Our own ancestors shared that complicity and there is no one left on whom we can exact revenge. That is the laceration of our shame... We have no more proprietorship as a race than have the indentured workers from Asia except the claim is wholly made. By all the races as one race, because the soil was stranger under our own feet than under those of our captors... theirs were the names we used. We began again...our curiosity...gave old names life.  
(Walcott 1998a, 10)

The commemoration of the colonial history of slavery is debilitating for these present-day travelers who neglect the sea as a space for their own travels, their own new discoveries.

A long section of the poem, the section on his turbulent journey at sea, is staged as a dream, and, I would suggest, as a response to James Joyce’s line “History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake,” which Walcott also uses as an epigraph for his essay “The Muse of History” (*Ulysses* 2010, 32). An ethereal figure, Maria Conception, who accompanies Shabine on his journey, holds *The Book of Dreams*, a book of interpretation of dreams. Critics have discussed this aspect of the poem in a

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<sup>60</sup> A similar idea from another of Walcott’s poems is “The tired slave vomits his past” (*Another Life* 1973, 183).

number of ways. As part of the main character's suspension between his lover Maria Conception and the wife and children he leaves behind as he sets off on a journey at sea—thus about difficulty of choice and the impossibility of choosing (Hamner 1993); As a deliberation on self-sacrifice and overcoming oppositional dualities and trauma (Kamada 2010); and as the alienation of exile, displacement, and the suffering of mixed-race populations (Burnett 2001), but none of these discussions have acknowledged the poem's dream structure, that Walcott adopts as a framework and as a conceptual focus. Nor has anyone identified the *Book of Dreams* as another book of history. The dream is the space of history from which Shabine strives to escape. The poet, Shabine, seeks the possibility of an alternative life beyond the one determined by the colonial and national cultures that valorize the African past. Walcott encourages the reader to embrace this possibility.

Suffering from insomnia, Maria Conception finds the prospect of dreaming the sole reason to sleep and always keeps the *Book of Dreams* at her bedside so that she can read their interpretations. The *Book of Dreams*, however, does not provide her any answers or solutions. "She ravage the book / for the dream meaning and there was nothing" (1986, 357). As part of this nightmare within the tide of history, the *Book of Dreams* is another book for the ravages of history to consume: "that insomniac's Bible, / a soiled orange booklet, with a Cyclopes' eye / center, from the Dominican Republic. / Its coarse pages were black with the usual / symbols of prophesy, in excited Spanish; / an open palm upright, sectioned and numbered / like a butcher chart, delivered the future" (1986, 357). Maria Conception is just as enslaved to history as those earlier slaves to their colonial masters. Even though Maria Conception is the most faithful reader of the

*Book of Dreams*, Walcott calls her “dreamless” (1986, 345). As long as she continues to live and dream historically, to seek out the meaning of dreams in the recorded dreams of others, she will never be a real dreamer. Subsequently, Walcott rejects the prophetic aspect of history and reclaims dreaming, or, better yet, imagining, as a human rather than a historical experience.

In one of her dreams Maria Conception dreams of a whale and a storm, alluding to the story of Jonah in the belly of the whale. Shabine is saddened when he concludes that “I’m the drowned sailor in her *Book of Dreams*” (1986, 359). Subsequently, in the book of history, a book of the past, Shabine would have doubled himself as yet another ancestor slave drowning at sea. History, like the invasive tide during Shabine’s journey, is a sudden tide into the journey of life. The “nightmare of history” is that history is predictable, for it repeats itself, in contrast to life which is full of contingencies, capricious and mercurial. Life as History is not actual life, it is a false dream. Walcott explicitly says in one of his essays: “For every poet it is always morning in the world. History is forgotten, insomniac night; History [is] always our early beginning because the after of poetry is to fall in love with the world, in spite of History” (Walcott 1998c, 79).

In a way, Walcott demystifies the figure of the poet and makes every human who wakes up in the morning and is a lover of life a poet—a creator of his or her own history. History would only constitute a beginning, a new history, as long as it is, like poetry (*poesis*), part of life in its *making* (*poesis*). In contrast to life, history renders Shabine’s journey inconceivable, indecipherable, vast, and complicated. And the *Book of History* is a manual to decipher the world—as part of that dream—to locate life as part of a unifying historical narrative.

Prior to his sailing, when Shabine departs for the harbor, he encounters an old woman sweeping her yard. She ignores his presence “The bitch looked through me like I was dead” (1986, 345). The current life on the island under the colonial order makes its inhabitants ignore one another and human relationships. As he roams in those streets, “a dog on these streets,” he is unhappy (1986, 346). In the taxi that drives him to the port, he recognizes himself as double, on the one hand as a colonial subject living a life that he does not own and, on the other, as someone who seeks to live his life outside the subtle regulation of empire: “I look in the rearview and see a man / exactly like me, and the man was weeping / for the houses, the streets, the whole fucking island” (1986, 345). These streets and houses “had started to poison my soul / with the big house, big car, big bohbohl / coolie, nigger, Syrian, and French Creole / so I leave them” (1986, 346). Western capitalism embedded and naturalized by the local Caribbean population effaces them even more. These streets are Western streets.

Once at sea, Shabine’s thoughts are conditioned by the current corruption of his island. “If loving these islands must be my load / out of corruption my soul takes wings” (1986, 346). Corruption colors his escape but also his love for the islands. By leaving these islands he can still love them without being complicit with their everyday corruption. The more he is at sea the further away he is from history.<sup>61</sup>

Shabine awakes, “I finish dream,” and finds himself sitting alone on the deck of a ship, realizing that his travel hasn’t taken him far, only to the Bahamas: “my *Flight* never pass the incoming tide / of this inland sea beyond the loud reefs / of the final Bahamas” (1986, 360). His journey, departing from his native Saint Lucia, does not reach a

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<sup>61</sup> The sea, lacking history, explains the epigraph of Horden’s and Purcell’s *The Corrupting Sea*: “Plato thinks that those who want a well governed city ought to shun the sea as a teacher of vice (ponerodidaskalos),” Strabo, *Geography* 7.3.8.

continent. Nevertheless, he feels satisfied as long as “my hand gave voice to one peoples’ grief,” suggesting that his poetry, emerging from within the islands, renders his work prosperous enough, for it is, at least, real (1986, 360). He is also satisfied for he realizes that, disregarding the short distance of his travel; he is surrounded by innumerable islands:

Open the Map. More islands there, man,  
than peas on a tin plate, all different size,  
one thousand in the Bahamas alone. (1986, 360)

Walcott undoes the Western metaphor of islands as places of isolation, reconstructing them as “peas on a tin plate” and emphasizing their materiality and actuality.

In *Omeros* he does something similar: “we helped ourselves / to those green islands like olives from a saucer” (*Omeros* 1990, 25). His islands are multiple and variable, “all different size,” and spaces of possibility.<sup>62</sup> Walcott puts continents and islands into perspective too, as part of the universe of islands.

There are so many islands!  
As many islands as the stars at night  
On that branched tree from which meteors are shaken  
like falling fruit around the Schooner Flight  
But things must fall, and so always was,  
On one hand Venus, on the other Mars;  
Fall, and are one, just as this earth is one  
Island in archipelagoes of stars. (1986, 361)

Walcott rethinks the scale of perceiving islands. Islands no longer acquire their existence as a piece that has broken away from the mainland, casting adrift in the Caribbean Sea, a colonial narrative, but are pieces of the universe. Nor is Walcott’s journey about the fixity of land or the fluidity of sea. His journey conveys the long distance between life and

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<sup>62</sup> Even though those similes may also ironically refer to the produces that the islands produced for the empire.

history and the proximity of islands to the rest of the universe “as the stars at night.” His journey at sea is a journey of transformation from a historical into a human subject. Without traveling far, Walcott claims islands for their present inhabitants, unlike colonials who claimed them for what they had to offer the metropole—slaves, channels, products. For Walcott there is only one unity and that is of the whole earth: “this earth is one / island in the archipelagos of stars.” Ultimately, his perspective emphasizes the global and cosmic. The distance of the Bahamas to Saint Lucia suffices to expose Shabine to the vastness of the universe.<sup>63</sup> His reconciliation and unity are a personal rather than global process. The unanticipated falling of the stars “like falling fruit” from a tree symbolizes the elimination of human hierarchies of “ministers-monsters...guardians of the poor,” “the police,” “businessmen” (1986, 348, 357). With their fall from high positions, humans become the measures of their own lives and find meaning in the elements of nature that surround them. Walcott’s perspective renders the island space as a central unit in the sea but also claims an equal place for islands in the world.

Shabine’s voyage at sea, unlike the voyages of earlier explorers, remains unbound by a specific purpose. He is guided by coincidence. “I have only one theme: The bowsprit, the arrow, the longing, the lunging heart ... the flight to a target whose aim we’ll never know, / vain search for one island that heals with its harbor” (1986, 360-1). His travel is without expectations. His island is not a “target,” as in those old (and new) colonial conquests. His journey is not therapeutic, like those colonial travelers. His journey is motivated by the opposite of conquest—it is fueled by the hope of liberation.

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<sup>63</sup> Walcott’s view of the earth as an island echoes that of Greek, Roman, and medieval authors who saw insularity as a condition common to islands and continents alike (Goldie 2011, 27).

Instead of islands being passageways to the world, Walcott makes history his own passageway (out) of the isolation of islands by history.

By staging his life as history within a nightmare/dream, Walcott mocks the factuality of a life linked to a historical narrative or a particular tradition. Dreams may be allegories of one's former life or prophecies for the future, but they are never real. A reality within a reality, a world within the world, dreams, like history, are seductive spaces that offer the illusion of reality. Unlike John Donne, Walcott tells us that a man is an island when he obeys the law of history, when he obeys the laws of his community; a man is an island when he is isolated from himself.<sup>64</sup> Walcott reclaims journey and travel for the islanders, the ordinary fishermen. He undoes islands as passageways of Empire, reconstructing them as possibilities of relief from the burden of history. Walcott poetically frames this relief by juxtaposing it with another sleep in opposition to his historical sleep in "The Schooner *Flight*" and the nightmare of history. In the following two verses he conveys islands as spaces with no history or as spaces that could possibly wipe out their history and begin anew.

He slept the sleep that wipes out history  
he slept like the islands on the breast of the sea,  
like a child again in her star-apple kingdom.

"The Star Apple Kingdom" (Walcott 1986, 391)

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<sup>64</sup> "While the islanders in the Caribbean considered the islands not as isolated entities but linked by the sea, the colonist, by contrast, barricaded himself into the island with ramparts, boundaries, and national colors" (McCusker 2011, 49).

## Walcott's View of the Mediterranean

This so called New World had become... a hemisphere without history, alien to the great Mediterranean tradition, a land of Indians and negroes peopled by the off- scourings of the great nations of Europe... For here it had not been the amalgam of related peoples, such as history had fused at certain crossroads of Ulysses's sea, but of the great races of the world, the most widely separated, the most divergent, those which for centuries had ignored the fact that they inhabited the same planet.

Alejo Carpentier, *The Lost Steps*<sup>65</sup>

The Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier (1904-1980) gives us a sense of the Caribbean as a mixture of the great races of the world. Even though both the Mediterranean and the Caribbean are presented as products of a colonial European order, for Carpentier the Caribbean is different, in the sense that it has been conceived as a space where the “off-scourings of the great nations of Europe” resided along with Indians and Blacks. Carpentier's view distinguishes the Caribbean from the Mediterranean, rather than seeing the New World as a continuation (or product) of the Old, a construction of the European hegemonic imagination. Despite this difference, Carpentier and Caribbean writers who followed him such as Édouard Glissant (1928-2011), Aimé Césaire (1913-2008), and Saint-John Perse [Alexis Leger] (1887-1975) have called themselves the writers of “the New World Mediterranean” (Dash 1998; Greenwood 2010).<sup>66</sup> However, not all of these writers saw themselves as part of the “New World Mediterranean” in the same way, however

Similar to Carpentier's view that the Caribbean was a space of divergent races, Martinican writer Edouard Glissant (1928–2011) emphasizes the Caribbean as “a place of

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<sup>65</sup> Carpentier, Alejo. *The Lost Steps*. London: Victor Gonzalez, 1956, pp. 80, 75.

<sup>66</sup> According to Michael Dash, “the idea of an Antillean identity should reemerge in the 1940s in the concept of a New World Mediterranean proposed by a Cuban novelist, Alejo Carpentier. This tendency, no doubt, has much to do with the elaboration of an Antillean aesthetic in a contemporary, postmodern context by Cuban writer Benitez Rojo” (Dash 1998, 11).

encounter and connivance” (Glissant 1997, 33). Comparing the Caribbean to the Mediterranean, he says that the Mediterranean is “a sea that concentrates in Greek, Hebrew, and Latin antiquity and later in the emergence of Islam, imposing the thought of the One” (Glissant 1997, 33). This, he continues, is in contrast to the Caribbean, “a sea that explodes the scattered lands into an arc...A sea that diffracts” (1997, 33). For Glissant the Mediterranean represents a space of myths expressed by individual communities asserting themselves as different from one another. In spite of their mingling and exchange, the Mediterranean communities are threatening and obscure for each other. The relatedness of the Mediterranean peoples under the auspices and control of European history, he says, becomes problematic as it is a relatedness that remains firmly aware of each community’s boundaries, reducing the other community to the transparency experienced by one’s own (Glissant 1997, 49). Glissant also refers to the Caribbean as “a passageway toward the American continent,” which perpetuates the European image of islands as crossroads. In short, Glissant’s comparison of the Caribbean and the Mediterranean attempts to attribute to the Caribbean a superiority vis à vis the Mediterranean, without realizing that both seas have been appropriated by European hegemony.

According to Michael Dash, “New World Mediterranean” encapsulates a group of Caribbean writers who appropriate Greece and the Mediterranean as “a daring raid on the founding notion from which the imperialist project derived its authority” (Dash 1998, 18-9). This “raid” Dash sees as a form of thought, offering by way of this Mediterranean discourse “powerful possibilities of renewal, of hallowing the everyday, of conceiving of the Caribbean as the magical crossroads of the Americas” and of “fused identity” (Dash,

1998, 18). In this conceptualization, Dash takes for granted rather than questioning how the “magical crossroad” of the Caribbean is similar to the Mediterranean. Neither he nor other writers mentioned above challenge the Mediterranean as itself a colonial European construction. At the same time, they neglect the imperial and political aspects of the project that turned the Caribbean into the “American Mediterranean.”

Writing on Derek Walcott, Dash says, “the Mediterranean becomes a concrete element of his poetics and provides him with tropes such as play, the polyglot city, Babel, twilight, flight,” which is not necessarily a persuasive summarizing view of Walcott’s Mediterranean poetics (Dash 1998, 106). In Walcott’s poetic universe, Dash continues, “the Mediterranean symbolizes an intercultural matrix, the geographic correlative to the Caribbean archipelago. This is the poet’s strategy for wresting the Caribbean islands free from the stereotypes of fragmentation and dependency” (Dash 1998, 98).

But there is another crucial aspect to Walcott’s Mediterranean. His poem “The Star Apple Kingdom” (1979), published in the collection by that name which also includes “The Schooner *Flight*,” deals with the state of slavery and colonialism in Jamaica. Walcott appears to treat the resemblance of the New and the Old Worlds sarcastically as a colonial projection: “Pools of shadow from an older sky surviving from when the landscape copied such subject” (Walcott 1987, 383). Here and elsewhere, Walcott engages the Mediterranean in his poetry, but with a difference from other writers in that he sees the Mediterranean not as an idealized “intercultural matrix” but as a space of slavery and islands. He sees the Caribbean peoples as victims of exploitation and slavery equal to those of the Mediterranean. In one of his interviews he makes this clear:

Part of what I'm saying in *Omeros* is that the Greeks were the niggers of the Mediterranean. If we looked at them now, we would say that the Greeks had Puerto Rican tastes. Right? Because the stones were painted brightly. They were not these bleached stones. As time went by, and they sort of whitened and weathered, the classics began to be thought of as something bleached out and rain spotted, distant. People who praised classical Greece, if they were there then, would consider the Greek's tastes vulgar, lurid. (Walcott, cited in Hamner 1997, 1)<sup>67</sup>

The white color of houses, statues, and ruins, the “bleached stones” of the Greek civilization, suggest the wear of time and the elements or perhaps the chemical conservation of the monuments in Western museums. With the passage of time, these “bleached stones” were established as “classic” and “distant” from actual life itself, full of varied colors. Time washed away the many shades of the real Greece, which, he suggests, might have been today's Puerto Rico if the color of its people and their works had lingered “with tastes vulgar and lurid.” Rather than white, Walcott thinks of their ruins as demonumentalized: painted in bright colors and as part of the everyday experience of the inhabitants of the Greek landscape. He de-idealizes Greeks as Mediterraneans in the European sense and calls them “niggers.”

Walcott is interested in the local, mixed native people, rather than in the whitewashed heroes of classical myth, the philosophers, the poets—the “cultural echo” of Athens referred to in his “Antilles” quoted in the beginning of this chapter. His poetics of mixing is visible also in his most famous poem *Omeros* (1990), which seems to echo the name of the great Greek poet, yet actually carries the name of a brand of vitamin pills: “Old St. Omer. / He claimed he'd sailed around the world. ‘Monsieur Seven Seas’ / they christen him, from a cod-liver-oil label” (Walcott 1990, 17-18).<sup>68</sup> Walcott appropriates *Omeros* into the use of everyday Antillean language: “I said ‘Omeros,’ / and *O* was the

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<sup>67</sup> D.J.R. Bruckner, “A Poem in Homage to an Unwanted Man,” *New York Times*, 9 October 1990, 13.

<sup>68</sup> This reference is from Justine McConnell, *Black Odysseys*, 2013, p. 110.

conch-shell's invocation, *mer* was / both mother and sea in our Antillean patois, / *os*, a gray bone, and the white surf as it crashes / and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore" (Walcott 1990, 14). Instead of the ancient Homer or Homeros, Omeros, a Modern Greek version, as Patrick Colm Hogan, argued, "implies that he himself is this new, modern Homer (i.e. "Omeros"), the new Homer who transforms it from a story about the heroism of the oppressor to a story about the heroism of the oppressed" (Hogan 2004, 175).

In the excerpt quoted above, Walcott suggests an image of Greeks as they used to be or must have been in their reality. His interventionist critique of the Western gaze over the Mediterranean is done through a shifting of perspective. In his characterization of Greeks "as the niggers of the Mediterranean," that is to say, denigrated blacks, Walcott's attack goes to the heart of Western civilization, rather than to the Greeks themselves. His utterance is an act of liberation, not only of the Caribbean peoples from stereotypes of their peculiar slavery, but even more so of the Neohellenic mind that is bound to Europeans' narcissistic valorization of themselves, with the Greeks serving as the mirror and origin of the European self. Walcott, by contrast, makes Greece Europe's other and sets out to liberate it from a narcissistic, self-serving, but ultimately myopic gaze. In Walcott's poetics, "Greek" and "Mediterranean" become crucial categories in the representation of islands not as colonial valorizations of the past, but simply as concepts that are integral and constituent to island cultures living near the sea. "Greek" and "Mediterranean" are by definition island concepts.

This view of the Mediterranean as Europe's narcissistic mirror finds its place in another of Walcott's poems. In "The Hotel Normandie Pool" (1981) Walcott transforms the Mediterranean from a narcissistic mirror, onto which the West projects its own image,

to a mechanism of disguise.<sup>69</sup> He does this by employing Ovid, the master-poet of mirroring, and his myth of Narcissus. While Walcott undoes the water metaphor as mirror, transforming it into a way of disguise, at the same time he mirrors Ovid himself and becomes his double, thus disguising his autobiographical narrative. The two poets become mirrors of each other in their experience of exile, isolation, and insult in the context of empire and nation. Apart from transforming the Mediterranean in a disguise mechanism, the poem performs a confession of the two men's life stories, emerging as the two engage in a dialogue. Through their life stories new histories of themselves and of the empire/nation emerge. Their dialogue is a camouflage of Walcott's dialogue with himself.

Walcott, who has just been divorced from his wife, is staying at the hotel *Normandie*. He imagines the surface of the pool of the hotel as the surface where he writes his poem. As if diving into the pool, he dives into his poetry. The sunlight and its reflection on the pool/paper, along with the breeze that ripples the water, urge his first verse. "After a breeze the pool settles the weight / of its reflections on one line...Sun hits the water / the pool is a blinding zinc. I shut my eyes, / and as I raise their lids I see each daughter / ride on the rayed shells of both irises" (1986, 439-440). Walcott appears to have a double self, one who closes his eyes and the other who raises their lids.

As he sets out to write, he sees aspects of his life passing in front of his eyes. He begins with the portrayal of his daughter. And, as he asks his poetry to make the daughter's portrayal possible, he addresses his daughter herself with the same request, asking her to be born: "I ask the element that is my sign, / 'Oh, let her little lithe head through that surface break!'" (1986, 441). Just with this one verse, Walcott not only

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<sup>69</sup> In the collection *The Fortunate Traveller*.

portrays a simultaneous emerging of his verse and his daughter, but crucially, and beautifully, the moment of his daughter's birth. He confronts us with the actual moment of the birth of poetry and life, the two as one. From this water—his poetry—emerges new life.

“Aquarian, I was married to water; / under that certain roof, I would lie still / next to my sister spirit, horizontal / below what stars derailed our parallel / from our far vow's undeviating course” (1986, 441). As an Aquarian, a bearer of water, his star-sign, Walcott bears his wife/his daughter/his poetry. His verses keep emerging as “drops” of loved ones that make verses with their names alone: “the next line rises as they enter it, / Peter, Anna, Elizabeth—Margaret / still sleeping...in the true shape of love, beyond divorce” (1986, 441). Walcott transforms the metaphor of water as mirror into a space of love.

He finds this poetry of “true love” and life hard to bear, perhaps suggesting his recent divorce and the fact that he is not unified with his loved ones. As he cannot bear facing his own reflection in his poetry/pool, perhaps out of guilt, he stops. But he also stops because laureate poets do not write about life, but appropriate master-poets such as Ovid. With the same verses that he describes his pause, he also undoes Ovid's water metaphor as mirror, as he cannot bear to see the reflection of himself in his poetry.

Time cuts down on the length man can endure  
his own reflection. Entering a glass  
I surface quickly now, prefer to breathe  
the fetid and familiar atmosphere  
of work and cigarettes. Only tyrants believe  
their mirrors, or Narcissi, brooding on boards,  
before they plunge into their images. (441)

At this juncture Ovid enters the poem. Walcott encounters Ovid and enters a game of reflections on the surface of the pool next to which Walcott is sitting. Ovid, preparing

to enter the pool, putting on sun lotion, like a tourist, makes the pool look bigger than it is: “Your visit, Master, magnifies the lines / of our small pool to that Ovidian / thunder of surf” (1986, 442). As Ovid enters, he offers magnificence to Walcott’s lines of his “small pool [poetry],” transforming it into “Roman” (1986, 442). Because of Ovid’s presence the poem shifts from the autobiographical to issues related to the state and the empire, corruption and exile.

At the end of the poem this pool emerges as a copy of the Mediterranean Sea, described as “pool pitched to a Mediterranean bleu.” Walcott draws a parallel between the Roman view of the Mediterranean sea, *Mare Nostrum*, a sea of “corruption, censorship and arrogance,” and the contemporary Caribbean: “our emerald sands are strained with sewage from each tin-shacked Rome” (1986, 442). When viewed as a reflection of the Roman Mediterranean, the Caribbean retains an imperial past that extends into modern-day issues of state: “our camouflaged, booted militias roaring past on camions...ideas / with guns divide the islands” (1986, 443).

When Walcott complains that Roman tyranny from the past repeats itself in a Caribbean of today that censors its poets, Ovid consoles him by telling him his own story. Even though, in the beginning, it was difficult to establish himself as a poet, Ovid says, the transferring sea gave him mobility and made him renowned as an exile from Rome. It looks as though Ovid speaks in Walcott’s words and vice versa: “In every watery shape I saw my child, / ... / bridges, canals, willow-fanned waterways ... / till, on a tablet smooth as the pool’s skin, / I made reflections that, in many ways, / were even stronger than their origin” (443). The verses suggest that Ovid’s paper/tablet was also a pool onto which he

made reflections. His reflections are in contrast to Walcott's "needle-beaks dark picking over the pool" (445).

Ovid engages in a series of confessions relating to his personal life. He describes his loneliness, his nostalgia for language, the lack of home, the insults he received as an exile: "when I was first exiled, / I missed my language ... / no bench would tell my shadow 'Here's your place'; / ... / turned from my parting gaze like an insult" (443). He also confesses that his poetry bears elements from the poet Albius Tibullus (55-19BC), suggesting that the simplicity of the poetry of poor Tibullus, the shepherds, and the native tongue of Tomis, representing the remotest places of the empire, inspired his poetry.<sup>70</sup>

"Tibullus' flute faded, sweetest of shepherds. / Through shaggy pines the beaks of needling birds / pricked me at Tomis to learn their tribal tongue, / so since desire is stronger than its disease, / my pen's beak parted till we chirped one song / in the unequal shade of equal trees" (444).<sup>71</sup> Ovid also confesses that, seduced by the crowds, flattered, he wrote poetry for the empire. "Campaigns enlarged our frontiers like clouds, / but my own government was the bare boards / of plank table swept by resinous pines / whose boughs kept skittering from Caesar's eye ... / There, hammering out lines / in that green forge to fit me for the horse." But he continues: "I bent on a solitude so tyrannous / against the once seductive surf of crowds / that no wife softens it, or Caesar's envy" (444). For his loneliness, an outcome of his own sickening desire for fame, "desire is stronger than its disease," he accuses those who belittled him for being, supposedly, a

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<sup>70</sup> "Ovid composed a poem (*Amores* 3.9) celebrating the importance of Tibullus' poetry and commemorating his death. Tibullus' profession of poverty is connected with his adoption of the Callimachean or Hellenistic poetic values of simplicity and smallness. Tibullus rarely uses mythology. Although he never refers by name to Augustus, many issues central to Augustan culture, such as war and peace, piety and religion, the personal versus the public, appear in his poetry. Ovid has characterized his poetry as refined and him as "refined Tibullus" [*culte Tibulle*] in *Amores* 1.15.27-8." *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Michael Gagarin, 2010. 06.11.2014 Web.

<sup>71</sup> Tomis is today's Constanta, Romania, where Ovid was exiled and died.

beneficiary of the empire: “and where are those detractors now who said / that in and out of the imperial shade / I scuttled, showing to a frowning sun / the fickle dyes of the chameleon /...from *Metamorphoses* to *Tristia*/art obeys its own order” (444).<sup>72</sup>

The voices of Ovid and Walcott merge into one. Walcott like Ovid remains isolated, a poet in between two worlds, his native and that of the empire. Ovid’s story converges with Walcott’s, who calls himself “boy-god Augustus” (443). Walcott/Ovid find themselves in between two worlds: the West and his Caribbean. Ovid tells him: “The Romans will mock your slavish rhyme / the slaves your love of Roman structures” (444). The Romans will reject them and the slaves will judge their attachment to the empire.

As Walcott engages in dialogue with Ovid, he turns readers’ attention away from the autobiographical, with Ovid acting as a persona aiding his confessional disguise. At the same time, however, the poem stages the process of Ovid’s poetic appropriation, refracting his glorious image into one of personal degradation, which also echoes Walcott’s. Walcott’s disguise as Ovid, apart from being autobiographical, is also narcissistic, reflecting his aspiration to become a laureate poet, which requires him to include someone like Ovid in his poem. In other words, Walcott sets the stage for his own confession of narcissism by undoing Ovid’s.

Walcott, aware of the danger of becoming like Ovid through this poetic encounter, writes: “I muttered to the ribbon-medalled water / ‘Change me, my sign, to someone I can bear’” (440).<sup>73</sup> Acknowledging the danger of disfigurement by the appropriation of Ovid and its anticipated possible criticisms, from Romans and slaves alike, he also wishes that this poem “would not cloud surfaces with my own shadow, /

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<sup>72</sup> In *Tristia* [Lamentations] he writes his elegies.

<sup>73</sup> When he wrote this poem in 1981, he had not yet won the Nobel Prize. He won the Nobel in 1992.

and that this page's surface would unmist / after my breath as pools and mirrors do, / but all reflection gets no easier" (440). Thus, to become better than Ovid, rather than an imitation of Ovid, he undoes a series of Ovid's metaphors. He reinvents the poetic metaphor of water, a space of tyrannical and narcissistic reflection, into a positive metaphor for poetry and life. His water is not narcissistic water, but pure: of love, family, poetry, birth. He also reclaims the idea of doubleness of self, often associated with narcissists, associating it with *any* human subject. To feel divided, to feel a double of self, is part of life when one feels a stranger to himself or when isolated. Walcott also challenges the Ovidian exile from the Roman Empire, which made "exile seems a happier thought than home" (422), and suggests, rather, that one can be an exile within his country or an exile within his family, as divorced. Or even, crucially, an exile within his life, a stranger to himself. Lastly, Walcott undoes the Ovidian myth of Narcissus, transforming it into something that relates to his own reality. Narcissus could be someone like himself, a poet, who fascinates by imagining himself as a future laureate poet.

Ovid/Walcott wonders why Walcott chose this "of all places, a small, suburban tropical hotel," as his catalyst for the grandiose Ovidian reflection. It is suburban, but also perhaps "sub-mediterranean," to use Abulafia's term, that is, touristic and tropical, as islands are for tourists. "Why here, of all places?" Ovid/Walcott asks, and answers the question himself: "Because to make my image flatters you" (445). In this verse lies the autobiographical revelation. Walcott, by masterfully making Ovid's image his own, makes him his camouflage, the clouding of the surfaces of his confession in the poem. Walcott flatters himself for managing to accomplish this task. In other words, Ovid is Walcott's double, and vice versa, not for the purposes of poetic imitation, but for the life

he wishes to conceal. Beyond his life as a poet, Walcott also conceals his personal.<sup>74</sup> This is suggested most explicitly when we find out that Ovid's exile from Rome is attributed to his *Ars Amatoria* [*Treatise on Love*], a poem on the art of seduction of women by men and vice versa. The book conveyed a "frivolous attitude to sex wholly divorced from marriage" and was a book that Ovid himself called "a mistake."<sup>75</sup> It is likely that this poem was one reason why the emperor Augustus subsequently banished the poet.

But there is a final twist in the very last section: Ovid, "the wrinkled god," instructs Walcott "the boy-god" to write the following verse:

For an envoi,  
Write what the wrinkled god repeats to the boy-  
god: "may the last light of heaven pity us  
For the hardening lie in the face that we did not tell." (1986, 445)

Both Ovid and Walcott, as separate entities, confess that they have spoken the truth, that their story is authentic, meaning that they have enacted "the authority to assert themselves" and "claim[ed] the right to speak" (Smith and Watson 2010, 237). What makes this authenticity possible and believable, what attributes gravity to it, is the fact that their autobiographies are disguised, requiring a significant amount of effort to be deciphered by a receiver. If disguise is a type of lie, *suggesting* the truth without telling it, then, in a sense, the poem also constitutes its truth through the lie that it did not tell. Having said the truth, as if in a lie, Walcott fulfills his wish at the beginning of the poem:

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<sup>74</sup> This whole section of the poem can be also read as a concealed allegorical apology to himself and to his wife for committing adultery, expressing feelings of guilt and remorse, but this is well hidden.

<sup>75</sup> M.C. Howatson, *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (2011). 06.06.2014 Web.

“I muttered to the ribbon-medalled water, / ‘Change me, my sign, to someone I can bear” (440). Walcott tells the truth and hopefully this helps him bear himself.

In the Mediterranean context of this discussion, Walcott also avoids the lie that he is another Mediterranean poet and thus part of the European tradition. Having disguised himself as Ovid, as if creating the appearances of appropriation and mimesis, Walcott *looks as though* he is a European poet, while the truth is that he is not. For Walcott the Mediterranean emerges as a mechanism by which he disguises his poetry as Western. His tradition is not linear or unbroken; he admits, it was interrupted by Asian, Chinese, and African influences. And his true inspiration, he reveals, is not Ovid, but the surrounding environment: the sky, the stars, the colors, the pool, the palm tree, the mango flower. The closing lines deny “the Master poet” as his inspiration. “What this pool recites is not a phrase from an invisible, exiled laureate, where there is no laurel, but the scant applause of one dry scraping palm tree as blue evening ignites its blossoms” (445). Walcott comes to redefine art, rejecting the idea of anticipating the approval of the Western critic. Walcott reinvents his art as “a painting with no memory of the painter,” which may suggest the Western idea of “art for art’s sake,” but at the same time may also suggest that the artistic practice is something that belongs to the world, rather than to a series of appropriations and traditions.

Ovid’s “rippling echo” from his fall in the water, substitutes, in disguise, the “echo of Athens.” The Ovidian mirroring dissolves into its own reflection as Ovid falling into the water in Walcott’s poem. At the same time the reflection becomes the self for as the reflection dissolves the self has to recognize it as a reflection of itself rather than a self. Those in the “small pool”—the islands who also have a story to tell—need to say it

in disguise. Walcott's transformation of the imaginary of water as mirror into a strategy of disguise of the postcolonial subject also undoes the Mediterranean as a European space altogether, opening it up for stories to be told, at least, in disguise rather than in reflection and imitation.

The Mediterranean as a European appropriation, as an image of the European self, transposed into Walcott's Caribbean, is a direct attack on Western civilization and the binaries it has created: white and black, Mediterranean and Caribbean. It constitutes a central element of Walcott's colonial critique. In other words, Walcott strikes back at the Empire through the Empire's own narcissistic mirror image, the Mediterranean. As he is appropriated by the empire as one of its greatest poets, like Ovid, the fact remains that he is named by them as such. Even when he becomes the Ovid of the Caribbean, Walcott, like those Caesars, Achilles, Pompeys—names that British masters gave to slaves—he is the object of comparison to Western writers.<sup>76</sup>

Critics of Walcott's work who have commented on Walcott's references to the "Caribbean Aegean" and the "New Aegean," and to Greek elements in general, argue that

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<sup>76</sup> "The slave-master gives a name to a slave because he thinks that that slave has the attributes of Achilles or of Caesar or Pompey. These heroic names may have been given satirically? I don't think so. I think they may have been given, even if they may appear to be patronizing, they were given because of qualities. I mean, if somebody's amused to call a slave Pompey because that's the last thing he is, Pompey, there are qualities of Pompey that are smart. Pompey's smart in general. And maybe that's the attribute he saw in a servant. Another guy may be Caesar because he looks around, he walks around like he is Caesar. This guy is Achilles because he thinks... the attribute is there! And whether you parody that attribute or patronize that attribute the suggestion of the attribute is true in terms of its association. Now does that person become Achilles? Does that person become Caesar? Yes! That person becomes, even if he doesn't know what his name is. Right? And does Helen, does this island become Helen of the Caribbean? Yes, it becomes because first of all it didn't give itself a name. And secondly, because in terms of the reference to it, really bloody wars were fought over it. It did change hands. It seemed to have been worth the price of a war" (Derek Walcott). "Derek Walcott on *Omeros*: An Interview." Interview to Luigi Sampietro <http://users.unimi.it/caribana/OnOmeros.html> 06.1.2014. Web.

Walcott emphasizes the Hellenic dimensions of the Caribbean archipelago in a way that replicates other asymmetrical power relations (Greenwood 2010, 35). “The Caribbean Sea is referred to generally by some as the ‘American Mediterranean,’ just as if we were to call the Mediterranean the Caribbean of Europe” (Greenwood 2010, 68). Walcott’s colonial critique about island exploitation, however, as well as the irony he employs to name the “New Aegean,” becomes clear in the following passage:

In the history books the discoverer sets a shod food on virgin sand, kneels, and the savage also kneels from his bushes in awe. Such images are stamped on the colonial memory, such heresy as the world’s becoming holy from Crusoe’s footprint on the imprint of Columbus’s knee...the poets of the “New Aegean,” of the Isles of the Blest, the Fortunate Isles, of the remote Bermudas, of Prospero’s isle, of Crusoe’s Juan Fernandez, of Cythera, of all those rocks named like the beads of a chaplet, they know that the vision of paradise wrecks here. (1998, 41)

In other words, Walcott explicitly glosses the naming of the Caribbean islands as one unit, “New Aegean” in irony. He suggests that the gesture of giving colonial names to the islands is a sort of a stamp of the passage of colonial history, which causes stasis. The islands themselves become destinations or wrecks of other travelers’ journeys, rather than the islanders themselves being the travelers, discoverers, and beginners of their own history. He also challenges the idea of tradition that needs not be seen as history, as something of the past, but as possibility for the future. In this passage Walcott uses the Mediterranean as a comparison to the Caribbean to point out the multi-culturalism of the Mediterranean onto which there is not an imposition of a singularity of race.

Michael Dash has said that for Walcott’s poetry “the only parallel situation, geographically, is to be found in the Aegean Sea, which also produced a wealth of cultural and artistic diversity” (Dash 1998, 106). He continues: “the symbolic power of

the Mediterranean in Walcott's imagination...[is] a governing motif...it is not a foundational myth but rather an idea that allows the exploration of a number of complex issues in Caribbean literature" (Dash 1998, 106). Again, these views remain within a comparative framework of assimilation and difference, a binarism through which linear tradition perpetuates itself. In the following excerpt from "The Muse of History," Walcott moves beyond the pattern of assimilation and difference in poetry to emphasize instead poetry's "staggering elation in possibility" (Walcott 1998, 53).

Because we think of tradition as history, one group of anatomists claims that this tradition is wholly African and that its responses are alerted through the nostalgia of one race, but that group must allow the Asian and the Mediterranean the same fiction, and then the desolate terraces of Perse's epic memory will be as West Indian to the idle Easterners among us as the kingdoms of the Guinea coast are to Césaire or the poetry of China is to Chinese grocers. We must accept the miracle of possibility which every poet demonstrates [...] The Caribbean sensibility is not marinated in the past. It is not exhausted. It is new. But it is its complexity, not its historically explained simplicities, which is new. Thus, while many critics of contemporary commonwealth verse reject imitation, the basis of tradition for originality, they represent eventually the old patronizing attitude adapted to contemporaneous politics. (1998, 54)

Walcott points out that the poetry of Caribbean poets needs to reflect the local multicultural population of the islands instead of being a poetry of just the African race. Walcott calls this singularity of race "a fiction."

For Walcott, Europe and Africa are two different sides of the same coin, as union and partition are. Walcott says "I would no longer wish to visit Europe as if I could repossess it or Africa. What survives in the slave is nostalgia for imperial modes, Europe or Africa" (1998, 63). He rejects the construction of ideologies and partisan perspectives that make an African race echo the pattern of purity of the white. "Pure black Afro-

Aryanism,” he says, perceives as blacks those who were uprooted from Africa as if those are the only “valid” or pure blacks. Referring specifically to black poets and poets from the Caribbean, Walcott engages another type of black, of mixed blood. This writer would become, according to the formulation, simply “a liberal” poet, for these other mixed strains adulterate him. But this simplification of the “intricacies of race,” alerts Walcott, would isolate poets and make them into “islands”:

[This] will develop into an individualism and will increase egocentricity and isolation, because such writers and poets already have more complex values. They will seem more imperialistic, nostalgic, and out of the impetus of the West Indian proletariat, because they cannot simplify intricacies of race and the thought of the race. They will become hermits or rogue animals, increasingly exotic hybrids, broken bridges between two ancestries, Europe and the Third World of Africa and Asia; in other words, they will become islands. (1998, 56)

What Walcott tells us here is that even though those mixed, hybrid poets are valorized as “liberal,” they are at the same time marginal to the poetry of their race. Instead, what Walcott wants is an acceptance of mixture not as an exceptional case in the Caribbean but as a rule. “The possibility of the individual Caribbean man, African, European or Asian in ancestry” (1998, 53). The perpetuation of racial divisions in these islands effaces their Caribbean identity.

## Autobiography

The time will come  
when, with elation  
you will greet yourself arriving  
at your own door, in your own mirror  
and each will smile at the other's welcome,

and say, sit here. Eat.  
You will love again the stranger who was your self.  
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart  
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored  
for another, who knows you by heart.  
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

the photographs, the desperate notes,  
peel your own image from the mirror.  
Sit. Feast on your life.

Derek Walcott, "Love after Love"<sup>77</sup>

Walcott's poem "Love After Love" (1976) is indicative as to what is autobiography for those writers who have suffered colonization. The autobiographical is found in the joyous moment when the self realizes that who he was is not who he thought he was but that there is another self—hidden, forgotten, neglected, but more authentic. This new/old self was suppressed because colonization imposed on him/her the habits and features of the West. As the realization of the existence of this self occurs, the older self welcomes the new. This is the moment of reconciliation than Anton Shamma (chapter 4) also alludes to in his autobiography. The gesture of welcoming the new self, not in anger or revenge, but with forgiveness, compassion and love, is a moment of reconciliation. This also

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<sup>77</sup> In the collection *Sea Grapes*.

reflects the way in which Walcott reconciles the opposition of Western and African heritage. It reflects his relationship with history, which remains part of who he is, even if he realizes history's falseness. This moment is a new beginning, a new history, a new self. The title of the poem is indicative of the fact that this realization comes late in the colonized subject's life, or indeed, that it has not yet come. For having been raised in a postcolonial society, facing himself as a reflection of the West, he lives with a false image of himself. His self is the missing link, the missing piece of the puzzle. His self had been a kind of an island: he was the crucial link for others to channel, to pass and to exploit.

Walcott's poetry as a whole is autobiographical. Each of his poems tells us something about his life as an islander. Because the history of islands has been passed over by the West, poetry and art become spaces for a new history of the individual. Life writing emerges through and against Western historiography. Walcott's poetry keeps close attachment to Western tradition, the "borrowed ancestors"<sup>78</sup> while it engages with an anti-colonial quest for identity. This proximity is what disguises autobiography as history. In one of his essays, Walcott confesses: "I needed to become omnivorous about the art and literature of Europe to understand my own world" (Walcott 1998, 63). Even though Walcott seems to acknowledge a by now stereotypical and problematic predicament, that he must consume Europe in order to become himself, he finds a way out of the impasse of mimicry: "I write 'my own world' because I had no doubt that it was mine, that it was given to me, by God, not by history, with my gift" (1998: 63).

The act of the autobiographical negotiates the postcolonial subject's life that is predetermined by others. In "The Schooner *Flight*," in conjunction with the Shabine

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<sup>78</sup> Walcott, "Homecoming, Anse La Raye," in the collection *The Gulf and Other Poems*, 1969.

giving “voice to one’s peoples’ grief,” Shabine offers the poem itself as a *gift* to the reader: “Shabine sang *to you* from the depths of the sea.” Even when Shabine is alone, he is accompanied by others, affirming that despite one’s isolation one is not alone. There is a receiver to his written words.

### **History as Life**

History makes similes of people, but these people are their own noun... a noun is not a name you give something. It is something you watch becoming itself, and you have to have the patience to find out what it is. In the Caribbean, people come from everywhere, from Africa and Europe, and the Mediterranean and the Middle East and the Orient. There is a restless identity in the New World. The New World needs an identity without guilt or blame (Walcott in Hamner DATE 34).

The view of the “Mediterraneanized” Caribbean invites a reexamination of the Mediterranean as well.<sup>79</sup> From the point of view of the Atlantic Caribbean, islands emerge as the missing links of the unified colonial historical narrative. While I have argued that “connectivity” and “unity” emerge as colonial categories as part of a rhetoric of control of remote geographies, Walcott reminds us that to travel, to connect and to discover—to make history—are not only the imperial, but also the common everyday condition of islanders. Walcott tells us that islands are possibilities for new beginnings, for a new history that is the history of the local people. To see islands as entities of their own rather than clusters or crossroads is to liberate them from Western ideas of their isolation.

There are two types of connectivity, both of which are outcomes of colonialism, as discussed above. The first is the connectivity formed both imaginatively and in

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<sup>79</sup> See Stefania Panebianco, *A New Euro-Mediterranean Cultural Identity* (2003).

practice by imperial exploitation as a means of control. “The wish to control the islands or opposite shores has very often been generated by the desire to control valuable resources or to profit from prized trade routes” (Abulafia 2014, 152). The other, is that conducted by the local population seeking to connect with people, traditions, and ancestors who are now gone, but most importantly, and this is something I emphasize, to connect to themselves. This is the connectivity that the next two chapters explore. These connectivities are often imaginative but reflect the experience of having being effaced from history. These writers become the historians of their lives and of their countries through their autobiographies. In their works we find some of the most compelling attempts to pursue ideas alternative forms of connectivity in the use of autobiography, both as a genre and as a set of aesthetic choices used within other types of literary production.

Walcott posits the autobiographical as parallel to the poetic imagination. Poetry is that space in which the subject imagines the possibility of a fresh life. His poetry allows the postcolonial subject to write a life that does not mirror colonial standards and the victimization of history. Walcott establishes poetry as a space that offers an alternative to the nightmare of history, a space to imagine a life without history’s burden. As an imaginative endeavor, poetry does not provide concrete answers and solutions as history does—or may claim to do. Books of history do not provide answers for how “to fall in love with the world.” The only one who can dream and find meaning (interpretation) for their dreams is oneself. The journey that Walcott suggests by no means guarantees happiness or salvation, but at least, it is one made by choice.

In response to the emphasis by scholars of postcolonial autobiography on the collapse of the unitary self in autobiography, I argue in the following chapters, autobiography has to do more with one's interaction with oneself to reach a more authentic self. This more authentic self was kept hidden, disguised by the requirement to fit in with the master colonizer and with their postcolonial societies. In other words autobiography includes the moment of recognition and reconciliation with oneself. I demonstrate how different connectivities emerge from various traditions and histories that are the outcomes of the reconciliation of oneself with a self. These ideas reveal to us what constitutes an autobiography, its functions and expressions in a renewed context where islands emerge as central spaces, and individuals of the Mediterranean island of Cyprus and other locations become the center of their own history. Walcott and the other writers discussed in the dissertation are "walkers" in Walcott's sense. They destabilize the colonial construct of continuity and the unbroken link of tradition; they reclaim the ability to construct traditions and genealogies of their own. This autobiography emphasizes the emergence of self as an outcome of coincidental events in human affairs, such as oral storytelling, friendship, politics, writing. Autobiography becomes a porous, shared object that is circulated and is open to the narratives of others that are constitutive of it, as well as an emergent new self. Different tropes make such an autobiography possible: storytelling enables links with ancestors; reverse chronology and anonymity enables the possibility for rebirth or renewal of tradition; disguise or doubleness of self makes space for the revelation of a different self, a more authentic version that is not a mirror or an image of the colonizer; coincidence emerges as the origin of events; and,

finally, imagination makes the invention of alternative traditions and genealogies possible. These elements constitute the *poetics of self*.

### **Chapter 3**

## **Invisible Crossings:**

### **Rina Katselli and Anton Shammias**

Κακά τα ψέματα, εμείς εν έχουμεν πατρίδα  
[Truth be told, we do not have a homeland]  
Ρήνα Κατσελλή, *Τζερνιώτισσες*

You're always happy to go back to a place, especially back home, even though I didn't  
have a home there.

Anton Shammias, *Arabesques*

### **Corrupting Unities**

Fernand Braudel emphasizes the factors of human movement and the relationships formed through communication across the sea as the constituent element in the formation of a “Mediterranean unity,” claiming that “the Mediterranean has no unity but that created by movements of men, the relationships they imply, and the routes they follow” (Braudel 1995, 276). Following Braudel, Horden and Purcell have said that the “distinctiveness of Mediterranean history results from the coexistence of a milieu of relatively easy seaborne communications with a quite unusually fragmented topography of micro-regions in the sea's coastlands and islands” (Horden and Purcell 2000, 5). Other authors too have featured the large network of communication or connectivities

comprising the Mediterranean (Bresson 2006, 113). “It is a site of encounters and currents...of perpetual transit” (Chambers 2008, 32).

Braudel’s “movement of men” happened on a local level, and Braudel does not suggest that a “Mediterranean unity” was the necessary precondition for human movement. But his “Mediterranean unity” is an infrastructure adding up to integration, processed on a remote level by ingenuous businessmen and ambitious rulers, and implying the movement of empires. It suggests control of remote geographies. Holden and Purcell’s history of the Mediterranean tries to reverse the logic, suggesting a history of the whole region, rather than a history *in* the region that implies lived experience of the local population who reside on the Mediterranean islands and its shores. We see in both Braudel’s and Horden’s and Purcell’s works on the Mediterranean the tension between respect for the particularity of lived experience and the unionist rhetoric, which reflects a Eurocentric, romantic, orientalist gaze.<sup>80</sup>

In response to these histories of a Mediterranean unity, I turn my focus to human relationships as they are presented in autobiographical narratives. Adopting Miriam Cooke’s view that the Mediterranean is “as much a network of reflections, connections, and intersubjectivities as it is a geopolitical site,” I read the life writing of Anton Shammas and Rina Katselli within the context of their post-partition societies in Palestine and Cyprus (Cooke 1999, 294). I emphasize the ways in which they negotiate their identities and deal with the legacy of empire. They see themselves as links within their communities of friendship and family—links in the sense of connectivity, but also in the sense of invisible links of a historical narrative with which they are coming to terms.

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<sup>80</sup> For a discussion of the Mediterranean as a product of the Orientalist gaze of travelers—writers, artists, archaeologists—who traveled the famous Grand Tour see Herzfeld 2006.

Their autobiographies constitute a moment of discovery and the crucial realization of their colonial past and the ways it influences their identities and deeply personal aspects of their present lives.

While Shammas and Katselli imagine themselves as members of communities of the present—political parties, European Parliament, friendships, workshops, and family—the recent histories of partition of their respective countries, Palestine/Israel and Cyprus, interrupt their belonging in their countries in particular, and in the world in general. The rigid borders enforced by the partition crucially and violently block their relationships. Counteracting the rigidity of dividing borders, Shammas and Katselli imagine themselves traveling to places and finding connections. Travel allows them to acknowledge themselves as homeless, the ideological apparatuses in their postcolonial nation-states privilege ethnic binarisms, Greek/Turk, Israeli/Palestinian, as a way to solidify a monolithic and homogenous national identity, threatened by an enemy. In opposition to this, Shammas and Katselli explicitly criticize ideological apparatuses that preserve partition and offer communities of belonging in their place. They replace regulated colonial claims of unification and reconciliation with connectivities they create themselves.

Referring to the partition of the Irish Republic/Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine, Joe Cleary maintains that the colonial opposition of tradition/modernity was inherited and transposed into stereotypical state identities. This is one of the ways in which colonial stratification and antagonisms survive into the present (Cleary 2002, 60). While this is also true for postcolonial Cyprus, where the tradition/modernity model was mapped onto the state identity, at the same time political apparatuses, as suggested by

Takis Evdokas, exploited the emotional vulnerability of refugees after the Turkish invasion of 1974, in order to preserve the island's partition, motivating antagonistic relationships between the two ethnic groups, Greek and Turkish Cypriots (Evdokas, 1978).<sup>81</sup>

Oftentimes, the nation embraces post-partition literary narratives not only as a part of, but also as constitutive of, national culture. Read through the prism of bifurcation and violence, these narratives affirm and institute tragedy, conflict, pain, suffering, and violence as inseparable traits of national identity and belonging.<sup>82</sup> Nationalized partitioned narratives enforce previous colonial divides—mainly the religious ones of Christian/Muslim and Muslim/Jew, which are eventually secularized as the ethnic ones of Greek/Turk and Arab/Jew. National narratives preserve partition by reiterating the violence caused by the “other.” At the same time, however, this post-partition literature exhibits significant instances that challenge the national bifurcating narrative. The post-partition autobiographical narratives presented in this chapter envision the possibility of a life beyond the bifurcation of Greek/Turk and Palestinian/Israeli; they imagine an expansive view of their sense of belonging.

What these two narratives have in common is that they are disguised autobiographies. They distribute aspects of the autobiographical self into the narratives of their characters in order to convey, conceal, or discover aspects of their own personalities. While this dispersal of aspects of one’s personality may appear as fragmentation, other dimensions are present, such as fear or desire to complicate and

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<sup>81</sup> For more on the modernity/tradition model in Cyprus, see Vassos Argyrou, *Tradition and Modernity in the Mediterranean* (1996) and Rebecca Bryant, *Imagining the Modern* (2004).

<sup>82</sup> National slogans such as “Ο πόνος του ξεριζωμένου” Δεν ξεχνώ και αγωνίζομαι,” “Επιστροφή στα σκλαβωμένα χωριά και τα σπίτια μας,” “Έξω ο αττίλας απο την Κύπρο” [The pain of the uprooted person; I don’t forget and I fight; Return to our enslaved villages and houses; Attila out of Cyprus].

conceal their true identity. Their disguised autobiographies are a form of apology they give to themselves and their community for being ignorant or dismissive of the fact that they have been objects of exploitation by empire for the majority of their lives. They are a testimony to the shocking realization of this situation. As they come to terms with their new identity, the autobiographical process pays off as a revelation. As part of this process, the self itself becomes a riddle or an invisible missing link, the elements of which are embedded in the narrative. The decision to write an autobiography is related to the personal process of dealing with one's history as life, discovering threads that when drawn together, provide clarity about the past, present, and future of self and history. This reflects the effort of autobiography to resolve and come to terms with one's identity.

Another aspect these autobiographies share is that they present their writing as something "given," as a *gift* that the old self makes to the new. To give one's autobiography—material, imaginary, or oral—to the new self to finish its writing, as happens in both of these works, is to surrender to the bitter reality that one has been someone else for the majority of one's life. This process, however, as it happens in the public form of a published book, constitutes an invitation to readers to perform a similar realization. Autobiography, the narrative that one *gives* to the self as well as to another, also suggests that the individual experiences are somehow linked or shared and registers a transformation of autobiography from a solipsistic narrative into a shared practice. This gesture affirms what Judith Butler referred to in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005) that "The 'I' has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation—or a set of relations" (Butler 2005, 8). This relationality that is part of our social interactions makes the story of oneself into an account given to others. As part of such an autobiographical

process, both autobiographer and reader become aware of the threads that link the self to characters and vice versa. Subsequently, the process of reading these disguised autobiographies becomes an act of discovery of a new history that is the outcome of concealed links and connections. Against colonial and geographical unity, the self becomes a riddle that seeks its own unity after the effacement of its history by colonial violence. In the process of sorting out the reality of its life and history, the self becomes a missing link in his/her own story, coming to the realization of that which he/she does not currently know about both the self and history. The self as a missing link in autobiography may be thought of as the link in a chain of stories which comprises his/her identity. Before his autobiography the self was a conglomeration of stories of others, he now comes to contribute with its own story. While those entangled stories previously determined one's identity, autobiography comes by way of sorting them out. The only way to do so is by figuring out how those are linked and how autobiographers fit into those chains of stories. As they figure out how their self fits into that chain of stories, they explain their belongingness, which leads them to a reconciliation with themselves and their lives.

In what follows I examine these writers' environments of partition and how they struggle with *symbiosis*—the Greek word for living together already discussed in Chapter 1 as a political, historical, and ecological term defining relationships of Mediterranean communities to the disasters and transformations of the Mediterranean landscape—as a way to resolve the problems of a divided existence. Ultimately, however, the writers realize that there *are* limits to this kind of approach and find alternative solutions in the form of the gift. I will discuss *symbiosis* as a specific type of colonial unity, as evoked by

Katselli and performed in irony in the text of Shamma. I will then examine the treatment of autobiography as gift. Overall, I hope to show how these subjects of former empires engage with human relationships and community beyond the colonial Mediterranean imaginary. Shamma's and Katselli's complex autobiographical structures are a response to the simple answers submitted for complex problems, in terms of Mediterranean belonging, to international communities of unions, whether European or Mediterranean. Their patterns of imaginary connectivity in their poetic expression echo what Miriam Cooke has called "Mediterranean thinking—an engagement with networking as a way of reconceptualizing place [that] opens up a different way to think about the Mediterranean and to Mediterraneanize thought. The Mediterranean, after all, has always functioned as a huge network of nodes and connections" (Cooke 1999, 290, 295).

### **Symbiosis as Arabesques**

The Mediterranean is a space of coexistence and confrontation between neighbors aware of their often powerful ethnic, economic, and again, religious, differences.

David Abulafia, "Mediterraneans."

Any effort of unity in the region of the Mediterranean is far less a reified thing than a process—the impetus to connect the disparate parts.

Brent D. Shaw, "Challenging Braudel: a New Vision of the Mediterranean."

Rina Katselli's *Τζερυνιώτισσες, Ιστορήμα* [Women of Kerinia, Istorima] (1997) presents the self as a refraction of several characters and those characters as a complex, tense unity of parts. On one level, it gives the personal stories of four exiled women from the city of Kerinia after the partition of Cyprus in 1974. These women are united by friendship, but in spite of their ties there are definite tensions in their relationships. Their

different roles in society and their different personalities contrast with each other and, yet, they are actually inextricably linked: all characters reflect aspects of the writer Rina Katselli, who sporadically appears in the text in the third person to remind the reader of her presence. Through this textual gesture Katselli creates distance between her public persona and her private reflections of her experiences as the first woman politician in Cyprus, urging readers to suspect the autobiographical connection that is not straightforwardly clear in the text. Rina Katselli in the context of the book is a writer and politician, echoing also the roles assigned to two characters, Orthodoxia, a politician, and Lenia, a writer. Orthodoxia, the politician, fails to be reelected in the recent elections, but is also a poet. Lenia, the journalist and writer, has been commissioned to write a book about Kerinia. Maria is a married mother mistreated by her husband, who seeks an escape from him and from her paternal family, as well as from the island in general.

The dominant character is Pigi. Divorced and appearing to be the most liberal of all the characters, Pigi in fact adopts old customs in her current life, reinventing them in her own ways. She is an iconographer and adept at reciting Byzantine hymns. Pigi possesses chameleonic qualities: her personality is never static. One day she is pious, another she is an atheist; one day she speaks in dialect with a heavy Cypriot accent, another she speaks perfect standard Greek (Katselli 1997, 24). These qualities portray her as a conglomerate character having the ability to consolidate extreme oppositions. Her name, Pigi, alludes to and is referred to in the text as “Ζωοδόχος Πηγή” (Life-Giving Spring), the Christian Orthodox name for the Virgin Mary. Pigi is the source of life, a mother figure, advising the other women about their lives.

A politician, a journalist, and a writer, Katselli disperses her autobiographical self into the female characters that she constructs. The construction of her autobiographical persona as a *network* of women, a composite structure, attributes to her a peculiar Mediterraneanism that emerges out of multivalent connections amongst these everyday local and uprooted women. The narrative becomes a network of narratives, offering Katselli the ability to manifest the empowerment these women feel because of their connections. The multiple crossings that these women perform as their narratives are infused and enmeshed together contrasts with the rigidity of the physical and patriarchal borders. Instead, from their connectedness emerges a new narrative that is counter to the national and the patriarchal.

Similarly, in Anton Shammas's fictional autobiography *Arabeskot* (1986) [Arabesques] the writer ties together the autobiographical "I" with several characters. There is Michael Abyad, his distant cousin who lives in the United States, as well as the Jewish writer, Yeshoshua Bar-on. Even though he is in fact alive, Michael Abyad's relatives and family in Palestine believe him to be dead. The reason for this strange misunderstanding is a story that circulates in Fassuta, Shammas's native village, which Shammas believed to be true. It is only later in his life that Shammas finds out that "the deceased nine-month-old" cousin "Anton," after whom Anton Shammas was named, is *not* dead and that his death was staged by the people at the orphanage where his mother, Almaza, left him while at work. His death was staged because Anton Shammas's cousin, now Michael Abyad, had been kidnapped and given for adoption to an upper-class family. The story about little Anton haunts the narrator Shammas. Abyad is also haunted by the story, told to him by the devastated Almaza, the tenant in the Abyad household

who raised him, who is surprisingly his actual mother. Michael Abyad, then, knows the story of little Anton who “died” without knowing that he himself is that child and without knowing that Almaza is his real mother. This complex structure of the lives of these characters reflects the complexity of shifting empires in Palestine, within which they live their lives. Palestinians find themselves under the auspices of different motherlands, Ottoman, British, and Israeli. Like Abyad, they are orphans, or step-children. Abyad’s orphaned state, which is not real—his mother is not dead, but raises him as a tenant in the Abyad household, reflects the historical phenomenon during the Venetian and Ottoman empire whereby individuals, often children, were kidnapped and adopted into new families where they worked as slaves or tenants. As part of the process, the children also had to convert and be initiated, baptized, into their new religious identity. According to Natalie Rothman, Zorzi, a run-away slave during in the Venetian empire, “presented himself at court as reluctant to abide by the rules governing Venetian domestic slavery. Rather than endorse his new identity as a baptized slave, he asserted his wish to return to his *ur* identity—not that of a Muslim enemy subject, but that of a kidnapped Christian boy...His professed desire to reunify with his parents was, moreover, a powerful indictment of his current servile state, challenging the legality of his very enslavement” (Rothman 2012, 431). “In order to befriend Frangia’s tenants, the ottoman merchants, and secure their assistance in his escape, Zorzi implied he was even willing to ‘reactivate’ his Muslim past and resume Muslim bodily practices” (Rothman 2012, 431).<sup>83</sup> These subjects, who were ready to temporarily perform bodily practices, and their movement in different households in the Mediterranean Rothman calls “trans-imperial subjects”

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<sup>83</sup> For historical details on this phenomenon see Natalie Rothman, “Contested Subjecthood: Run-Away Slaves in Early Modern Venice” (2012).

(Rothman 2012). Rothman's term is descriptive of the situation of conversion from one religion to the other, and of transposition of subjects from one empire to another.

Rothman emphasizes Zorzi's "command of several sets of practices associated with different ethno-religious categories of belonging in the Venetian-Ottoman borderlands, and their attendant narrative frames" (Rothman 2012, 431). "Such mastery," she says, "allowed this young person some flexibility in negotiating the juridical and political constraints of his status as a domestic slave" (431). With a modern lens, however, and in a context where these empires have ceased to exist, I perceive the subjects in these autobiographies as understanding themselves as "interchangeable"—thus another form of disguise, whereby their willingness to shift their identities reveals not only their ability to mobilize within the empires and their institutions, but also and most importantly to live lives true to themselves.

Whereas Katselli creates multiples of herself, endowing them with elements of her own personality, Shammas creates a double. To double or diffuse the self in post-partition autobiography is not necessarily a way to fragment the self, replicating the reality of partition, but rather a way to resist the master(s)/colonizer(s), who may not be able to penetrate it, to read and understand it.

Shammas's *Arabesques* is a conglomeration of stories, either heard from members of his family or constructed by the writer. As with *Women of Kerinia*, the convoluted ways these stories are presented require the reader to remain alert in order to draw the connections. The name Anton Shammas emerges out of a network of circulating stories that are told to him as a child. The various listeners of those stories perceive their lives and relationships as part of larger networks constructed by those stories, particularly

because these stories contain the knowledge of relatives who now live far away, in countries such as the United States and Argentina, as well as closer to home in Lebanon, Syria, and Haifa. These misplacements are the outcome of colonialism, urging people away from the homeland for a better future. In contrast to the “smooth” Mediterranean networks and routes and connectivities proposed by Braudel and Horden and Purcell, which elide the complex textures of lives brought together through “connectivity,” Shammas gives a specifically complex name to his networks, *arabesques*, with an unresolvable structure reflecting the complexity and indecipherability of his narrative. When seen in a larger colonial Mediterranean context of merchant travel and captivity, doubling or multiplying oneself reflects a syncretic inter-breeding and complex mixing of different ethnicities.<sup>84</sup>

As mentioned in Chapter 1, symbiosis is a term used in several arenas. It is a biological term commonly understood to describe a close and often long-term interaction between two or more different species. Symbiosis was originally employed in ecological science to describe the situation in which dissimilar organisms live together in close association, and embraced all relationships, both mutualistic and parasitic.<sup>85</sup> In political discourse, symbiosis has also been employed in an ethno-religious context in the contemporary era to denote a specific mode of ethnic and religious coexistence in spite of differences. In Mediterranean studies, symbiosis is often used in two ways. The first came to bear political significance in the post-partition era in Cyprus, as well as in Palestine/Israel. In Cyprus, symbiosis appears as a process of common living conditions of Muslims and Christians prior to nationalization, such as occupation, dress, vegetation,

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<sup>84</sup> See Epstein, “Hybridity” (2014).

<sup>85</sup> In modern scientific use, however, symbiosis is often restricted to mutually beneficial species interactions, and parasitism to antagonistic ones.

and language, which was interrupted by the partition and by the political propaganda of parties and leaders of each community. The interruption of previous symbiosis was amplified by the animosity that was cultivated in the respective religious communities (Evdokas 1978; Anastasiou 2088, 11; Beckingham 1957, 170). The reference to symbiosis today, when it becomes an object of official political rhetoric, targets reconciliation of categories—religious, ethnic, national Greek/Turk, Israeli/Palestinian—rather than of ordinary people.<sup>86</sup> But even if it used to describe the relationships of individuals in their ordinary experiences, symbiosis remains a problematic term, charged with the colonial historical perspective of the *longue durée*. Symbiosis is part of a larger colonial history that moves on the axis of unification and partition.

In present-day Cyprus, the historical and colonial significance of the term is witnessed, for example, in the 2009 Greek Cypriot educational reform which targets:

Καλλιέργεια κουλτούρας ειρηνικής συμβίωσης, αμοιβαίου σεβασμού και συνεργασίας Ελληνοκυπρίων και Τουρκοκυπρίων με στόχο την απαλλαγή από την κατοχή και την επανένωση της πατρίδας και του λαού μας.<sup>87</sup> (Υπουργείο Παιδείας και Πολιτισμού, Λευκωσία, Κύπρος 2009. Web)

[Cultivation of a culture of peaceful *symbiosis*—coexistence, mutual respect, and cooperation of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots aiming to be released from occupation and reunify the homeland and our people.] (Ministry of Education and Culture, Nicosia, Cyprus, 2009. Web)

The use of symbiosis in this official context reiterates the colonial idea of unity, specifically *re*-unification, “επανένωση.” Reunification implies a prior state of affairs whereby the two ethnicities were unified, so that they need to be unified again. However,

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<sup>86</sup> This is different from the approach taken by NGOs that focus on human relationships of the ethnic communities.

<sup>87</sup> Public announcement of the Ministry of Education and Culture, dated 28 October 2009. Web

the only union that ever happened in Cyprus was under the British Crown, with the cost of heavy taxation.

In the context of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, symbiosis appears in a number of works, with a focus on multi-confessional and multi-cultural experiences between Muslims and Jews during the Middle Ages.<sup>88</sup> Symbiosis emerges as an idea of reconciliation of religious differences according to a perceived history of unity, emphasizing the assumed familiarity merging out of a smooth history of religious and cultural exchange, influence, and borrowing.

In his *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages* (1955), S. D. Goitein was one of the first modern historians to adopt the term symbiosis as a concept that might illuminate a long history of Jewish-Arab exchange. Goitein describes a period of *creative Jewish-Arab symbiosis* that lasted about 800 years, “during the first half of which the Muslim religious faith and Arab nationhood took form under Jewish impact, while in the second half traditional Judaism received its final shape under Muslim-Arab influence” (Goitein 1955, 10). Goitein juxtaposes modern Judaic culture with that of the medieval Jewish thinkers who flourished under Islam and who in their writing used Arabic language and forms (1955, 130).<sup>89</sup> Echoing Goitein, Ammiel Alcalay applied Goitein's notion of “interfaith/creative symbiosis” to reveal “the assumed familiarity of Muslims and Jews and lack of either animosity or barriers between them as such” (Alcalay 1993, 119, 94). The question of symbiosis, however, goes beyond the history of Arabs and Jews and echoes a Eurocentric impulse. This is something that Gil Anidjar challenges, but

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<sup>88</sup> I discuss the work of S.D. Goitein 1955, Ammiel Alcalay 1993, and Steven Wasserstrom 1995 in what follows.

<sup>89</sup> Due to the worsening relations between Jews and Arabs in the aftermath of 1948, Goitein was criticized for constructing “the golden age” of Muslim Spain and Cairo in light of the modern-day concerns (Hughes 2005, 72).

even before Anijar there was another historian who amplified Goitein's and Alcalay's histories of symbiosis.

In his book *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (1995), Steven Wasserstrom refined Goitein's notion and adapted it to religious studies by focusing on an interpretation of symbiosis that concentrates on “products of mutuality” between Muslims and Jews (Wasserstrom 1995, 206). Wasserstrom examined Goitein's “creative symbiosis” and questioned this conventional paradigm in general and the limits of the notions of cultural “borrowing” or “influence” in particular (1995, 10). What emerged from his study was a sophisticated conceptualization of the complex operations by which Muslims “Islamized” cultural and intellectual artifacts seeming to originate in Jewish tradition, and, conversely, the process by which Jews “Judaized” institutions, materials, and idioms emanating from within Islam. One of the most important insights of Wasserstrom's argument was that “*Jew* served as...catalyst in the self definition of Islam; and *Muslim* likewise operated in synergy with a Jewish effort of self-legitimation” (1995, 11, Wasserstrom's emphasis). He also introduced the term “co-evolution,” a model in which changes in species A prepared the field for the natural selection of changes in species B and vice versa. The two religions, in his view, could only define themselves in contrast to each other (1995, 10-11).

Despite the nuanced variability in symbiosis in Goitein and Wasserstrom, both authors considered symbiosis as a positive instance in the history of Jewish and Arab cultural exchange, without considering its colonial underpinnings. Symbiosis between Arabs and Jews in the Middle Ages, and especially in the modern context of the partition of Palestine/Israel, appears to be an idea charged with positive motivation for future

peace, that is, *unity*, between the two communities. Located in the Middle Ages, symbiosis may be perceived as something that repeated in the past and if also repeated in the present can make a new peaceful coexistence possible.

As a politician, Katselli uses “symbiosis” once, and she seems to use it like Goitein and Wasserstrom as a way to commemorate the multi-religious and multi-ethnic community of Christians and Muslims in Cyprus in the past, without necessarily showing awareness of the colonial and unionist underpinnings carried by the term. While pointing emphatically to the peaceful coexistence of Christians and Muslims during the Ottoman era, she almost in passing refers to Lusignan, Frank, and Venetian oppressors. Such a commemorative symbiosis in Katselli’s text derives from within the architecture of a Christian church and a Muslim mosque that are situated next to each other. Emerging out of architecture, not only is symbiosis removed from the lived experience of Turks and Greeks in the present, but also it suggests a monumental and static account of human relations:

Οι δυνάστες του νησιού ήταν οι Λουζινιανοί και μετά οι Ενετοί. Το 1471, όταν καταλαμβάνουν την Κύπρο οι Τούρκοι, τη διαμοιράζουν σε Μωαμεθανούς, μα στο χωριό μένουν και ντόπιοι Έλληνες που πάντα καλλιεργούσαν τη γύρω έφορη γή. Στα τριακόσια τόσα χρόνια του Οθωμανικού ζυγού Έλληνες και Τούρκοι *συμβιώνουν* ειρηνικά πλάι πλάι, όπως η εκκλησία της Περιστερώνας με το τζαμί, που είναι εντελώς δίπλα της.

[When the Lusignans and then the Venetians were the oppressors. In 1471, when the Ottomans conquered Cyprus, they distributed the land to the Muslims. In the village, however, local Greeks continue to reside, who have always been cultivating the fertile land around the village. During the three hundred years of Ottoman conquest, Greeks and Turks peacefully *coexist* [*συμβιώνουν*] just as the church of Peristerona coexisted with the mosque that is right next to it.] (Katselli 1997, 133, my emphasis)

One of the Goiteian examples of creative symbiosis was that of Jewish intellectuals who wrote their texts influenced by Arabic literary tropes and prosody.

They never had the slightest doubt about the absolute superiority of Judaism. I emphasize this fact not because I believe that such an attitude should be adopted in our time, but simply as an indication that Judaism inside Islam was an autonomous culture sure of itself despite, and possibly because of, its intimate connection with its environment. Never has Judaism encountered such a close and fractious symbiosis as that with the medieval civilization of Arab Islam. (Goitein 1955, 130)

Goitein emphasizes Arabic influences on Jewish culture within a dominant Islam. He too locates symbiosis in the past, suggesting a potential symbiosis as a response to partition. Goitein also points to Judaic superiority and autonomy, despite being a minority within that Islamic culture. If Judaism emerges from “inside Islam,” it still remains “an autonomous culture sure of itself” (Goitein 1955, 130). Goitein’s symbiosis clearly does not focus on the equal coexistence of Arabs and Jews, but a coexistence with hierarchal distinctions whereby Jews, even as they borrowed cultural elements from Arabs, are nevertheless autonomous as a minority.

Gil Anidjar comments on the origins of symbiosis as a political phenomenon and as part of a colonial and European history. In *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (2003), he suggests that “the (impossible) history of the Jew, the Arab and the Arab Jew is really the history of Europe: Europe as defined against its enemies—the Jew (the theological enemy) and the Arab (the political enemy)” (Anidjar 2003, 20). Anidjar challenges the “naturalness” of the recent animosity between the Jew and the Arab, exposing instead the discursive practices that operate behind its constitution. “Europe emerges as a third (silent, hidden, yet very active) party creating and sustaining the

separations between Arab and Jew, while rendering its role in the distinction, separation and enmity of Jew and Arab invisible” (Anidjar 2003, 20). “This separation and enmity has long served as the very core of Europe’s attempt to articulate its own identity by means of separating the political from the theological” (Anidjar 2003, 20). He suggests that “this ‘being together’ can never quite assemble into a figure (‘the Arab Jew’), for it is always more than this sum of names connected by a hidden hyphen. It is a ‘being together’ that results in an impossibility, a *non figure* that in its *invisibility* and *unreadability* reproduces and exceeds the so-called ‘Jewish Muslim symbiosis’ at once ancient and new” (Anidjar 2003, 9-10, his emphasis). Symbiosis, then, the attempt to unify hierarchically diversified categories in the name of Arab Jew, is yet another form of the “peace-making” process. Arab and Jew become micro-ethnicities that need to connect as part of a smooth *longue durée*, deriving from the past to the present, resisting periodization and effacing colonial and Zionist violence.

Shammas’s *Arabesques* presents a reversal of Goitein’s “creative symbiosis,” while at the same time demonstrating it in a subversive and mocking way. Written in Hebrew, *Arabesques* performs an act similar to that of those Jewish thinkers in the Middle Ages whom Goitein praised for having managed to embody Arabic literary tropes in their writing and yet written utterly Jewish texts. By adopting the language of the “other,” Shammas becomes a “Jewish” writer in the Goitean symbiotic sense. Yet he writes an utterly Arabic text, *Arabesques*.

*Arabesques*’ plot is arabesque-like and also symbiotic. It weaves together the autobiographer and a Jewish character, also a writer, as part of the narrative. This symbiosis is a peculiar one. *Arabesques* presents this Jewish character, Yeshoshua Bar-

On, whom Shammaas calls, ironically, “my Jew” (Shammaas 1986, 80-1). Bar-On incorporates in his own novel-in-process an Arab character whom he calls “my Arab” and who is also at the same time a “Jew” (1986, 92). Bar-On is a writer in the Goiteian sense, who seeks to exhibit a modern symbiosis in his literature, echoing that of the Jewish writers in the Middle Ages. The Arab, as Bar-On says, is his “literary solution,” which suggests a solution in the sense of imitation of those medieval Jewish thinkers who used Arabic tropes in their writings (1986, 91). He says,

My Jew will be an educated Arab...but not an intellectual. He speaks and writes excellent Hebrew...The Arab is a literary solution...My Arab is nothing but a solution to my personal problems and not to the problems of fiction...metaphor for the new loneliness. A wife who left. A son who got in trouble with the police ...There has to be an Arab this time, as some sort of solution to some sort of silence...My Arab will build this tower of confusion on my plot. (Shammaas 1986, 91-2)

Bar-On’s incorporation of the “other” benefits his own image (1986, 92). The Arab is just “educated.” Only the Jew, Bar-On, can be the real intellectual. Generally, in autobiography, each writer facing “himself as other” needs a persona as a cover-up. To the extent that autobiography uses the “other” as part of the emergence of a solipsistic subject, we may say that it is an invasive and colonial autobiography.

At the same time, Shammaas turns Bar-On’s hegemonic gesture inside out. The way he does that is by acknowledging and incorporating it as part of his text. Shammaas pivots the paradigm of Goitein’s “creative symbiosis,” acknowledging *a priori* that his *Arabesques*, even if written in (symbiotic) Hebrew, will not be considered equal to the works of those other “intellectual” Jews, successors of medieval Jewish scholars. The Arab, as symbiant, is just “an educated Arab but not an intellectual.”

Apart from a literary solution, “the Arab” is also a personal one, whom Bar-On uses as a facade, seeking to shield his autobiographical family problems from the public eye. As part of his effort to obfuscate the autobiographical via the symbiotic element, which in that sense it becomes a mechanism of his disguise, Bar-On presents the Arab as an isolated and thus segregated figure. Accordingly, Bar-On plans to begin his book in the third person with this “possible opening:” “Having come to Jerusalem from his village in the Galilee, he learned that, like the coffin, the loneliness of the Arab has room enough in it for only one person” (Shammas 1986, 93). Bar-On “invents” this technique of the substitute “loneliness of the Palestinian Arab Israeli” to “fool” his readers: to confuse them as to his own loneliness:

An invention of the [writer] who managed to fool even the [readers] themselves. I will write about the loneliness of the Palestinian Arab Israeli which is the greatest loneliness of all. With the skill of the veteran...who is still remembered for a few precise and devastating...strokes of prose, among the best in Hebrew literature. (Shammas 1986, 93)

This gesture puts symbiosis in action: a utilization of the “other” as respectfully distinct and yet connected to himself.

In their public exchange outside the book, in real life, Anton Shammas and A. B. Yehoshua—who is an actual Israeli writer and not one to whom Shammas attributes his fictional character—come to disagree on issues of “majority” and “minority” in present day Israel/Palestine. Shammas asks for “a new definition of the word ‘Israeli,’ so that it will include [him] as well” (cited in Grossman 1993, 257). Living Yehoshua responds by invoking Goitein’s “symbiosis.” He invokes an inclusive Israeli identity that will emerge in a gradual process from everyday life, rather than be imposed. This communication,

Yehoshua said, will lead to the gradual formation of a common Israeli identity. At the same time, Yehoshua emphasizes the past symbiosis of Arabs and Jews as a template for this new symbiosis by saying that during the First Temple period “Jewish religious identity was not at all a necessary element of Israeli identity” (Grossman 1993, 270-271).<sup>90</sup> By invoking Goitein's symbiosis, Yehoshua preserves the European theological–political distinction with citizenship as superior to theology. Yehoshua's symbiosis, used in a modern context, exemplifies the danger of *longue durée* and the application of continuity as a historical perspective on Mediterranean history. This danger is of creating continuities of the present with non-commensurable pasts.

Shammas's view, in contrast to Yehoshua's, looks for an inclusive humanity beyond Arabs and Jews, and beyond the distinction of “majority” or “minority,” also a European construct.<sup>91</sup> This view of Shammas comes in contrast to what critics of his work have pointed out. Critic Hannan Hever, for example, claimed that “Shammas chose the Arabesque as a figure of minority discourse” (Hever 1987, 60). Gil Hochberg said that “by employing the arabesque as a figure of minority discourse, Shammas is also pointing at the [stereotypical] orientalist approach toward Arab culture within Hebrew literature—a literature that, as Shammas ironically comments, “is written from right to left, but is read from left to right” (Hochberg 1987, 24). Shammas's inclusion of Arab and Jew with the prospect of having one identity, however, constitutes a gesture of human responsibility and mutual accountability, rather than a coexistence of ethnically divided parts. I shall come back to this at the end of this section.

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<sup>90</sup> David Crossman, *Sleeping on a Wire: Conversations with Palestinians in Israel* (1993) pp. 257, 270-1.

<sup>91</sup> See Amir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony* (2007) discussed later in the conclusion of this chapter.

Shammas's *Arabesques* is not symbiotic, while at the same time it moves in parallel to it. Shammas includes the symbiotic Arab/Jew embedded within Bar-On's Jewish narrative. By so doing, Shammas incorporates the Jew, through another Jew, who is a performer of Goiteian symbiosis. By demonstrating symbiosis through the Jewish performance of it, and doing so mockingly, Shammas effaces the symbiotic as a practice of the Arab. Instead he uses *arabesques*, which he places "in the minds of the Shammas family" (Shammas 1986, 209), that is, in the stories and lives of the people of his native village. Rather than between Arab and Jew, his arabesques are personal stories, with the issues those raise: life, relationships, distant relatives, histories of the lives of the Fassuta people. Thus, while acknowledging Goitein's view of "creative symbiosis" as an expression of Jewish superiority [over the Arab], Shammas undoes it. He transforms and transposes symbiosis into arabesque located within Arab culture alone. But what does this gesture mean? And, what is an arabesque? According to Gil Hochberg,

The arabesque, like Scheherezad, or the old oral tradition of storytelling, is a common representation of Arab culture within Hebrew literature. Shammas "returns" to this narrow world of representations in what he calls "an Arab story written in Hebrew letters," thus offering his own cynical representation of representation. (Hochberg 2007, 90)

Arabesque, however, in Shammas's work, is much more than a representation of Arab culture. The arabesque is an artistic decoration that can be characterized as labyrinth-like. It does not have a beginning, middle, or end. Rather, it is a complex, intricate design of interlacing geometric floral or non-floral patterns, with its elements inextricably intertwined. It is characterized by "a continuous stem which splits regularly, producing a series of counterpoised, leafy, secondary stems which can in turn *split again*

*or return* to be reintegrated into the main stem” (Jones 1978, 170-1, my emphasis). This limitless, rhythmical alternation of movement, conveyed by the reciprocal repetition of curved lines, produces a design that is balanced and free from tension. As such it represents a creative synthesis of diverse elements and a work of uninhibited imagination. Arabesque is the fundamental element of Islamic art and of Islam in general. The term literally means “in the fashion of the Arabs.” Arabesques, even though a pattern going back to the eighth-century mosaics of the Great Mosques of Damascus, were adapted by Renaissance artists in the sixteenth century and became a Western pattern of art. Even if the name itself is not necessarily Arabic, this pattern is, constituting its substance. Arabesques suggest the complexity within the Arabic culture as they symbolize unity arising from diversity, according to Radwa Ashour: “Like arabesques, the Arab world is one and varied. Arab is a cultural rather than a racial definition. The vast majority of its inhabitants, ‘the Arabs,’ speak Arabic and/or have an Arab/Islamic heritage whether they are Muslims, Christians, Kurds, Nubians, Berbers, Assyrians” (sourceradwaashour.net, “Arabesque,” Web).<sup>92</sup>

Shammas, of course, is a Christian Palestinian. While Yael Feldman claims that Shammas “has dared here, in Hebrew...to force into the open a memory in a minor key, the memory of the Arab Christian minority, by tracing its roots in an Arab-Arab conflict” (Feldman 1999, 385), I would argue that Shammas does not trace the roots of conflict, whether Arab-Arab, or Christian-Muslim, or even Jewish-Arab. Rather, he points to the inclusiveness of Arab culture as, *at least*, a culture open to the influence of those medieval Jewish writers.

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<sup>92</sup> Arabesque was also part of the title of the stories by Edgar Allan Poe, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1839-40).

Shammas substitutes the Zionists' beliefs of symbiosis, which are also Eurocentric, with arabesque. Arabesques, as a way of remembrance and storytelling, are also the link that keeps his dispersed family together. They are the family stories, which circle around and do not all come together. Let us try to understand how the arabesques of the Shammas's family interrelate their parts.

Hochberg argues that Shammas's narrator defines his identity in relation rather than in opposition to the Hebrew-Jewish-Israeli:

Just as the narrator does not know where his own identity begins and that of his double (his dead cousin) ends, so do the stories of the two people appear in *Arabesques* to be conflated and intertwined.... The Hebrew-Jewish-Israeli identity is not set in opposition to the Palestinian identity as the enemy, but *in relation* to it. As such, these two seemingly independent, even opposed, identities are in fact deeply dependent on each other. (Hochberg 2007, 82-83)

The focus in this excerpt is on the Hebrew-Jewish-Israeli identity "which is *not* set in opposition to the Palestinian identity as an enemy, but in relation to it." In other words, Shammas wants to make peace with the Hebrew-Jewish-Israeli and thus live symbiotically with him. Yet once more we return to a relation of dependency between the two ethnicities, as Hochberg states: "These two seemingly independent, even opposed, identities are in fact deeply dependent on each other."

*Arabesques*, however, turns us away from the binary of self and other and toward the multiplicities within one's own culture, in this case the Arabic. The labyrinth from which Shammas's autobiography emerges is not the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, but his uncle Yusef, whose "years of his life were but links in a chain leading to salvation" (Shammas 1986, 228). Uncle Yusef's stories initiate Shammas into the world of stories "which keep people awake at nights" (228). The same idea is an epigraph in one of the

book's chapters: "People say telling tales is good for sleep, and I say it's meant to keep people awake" (207). Uncle Yusef rendered his stories without exact ending or beginning, without full explanation, which reflects the "dead" subjects and perhaps their silences, as they haven't articulated their oppression under shifting empires.

These Christians always knew how to stay off to one side, at the back door where the conquerors linger and ponder all the doors they have broken into. The Christians know how to keep the embers glowing so the fire never goes out. Not obvious embers, but a continuous dying, so that you can never tell if the fire is alive or dead. (217)

In the context of the state of orphanage, within which Shammas's story is glossed, there is no explanation given to orphan children, especially when they are kidnapped. Uncle Yusef's "stories were plaited into one another, embracing and parting, twisting and twining in the infinite arabesque of memory ...[A]ll of them...flowed around him in a swirling current of illusion that linked beginnings to endings, the inner to the external, the reality to the tale" (226-7). These tales keep providing Shammas the tools that will lead to the discovery of his identity.

I tend to believe that it wasn't by chance that he passed on to me the story of my name...He [Yusef] knew that I was destined to retell his story one day. That's why he so graciously granted me the key that let me into all the corridors but kept the master key in his own hands. (227)

The doubt about his identity is the product of a series of stories and genealogical splits, begun by this Palestinian Christian man, Shammas's uncle Yusef, by Shammas's uncle Jiryas who lives in Argentina, by a Syrian story of a cave that haunts him, and, of course, by his cousin Abyad, his double, who is a quasi-orphan and lives in the United States. Shammas's identity emerges alongside the doubts brought on by the stories of these members of his family, distant and yet so present in his memories: "And so one day I

found myself, the way you sometimes find yourself in dreams... gnawed by doubts, too *afraid* that I might stir up from the distant past the dust of memories” (34, my emphasis).

Why the fear, though? Because he is not supposed to stir these things up, under the new conditions of yet another invasion, in 1967. After that war the stories shift from arabesques to an intrusion of simple tales about the Jew and the Arab. Character Bar-On presents this intrusion clearly. When Shammas is about to meet Abyad for the first time, Bar-On appears to “breathe down his neck”:

I sit down again, ashamed. At myself, at having allowed Bar-On to invade my life once more. Here I am sitting with someone who has recently met with two people who are dear to me, whom I'd like to see face to face and talk to, and instead of asking him about them, I pain and worry about whether Bar On is going to think that there's an attempt here to recruit me into the ranks of a “hostile organization.” And I ask myself how I would have responded if Bar On had not been breathing down my neck. (257)

The Jewish gaze imposes rules onto Shammas of how to be, what to think or dream. Bar-On's presence constitutes an invasion, an interruption to his intimate life, to his relationship with people he loves and misses.

### **New Life**

The “secret story” of the boy who supposedly died circulated in Fassuta prior to 1948 and was not supposed to survive the war of 1948. That moment in time signified the end of the Fassuta stories, because of the dispersal of the family members to other places. The early pages of *Arabesques* recount incidents in the Shammas family history prior to that time, describing the lives of the people in the village of Fassuta during the Ottoman era, followed by the British conquest. The people of Fassuta are storytellers. They keep narrating stories that tend to focus on the period of the Arab Rebellion of 1936-7. With

the formation of the state of Israel and the displacement of Palestinians, storytelling became nostalgic for those who stayed in the village under the new Israeli regime, for example, “After the fashion of refugees, [Em Nasser tends] to string unrelated stories on a single thread of nostalgia, or to mix up the chronicles” (154). It is because of Shammas’s Lebanese border-crossing that the fact that Anton is not dead is revealed.

The storyteller is a Fassuta woman called Layla Khoury, now a migrant to Lebanon who, expelled from her village by the Israeli army during the early days of the formation of the State of Israel, married the son of a famous Palestinian fighter and converted from Christianity to Islam, changing her name to Surayyah Sa’id. The revelation that cousin Anton is alive becomes almost apocalyptic for Shammas. It hides a vaster truth about his life. Shammas’s identity is embedded in a strange conversion, symbolized by the conversion of Khoury to Islam. His conversion, however, is not religious, but from the falsity of Abyad as a story to Abyad as alive and true. Realizing the truth about Abyad, he also realizes the truth about his identity. In this moment the autobiographical “I” emerges.

The autobiographical constitutes a moment of the revelation of oneself to oneself, now authorized to speak and write by the discovery of a mistaken identity. “Uncle Yusef was well aware that his being was flawed and incomplete, like my own” (228). Even before Shammas writes his autobiography, even before he realizes those missing parts, “the missing half of the amulet,” he already knows the meaning of those stories, as Uncle Yusef does. But rather than telling him what the meaning is, Uncle Yusef lets him find the meaning himself. “I would need to utter the complete Word, and he would see to it that I did not lack for a single syllable” (228-9). The utterance, the autobiography as a

disguised revelation of the truth of the lives of these people and of his own, constitutes the completion of his identity. The crucial realization that Shammaas has awakened to is the reality about his life, which he had previously kept secret. Shammaas as well as his native people are all Antons, orphan children who grew up thinking that they were Abyads—and probably some of them never awoke to that realization.<sup>93</sup> This is why they do not have autobiographies, and if they did, they would be by definition false stories with missing parts, as was Abyad's before Shammaas reinterprets it as his own life story. The self is a story of a missing part, which remains to be discovered by the self. "There is someone else, whose name is the same as yours, and half your identity is in his hands, half an amulet," Uncle Yusef says (227). As Shammaas untangles the reality about his name, this becomes the reason for writing his autobiography. Shammaas fashions his autobiography in this complex way to capture his life before the crucial revelation and after, but the two lives are inextricably linked. Shammaas discovers the missing link of his life story and that missing link is a derivative of his vaster realizations about the history of his people. The "dead" person, after whom Shammaas was named, now alive, leads to a link of continuity with a living history. The connectivity between the two histories is not just the name Anton Shammaas anymore, an emblematic marker of history, but a living connectivity, Michael Abyad.

Abyad never cares to find out what his origins are: he never cares to go back to Palestine. The question is raised "Why would anyone want to learn that for the entire fifty years of his life he has really been somebody else?" (72). The story of "Anton who died," which Abyad bears in his imagination is tragic. But it would have been even more tragic if he had found out that he himself was that child. Abyad is an orphan, but he does

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<sup>93</sup> See also p. 218 of *Arabesques* as he associates refugees with the metaphor of orphanage.

not know it. All he knows are soft versions of stories of conflict and war, a knowledge mitigated by the hope of Jews and Arabs living together again. In Khoury's mind, this is expressed by the following statement "You lost a child, I lost a home." But having lost a home and a child is not as tragic as the realization that Khoury could have been the wife of Abyad, with whom she had fallen in love when still in Palestine. If only Abyad knew that he was Anton, if only he was in touch with himself. That would have been another life for her and for Abyad (248).

Whether Abyad returned to Fassuta or not, his return would be a return without a home, for the people of his village are now dispersed and his home lost to the Israelis.

This Leyla Khoury has realized:

I was happy to go back to the village in '48. You're always happy to go back to a place, especially back home, even though I didn't have a home there. I mean, my sister was there, but it wasn't as if I'd come home. My parents died in '35. Sometimes I think about my father, dream about him. About my mother—I don't know. As if she had died on purpose, died and abandoned me and my sister, two orphans. As a matter of fact, I didn't think at all about the whole period until I got to the Abyad's house. There I had a lot of time to think. I began to forget Sitt Sa'da [her aunt who raised her]. But I couldn't forget one thing, the thing that won't leave me in peace as long as I live. (245)

The one thing Leyla Khoury will not forget as long as she lives is that when she was taken as a tenant into the Abyad household, Almaza, the older tenant, was given to another home. Khoury then met Michael and figured out through an amulet Michael kept that he was Anton, the child who supposedly had died. As she reveals the story to Shammass, the reader can barely decipher something very strange, but this is well concealed, indeed disguised. There is a succession of women in the orphan's life; as one lover comes, the mother goes; yet Michael remains ignorant of both. Deciphering the connections of their stories, Khoury and Shammass realize their shared "orphanage" and

along with that, the truth about Palestine and their homelessness. “Palestine is lost and will never return” (220). They also realize that they could have been a couple or even married. After they realize this, they make love. This is their reconciliation: “suddenly a cry is heard, and the cry shatters into a myriad of fragments, and the body of Laylah Khoury, the body of a woman who is not yet twenty years old, is cast over me, and my body is caught on the hook of the amulet, with great reconciliation and with infinite compassion that tell me the triangle of the black amulet will remain between her breasts forever” (248). The amulet was that which Abyad had given her years before, but it could also be Shammas’s. Reconciliation comes with truth. And the beginning of their history is the moment that they reconcile with themselves, when they find connections they have missed. This reflects the idea that life is a composite structure, filled with possibilities for various unities. Unity is contingent on coincidence, rather than a regulated political principle. When it’s time, interrupted unities may one day re-unify.

Shammas’s and Khoury’s accounts are of the lives they *could* have lived, but did not. Khoury and Shammas reconcile by apologizing to one another, and to themselves, for their mutual experience of indifference. Their history begins at the moment of their apology. Autobiography arises from within the self who uncovers the truth of his so-far unrecognized oppression as someone between Arab and Jew.

Through its disguise as a novel, *Arabesques* conveys the experience of multiple colonizations. Khoury’s truth provokes Anton’s symbolic descent into a cistern, at the bottom of which “silt and the remnants of the leaves...had sunk into the concavity” (49). In spite of its seasonal cleaning, the residues of previous colonizations remained at the bottom, forgotten, as new histories were deposited after yet another conquest. Histories of

colonization, like the silt at the bottom of the cistern, remain under water. Their truths, like those residues, wait to be unearthed for the residues they are. In this cistern, Shammas's identity resides.

Apologia quintessentially involves the confession of one's human flaws: guilt, loneliness, dishonesty, selfishness, and much more, in a way that Judith Butler indicates in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005).

I will need to be forgiven for what I cannot have fully known, and I will be under a similar obligation to offer forgiveness to others, who are also constituted in partial opacity to themselves. If the identity we say we are cannot possibly capture us and marks immediately an excess and opacity that falls outside the categories of identity, then any effort "to give an account of oneself" will have to fail in order to approach being true. (Butler 2005, 42)

Shammas nevertheless acknowledges the symbiosis point of view of Jewish Yehoshua, the "other." In that sense, Shammas's autobiography conveys a sense of responsibility towards the point of view of the "other" even when he writes about himself. Accounting for the point of view of the "other" makes autobiography an account of accountability. In one's relation with the other, one does not become the other, but in humility acknowledges that one's own point of view is not the only one. "The virtue of humility might allow us to learn...to acknowledge that our point of view is not the only one, and to be willing to deal with complex and confusing issues honestly (Butler 2004, 39).

Here I use the following excerpt from Derek Walcott's poem "Homecoming: Anse La Raye" (1969), evocative of the autobiographical moment in *Arabesques*, as a moment of knowledge of one's homelessness:

They swarm like flies  
round your heart's sore.

Suffer them to come,

entering your needle's eye,  
[...]  
for once, like them,  
you wanted no career  
But this sheer light, this clear,  
Infinite, boring, paradisaal sea,  
but hoped it would mean something to declare  
[...]  
all this you knew,  
but never guessed you'd come  
to know there are homecomings without home. (Walcott 1986, 128)<sup>94</sup>

Coming to the question of the autobiographical writing in *Arabesques*, Hochberg ignores Shamma's crucial and deeply personal apologia and the fact of his homelessness and instead features "the self as other" and the narrative "made of multiple and incomplete voices:"

[Autobiographical writing] is necessarily a narrative about the other, or about the self *as* other.... While such practice of borrowing [the Hebrew language] disables the narrator from finding his original and authentic voice (and in that sense from writing his autobiography as a story of introspection and self-reflection), it does enable him to write, instead, the story of the self *as* a narrative made of multiple and incomplete voices. (Hochberg 2007, 81)

Shamma's account, however, is authentic, introspective, self-reflexive and complete even though disguised in a way that Hochberg's analysis does not quite grasp. His story is not about himself as other, but about the self who thought he was the "other." His story may seem as though it is incomplete, for its links amongst characters and autobiographers are disguised. Shamma's *Arabesques* performs a connectivity that lies within the history of a homeless people, rather than between Arab and Jew. Shamma offers his autobiography as an apology to himself, disguised as Michael Abyad, for being indifferent to the fact that for all these years he was someone else. His autobiography is

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<sup>94</sup> From the collection *The Gulf and Other Poems*, 1969.

an account of a truth that he was not supposed to know or care about: that his mother country, Palestine, under the Ottomans, British, and Israelis, is actually a stepmother.

Katselli and Shammas give clues to the reader for their invisible crossings. For example, toward the end of *Arabesques* Shammas writes:

If Michael were the teller, he would have ended [the story] like this: “He opened a drawer and took out a pencil and wrote on the file: My Tale. He frowned at this a moment, then he used an eraser, leaving only the single word Tale. That seemed to satisfy him.” (Shammas 1986, 259)

Shifting to third-person, as if it is Abyad that is speaking, Shammas acknowledges that without his having being reborn into a new life, his tale would be just a tale, but not his own, “my tale.” Shammas’s autobiography integrates within it the autobiography what he would have written as Abyad and thus does not reject the previous life and self.

Shammas’s reconciliation with himself is like Walcott’s in “Love After Love.”



Figure 3-1 Kerinia I love you



Figure 3-2 We don't have a homeland

These two images are placed in disparate places in *Women of Kerinia*, the first one, “Kerinia, I love you” in the first chapter, and the second, “We do not have a homeland,” in the last. The two together constitute a significant autobiographical clue. They reflect

the idea of being reborn upon the moment of the crucial realization that Katselli has not been a sovereign subject in her own homeland. The first symbolizes Katselli's nostalgic self that loves the homeland and hopes to return to it, echoing the national narrative of return. The second symbolizes Katselli's self as she is coming to terms with the idea that not only is there no return, but also that there is not a homeland. The beginning chapter announces the writing of a particular book, *Birthplace*, about Kerinia, Katselli's native city, from which she is exiled. The last chapter, however, announces the existence of another type of writing, an autobiographical writing which Katselli disguises in that first book. The actual book ends up being a combination of both, *Women of Kerinia*. These images illuminate her book's subtitle, *istorima*—history by illustration. *Istorima*, as I will explain in a later section, is a step before history proper, which is emblematic and national, almost a history but not quite.

The beginning of a process towards a discovery of the autobiographical self occurs in parallel with character Maria. Having watched a movie that raises “υπαρξιακά ερωτήματα” [existential questions], the character Maria contemplates her existence: “Εγώ είμαι, εγώ είμαι... το έργο λέει πως πρώτα ήταν η Ελλάδα αλλά τελικά είμαστε εμείς. Είμαι Εγώ! Ποιός εγώ; Και γιατί εγώ και όχι το τίποτε. Μόνη! Με όλο το βάρος της σημασίας της λέξης. Μόνη χωρίς τον εαυτό μου, γιατί δεν έχω πια εαυτό” [I am, I am...the movie says that first it was Greece but eventually it's us. I am me! I, who? And why I instead of nobody. Alone! With all its significance. Alone without myself, because I no longer have one] (Katselli 1997, 194). In the form of these existential questions, Maria brings up the question of Greece. The question of the self, the self as nobody, the loneliness of self are captured in a temporal juxtaposition of a before and after: before it

was Greece and now it's us. Greece enters this personal and confessional moment when Maria contemplates on separating from her husband and liberating herself from the patriarchal structures that she finds restrictive. When Pigi asks her “Μαρία, τί είναι ο άντρας σου για σένα και τι είσαι εσύ για τον εαυτό σου;” [Maria, what is your husband to you and what are you to yourself?] (Katselli 1997, 194) Maria looks lost and does not quite understand this question. “Δηλαδή;” [What do you mean?], she responds (1997, 194). She has no answer except that she *is* her husband and children. “Και ο εαυτός σου;” [And how about yourself?] Pigi insists (1997, 194). Maria still has no answer regardless of Pigi's multiple rephrasings of the question. Pigi's questions however instigate her aforementioned existential contemplation of “who am I?”

The distinction between a new and old self is marked by a variation of the tense in the verb “I am” in Lenia's following statement: “ένα θρουμπί σε λίγους πόντους γής που ζώμειναν, που ζώμεινε, που ζώμεινες για να θυμάσαι αυτό που ήσουν—αυτό που είσαι;” [A savory tree on a few centimeters of land that remained, that it remained, that you remained to remind yourself of who you were—who you are?] (Katselli 1997, 184). As Lenia as she is coming to a realization of her transformation into a liberated woman, she uses the metaphor of the savory tree, an Eastern Mediterranean plant that grows on rocks and dry areas, as a reminder of what her identity has been and is now. As she realizes that the sun, the moon and the wind are still there, she, like this plant, was and is still there, despite of her uprootedness (1997, 184). The savory tree usually grows isolated from other plants, and this is why Lenia uses the verb “ζώμεινες” which may also mean left outside, to describe her condition as this savory tree because savory trees always grow isolated.

The act of being reborn into a new life has a long history in the Mediterranean. Steven A. Epstein explains this with what he calls “serial identity” (Epstein 2014, 349). Epstein gives a series of examples of Mediterranean subjects and their “creative self invention” (Epstein 2014, 349). These subjects changed their names, converted to other religions, spoke many languages, intermarried. Epstein gives the example of Aselm Turmeda (1350-1423), who as is presented in his autobiography reinvented himself by changing his name and converting to Islam. Epstein also gives the example of Leo Africanus, an Andalusian émigré (1486/8-after 1532) who was raised in Fez. Leo traveled extensively in the Mediterranean and was then taken as a slave to Rome, where he was baptized as a Christian and wrote his books. In his manuscripts Leo “planted some ironic observations that Muslim readers would recognize and Europeans would not” (Epstein 2014, 350). As an exile and “true captive,” Epstein says Leo, who traveled and never lived far from the Mediterranean shores, was not very interested in the sea or even its coasts (2014, 350). While living in Italy, he performed his Christianity, but in a way that went beyond hypocrisy, pretense, or convenience (2014, 351). Leo was a chameleon-like figure because he changed identities over time. Changing places over time left Leo the opportunity for self-inventions (2014, 351).

Paul of Tarsus (6-67 CE) also had an elusive family history. “Being born again, as he frequently put it, was after all a kind of serial identity never losing its connections to he previous iteration. His constant use of the metaphor of adoption reminds us how Mediterranean cultures value this practice by which anyone might become a son or daughter of a new parent and obtain a new identity” (2014, 349).

Shammas and Katselli are part of this tradition. In this historical context, Abyad's kidnapping and adoption into a new family is not so strange, after all. Nor is it strange that Shammas is reborn as Abyad in the United States. Uncle Yusef in *Arabesques* and the character Pigi in *Women* are chameleon characters or interchangeable. Uncle Yusef "did not judge between these contradictory beliefs, [Christian and Pagan] and even conceived them as a single entity" (Shammas 1986, 228). Nor is the renaming of the names of places and people strange: Rada Mikha'eel is later known as Abu Jameel (1986, 209); Leyla Khoury becomes Surayyah Sa'id. The village Deir El-Kasi is eventually called Elkosh (1986, 126); the mill of Wadi El-Karn eventually becomes known as Nachal Kaziv (1986, 160).

### **The Gift of Autobiography**

Whereas the dispersed autobiographical self of Katselli and the doubling of Shammas might be seen as a form of fragmentation of self, their doubling is nevertheless a reflection of their colonial pasts in a larger Mediterranean context. A distinction must thus be drawn between contemporary autobiography written from the point of view of the former colonies of the Mediterranean and autobiography from the metropole. One of the most prevalent examples of the fragmentation of autobiography in the Western world is that of *Roland Barthes* by Roland Barthes (1977). Barthes experiences life as chronologically or historically fragmented and without having a narratable progression. He considers this fragmentation as integral to life narrative (Jay 1984, 182). Barthes knows himself through contradictions, fragmentations, and lack of coherent meaning. Intrinsic divisions bring him closer to self. He says,

But the important thing is that these little networks *not* be connected, that they not slide into a single enormous network which would be the structure of the book, its meaning. It is [written] in order to halt, to deflect, to divide this descent of discourse towards a destiny of the subject. (Roland Barthes 1977, 148, my emphasis)

Barthes fragments himself and does not desire a connection of the parts or a unified meaning of self.

In contrast to Barthes, Shamma and Katselli structure their books in ways that are complex and fragmented, but with the intention that the fragments be assembled into a unity by the reader's careful reading. Unification, as they demonstrate for us, is not an easy or foolproof process. The reading of the autobiographical "I" becomes a journey to discover the connected elements, not of subjects in the grand narratives of history, but of the twists and turns of history as life. Unification, in other words, is not concerned with things outside the self, even as it involves others.

Embedded in the two narratives lies a significant act of *giving* as an act of sharing, an exchange, a sign of relationality. The act of giving one's autobiography to another signifies an openness to share one's experience, as well as to receive the stories of others. It signifies openness to the possibility of receiving someone else's story with compassion, as if it were one's own. This act of giving also reflects an idea of autobiography as porous and transitive. Rather than being an *emblem* of a particular personality, the one and only narrative one can possibly produce about a life, autobiography becomes a shared object that circulates, leading to the idea of autobiography as a gift.

Lisa Guenther offers valuable insight on the intersubjective dimension of the autobiographies I have been discussing, where the subjects of narrative represent themselves in many pieces but not in irreparably broken fragments. Guenther proposes an

understanding of existence as *the gift of the other* (2012). She reconstructs the Heideggerian “being-toward-death,” which, as she says, de-emphasizes the space in between birth and death. In its place she proposes “being-from-others.” In contrast to the Heideggerian idea, she argues, we should receive “our...existence as a gift that can never be reclaimed as a possession or choice but that precisely as such demands a response and perhaps even responsibility” (Guenther 2008, 113). This relation, Guenther continues, implies an *intersubjective* meaning of participation in a community, which inherits and interprets its collective heritage. “Being-from-others” highlights “the sense in which no one exists without initially coming from someone, from a woman in particular, in a way that is ontologically distinct from the way [one] inherit[s] a tradition or a set of possibilities” (Guenther 2008, 113).

The Heideggerian “being-toward-death” has implicitly influenced the study of autobiography in its conceptualization as “a record of living in a text that outlives the lives” (Smith and Watson 2010, 262). The imprint of Heidegger is evident in other definitions of the genre as well. For example, Nancy Miller claims, “Every autobiography—identity through alterity—is the writing against death twice: the other’s and one’s own” (Miller 1994, 12). The process of writing one’s autobiography, bearing in mind one’s own death, is something that Miller calls “autothanatography.”

*Autobiography as gift*, in contrast, reflects the confrontation between life and life, rather than between life and death, and thus offers the possibility of *rebirth*. Guenther’s perspective expands our understanding of the possibilities of autobiography, which becomes in and of itself a narrative of the self while accounting for the point of view of the other. If autobiography, as Miller says, is “identity through alterity,” the confrontation

of the self with itself, witnessed by a third person or by the self in the third person, allows us to consider as part of autobiography the realization of rebirth of the colonial subject, who for so long had thought of itself as someone other than itself. So far, colonization had made it think of itself as sovereign. But the realization that its existence had been conditioned by the empire constitutes a liberating revelation.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), Judith Butler claims that “giving an account” is always giving an account “to someone” (Butler 2005, 36), and that the act of “giving an account of oneself” [*didonai logon*] entails an “ethical responsibility” between storyteller and listener (20). The subject, according to Butler, is bequeathed a “fundamental sociality” and is produced in relation to others; all are defined by the necessity of interaction (33). Butler draws on the terminology of the judicial system in order to provide an alternative space to *account for oneself*, thus transferring to the realm of interpersonal relations some of the responsibilities of systems of justice. In turn, Butler gives an account of the emergence of the self as being “the relation to you” (81). That is to say, the other is a precondition for the existence of the self. A subject makes claims for itself only in the presence of others. The other, however, is as much unknown as the self. Equal lack of full knowledge of one another and of the self provides a space that, according to Butler, creates the conditions for ethical *coexistence* and responsibility, since, again according to Butler, our existence belongs partially to others.<sup>95</sup> In a sense, Butler echoes the logic of symbiosis in its most positive aspect that considers two different and differing parts equally sovereign. If, according to Butler, one’s existence

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<sup>95</sup> At the same time, Butler reminds us of the difficulties of narrating our life story and in “our hope of restructuring or transforming the world through it. With the narration of oneself comes an account that includes social and moral conditions and norms that exceed a purely personal or idiosyncratic meaning” (Butler 2005, 7)

partially belongs to others as part of a social life, then what is to happen to those who refuse or neglect the right to self-legitimacy because of their mirroring of an image imposed on them by colonization and the postcolonial apparatuses of the state?<sup>96</sup>

The intersubjective dimension of life writing is in evidence in both Katselli's and Shammas's books. In *Women of Kerinia, Istorima*, for example, the reader learns that the character Pigi has been writing her autobiography, under the title *To βαθύ μυστήριο της αγάπης* [The Deep Mystery of Love], which is different from the title of Katselli's book. Pigi intends to give her autobiography as a gift for another character, Lenia, to publish as part of *Birthplace*, the book she is writing about Kerinia: "Δώρο απο μένα" [Take it as a gift from me] (Katselli 1997, 298). She says, "Αν αποφασίσεις να εκδώσεις το βιβλίο μπορεί να σου το δώσω τούτο, να το προσθέσεις μέσα" [If you decide to publish your book, I may give you this one to add it in there] (297). Pigi also insists that Lenia combine not only her autobiography but also Orthodoxy's political memoirs in the same volume and publish it as Lenia's own book. "Άκου έθελες να γράψεις βιβλίο. Έτο! Έτοιμον!" [Listen, you wanted to write a book, didn't you? Here it is. Ready made!] (297).

Similarly, when Anton Shammas travels to the United States for a writing workshop and finally meets Michael Abyad, Abyad is in the process of writing his autobiography. Abyad had decided to be present in it as the little Anton who died, writing under a fictitious name—Anton Shammas (Shammas 1986, 259). This is because the stories he heard from Almaza about "little Anton who died" haunted him throughout his life: "At times I had *imagined that I was him*. I hear about him and sleep on his pillow,

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<sup>96</sup> We may also ask: How do you account for those who have thought of themselves as others or those who have thought of themselves as islands dependent on the mainland?

and even have his dreams” (258, my emphasis). Crucially, when Abyad meets Shammas, Abyad *gives* his autobiography to Shammas and asks him, as the writer that he is, to finish it: “Take this file [my autobiography] and see what you can do with it. Translate it, adapt it, add or subtract. But leave me in” (259).

Gil Hochberg points out that *Arabesques* is a narrative about the “drama of identity” and “the schizophrenia that links the Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli, making them one person or two persons within one subject” (Hochberg 2007, 84). *Arabesques*, she argues, “highlights the interdependency of the two identities: the Palestinian and the Jewish-Israeli (2007, 82). But the transposition of the first-person narrative, Abyad’s autobiography, into the third-person narrative that *Arabesques* periodically performs, opens up the possibility of its reading as an intersubjective account between Abyad and Shammas, who are both aspects of the autobiographer. Intersubjectivity is a process that occurs within the self as it involves others.

In these two examples of gifted autobiographies, there lies an expressed wish of “being from others,” in Guenther’s terms: the disguised autobiographical desire to be reborn through the translation, adaptation, addition and subtraction of the self as other. This gift of autobiography constitutes the opportunity that postcolonial subjects offer to themselves to be reborn into a new life: into a new set of narratives that embrace their old history and the potentiality of a new self, including the tragic but also liberating realization that the sovereignty of the postcolonial subject was conditioned by the empire and the postcolonial apparatuses of the state, as we shall now see.

“Which of the two of us has written this book I do not know,” says Shammas (1986, 259). The story of the one Anton instigates the story of the other and vice versa.

The doubling of himself represents birth as a repetition. The Mediterranean subject is a subject that re-invents itself. His life is constituted by multiple *beginnings*.

### **Happy People Have No History**

Μένω με την κραυγή μέσα μου φυλακισμένη! Η κραυγή κάτω απο τα πολιτισμένα χαμόγελα, τα πολιτισμένα λόγια, τις πολιτισμένες συνεδρίες ζητά τα δικαιωμάτά της

[I remain paralyzed with an outcry imprisoned inside me! The outcry, under the civilized smiles, the civilized words, the civilized meetings, asks for its rights.]

Katselli, *Women of Kerinia*.

While in Strasbourg (April 1983) as a member of the European parliament, Katselli writes her impressions as part of a political diary that she includes in *Women of Kerinia*. The diary is marked by her overall disappointment with the way European members and committees deal with the Turkish invasion and the subsequent uprootedness of the Greek Cypriot population in Cyprus. She is also disappointed by the members of her own delegation, who neglect her because she is a woman. She often finds disturbing European congressmen's comments insulting, such as, "Happy people have no history!" (Katselli 1997, 270), and the dismissal of Cyprus, based on the fact that it is a small country: "αμφισβητούν την ύπαρξή μας σαν ανεξάρτητο δημοκρατικό κράτος της Ευρώπης και θα αποφασίσουν αν θα παραμείνουμε" [They doubt our existence as an independent democratic state of Europe and they will decide if we will remain] (245). The very fact of Cyprus' existence as a state is contested: "Οι Γερμανοί βουλευτές μας αρνιούνται να υπάρξουμε όσο περνά απ' το χέρι τους" [The German congressmen deny our existence as much as they possibly can] (239). Isolated, Katselli roams the hallways of the parliament, where she is surprised to confront an ancient, seventh-century,

authentic Cypriot vase [Κυπριακός αμφορέας] (443).



Figure 3-3 The gift of Cyprus

The vase is located in a glass showcase next to a bank and a post office, at the corner of a large staircase area. Katselli expresses her reaction to her confrontation with the vase as follows: “Την πρώτη φορά που τον είδα παραξενεύτηκα. Δεν είναι δυνατόν, σκέφτηκα. Πλησίασα και διάβασα την επιγραφή του, τελείωνε με την πληροφορία πως δωρίθηκε απο την Κύπρο όταν έγινε μέλος του Συμβουλίου της Ευρώπης το 1960. Συγκινήθηκα!” [The first time I saw it, I was saddened. This can’t be possible, I thought. I came closer and read its label. It ended with the information that it was given as a gift from Cyprus when Cyprus became a member of the European Council in 1960. I was moved!] (243).

The almost spectacular presentation of the vase stirs emotions in her, for she finds its presence in the European parliament unexpected. Because of this surprise, she provides its image as proof in the diary’s appendix. Katselli also gives us a description of the space in which the vase is located as a tourist attraction for tourists, interspersed with congressmen: “Στους διαδρόμους του μεγάλου αυτού κτιρίου όπου, εκτός των άλλων,

είναι και τουριστικό αξιοθέατο με τους τουρίστες να διασταυρώνονται με τους βουλευτές” [In the hallway of this great building, which is, apart from other things, a touristic attraction with tourists crisscrossing with congressmen] (246). In that same space, she continues, “κατάντησα να βλέπω τους πάντες όχι σαν ανθρώπους μα σαν περίεργα εξωγήινα όντα που κινούνται με ειδικούς απάνθρωπους σκοπούς” [I ended up seeing everyone not like human beings but as some sort of bizzare aliens who mobilize for specific inhumane purposes] (240).

The ancient vase, symbolic of Cyprus’s classical history, affirms both Cyprus’ and the vase’s Hellenism. Its donation as a gift to the European parliament constitutes the ancient vase as a political artifact. The showcasing of the vase becomes a piece of evidence for the historical narrative of Europe and its Hellene-centric civilization. The Cypriot gift, the vase, symbolizes the contribution of this small island to the West. The island acquires value in the process of a larger European unity and European unity accepts the island’s contribution to the lights of classical civilization. At the same time, with this gift, Cyprus seals its accession as a member to the European Council. Cyprus gains access to Europe through its classical antiquity, which is integral to a European identity, which is also Cyprus’ gift to Europe.

The political gift of Cyprus to Europe makes an interesting juxtaposition to the gift of the autobiography, *The Deep Mystery of Love*, that Katselli makes to herself. The political gift, history as vase, is in contrast to the autobiographical gift, the mystery of love, history as life. The political gift, the vase, negotiates Cyprus’ inclusion or exclusion from Europe. Katselli’s gift of autobiography negotiates her own personal autonomy—specifically, her being sexually liberated. When reading the pages of her autobiography,

Lenia says: “Ξανακοιτάζω τις σελίδες. Τόσο απλές αλλά και τόσο πολύπλοκες ταυτόχρονα, όσο το ερωτικό σμίξιμο της ψυχής και του σώματος μιας γυναίκας και ενός άντρα...τα βρεγμένα σεντόνια απο την ηδονή. Βλέπω μια πλευρά της Πηγής που δεν έχω ξαναδει” [I look at the pages again. So simple but complex at the same time, as the erotic mixing of the soul and body of a woman and a man...the linen wet from hedonism. I see a side of Pigi that I have never seen before] (Katselli 1997, 297).

Katselli, who does not point to the symbolic validity of the gift of Cypriot history to Europe, perceives the vase as the way of recognition of Cyprus as European. Her emotional response “I was moved!” exemplifies a strange assimilation of her own culture, the Greek Cypriot and the classical, with the European. Katselli perceives the vase as a piece of herself and as a recognition of her existence as Cypriot and as an uprooted woman. The vase is a compensation for her invisibility. The visibility and recognition of the vase as Cypriot makes her feel vindicated. In this context, whereby the only remaining recognition is her national/colonial/European history, Katselli comes to propose her autobiography *disguised as history* telling it as lived.

The debilitating reality of living in a partitioned country, occupied by military troops, marked by the violence of war, upsets Katselli’s notion of happiness and causes instability in her present, as her personal life is constantly challenged. The dissemination of her identity into four different characters is an expression of the unstable and uncertain anchoring of the self in a national history that is paradoxically her own, as it is Europe’s. Life would not, however, be challenged if the nation faced its history as the mosaic that it is, as she says, a conglomeration of multiple pasts, rather than being fixated on one aspect of it:

Δεν τολμούμε...να δούμε κατάματα μερικά κραυγαλέα πράγματα απο την ιστορία μας, να τα πούμε με τ' όνομά τους και να κάνουμε τις απαραίτητες επιλογές. Για τούτο χανόμαστε.

[We do not dare to look our history right in the eyes and to speak things as they are, to make the right choices. This is why we are going extinct.] (Katselli 1997, 90)

The explanation of this possibility of “extinction” finds its place in a European forum with the name “A Future to Our Past,” in which Kastelli participates. As part of the discussions of the forum, another member from a European country said: “Happy people have no history!” (270). Struck by her colleague’s provocative statement, Katselli considers the possibility of her country as a place that lacked history. Under such conditions she could then imagine her life as peaceful: “Εγώ μέσα μου ευχήθηκα: *How I wish to have no history. How I wish to live peacefully in Kerinia*” [Silently, I wished: How I wish to have no history. How I wish to live peacefully in Kerinia] (270, italics in the original). But what exactly does “no history” mean, and who could possibly lack history? The paradoxical juxtaposition of the European and Cypriot history is striking—for there is no juxtaposition. Their histories in many aspects coincide. Katselli feels this history as a burden and wishes to have no history instead.

If history, however, even though burdensome, may be lost, then, Katselli fears, Cypriots will become extinct. “Ακριβώς εκείνη τη στιγμή ένιωσα άβολα μέσα σε τόσους ανθρώπους που εκπροσωπούν χώρες με προβλήματα μεν αλλά όχι με κίνδυνο αφανισμού όπως εμάς” [At that moment I felt uncomfortable among all these people who represent countries that have problems of course, but are not faced with the danger of extinction, as we are] (270). This illustrates Cyprus’ dependency on the history, particularly the antiquity of its history, for survival. Her fear of Cyprus’ extinction parallels the

institutionalized Christian eschatology that Reinhart Koselleck (1923-2006) discusses in his *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (2004).

Koselleck gives a genealogy of how the idea of historical time came to be. Starting with the fifteenth century he explains that Christian history is eschatological and is characterized by the constant anticipation of the end of the world, on the one hand, and the continual deferment of that end, on the other (Koselleck 1975, 11). The future of the world and its end were made part of the history of the Church. Up until the time of modernity, characterized by a peculiar form of acceleration, historical time remained under the control of Christian eschatology and the authority of religious institutions. (Koselleck 1975, 13). As with the Christian end of the world, Katselli senses in the nation a constant fear of its end: a punishing present of imminent catastrophe and extinction at the hands of an “enemy.”

The seed of Katselli’s fear of extinction is found in the national rhetoric of the first Cypriot president, Archbishop Makarios (1913-1977), which drew on the idea of sacrifice, endurance, and suffering, and with whom Katselli was affiliated.<sup>97</sup> That national discourse, formed after the British colonization in Cyprus, adhered to the ideological framework of the Eastern Orthodox Church and particularly of its eschatological tradition; it promoted sacrifice, endurance, suffering, and even death as essential for national survival.

Ο λαός μας θα ζεί εις τους αιώνες και ποτέ δεν θα χαθεί. Γιατί δεν χάνονται οι λαοί που θέλουν να ζήσουν και αγωνίζονται για να ζήσουν.

[Our nation will continue to live through the ages and will never be lost. For nations that wish to live and fight in order to do so are not extinguished].  
(Pavlidis 1981, Vol. III 583)

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<sup>97</sup> From 1981-1996, Katselli was a member of the Democratic Party. The founder of the party, Spyros Kyprianou, held the position of minister of affairs for twelve years in Makarios’ government.

Makarios urged the people of Cyprus to take the nation's destiny into their own hands and fight for its survival. Only in this way would the nation continue to exist. Makarios' rhetoric transformed the old Christian eschatology into a secular fear of modernity. Life, in Makarios' eyes, was a matter of *fighting* instead of *living*. This Christian eschatological mindset, now made modern and national, insisted that the responsibility of the national subject was to be perpetually vigilant against a possible future death, at the expense of personal enjoyment. Katselli's previous wish for "no history" is a wish for the absence of history as eschatology and as the perpetual fear of extinction. Instead of enjoying the meetings and contributing to the conversations in a carefree way, Katselli needs to be constantly alert in order to defend Greek Cyprus, in case some Turkish or European politician says something oppositional to the Greek Cypriot national views:

Τούτη η αγωνία με εμποδίζει να συμμετέχω σε διάφορα θέματα που θέλω. Όλη μου την προσοχή απορροφά η έγνοια μήπως ειπωθεί κάτι που θα βλάψει το Κυπριακό.

[All this agony [against extinction] prevents me from participating [in the E.U. parliament] in other topics that I enjoy. All of my attention is absorbed by the fear that something negative may be spoken that would harm the Cypriot issue].  
(Katselli 1997, 270)

As a response to the burdensome history and her desire for creativity, Pigi as iconographer reinvigorates Byzantine iconography by drawing saints in modern dress. She also recomposes masculine saints as women. In one of her paintings, Pigi portrays the evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John on a television screen wearing suits and ties. John is presented as a woman:

Τρεις άντρες και μια γυναίκα, που τα βυζαντινά τους πρόσωπα ξεπροβάλλουν μέσα απο οθόνες τηλεόρασης, κρατώντας χειρόγραφα. Οι τρεις είναι άντρες κουστουμαρισμένοι, με ωραίες γραβάτες. Γυναίκα η τέταρτη, με ωραία

μπλούζα... ‘Πώς σου φαίνονται οι τέσσερις Ευαγγελιστές μου;’ ακούω τη φωνή της Πηγής να ρωτά. Τότε προσέχω τα ζώδια των Ευαγγελιστών, ιστορημένα στις γραβάτες και στα πουκάμισά τους. Άγγελος του Ματθαίου, λιοντάρι του Μάρκου, βόδι του Λουκά και αετός του Ιωάννη!

[Three men and a woman, their Byzantine faces portrayed through a television screen, hold manuscripts. The three men wear suits and ties. The woman wears a nice blouse.... “What do you think of my Evangelists?” I listen to Pigi asking me. Then I notice the Evangelists’ zodiacs historicized [*istorimena* i.e. graphically depicted] on their ties and shirts. Matthew’s angel, Mark’s lion, Luke’s ox, and John’s eagle!]. (Katselli 1997, 293)

Pigi displaces the Evangelists from their expected religious contexts and places them in what are ultimate expressions of popular culture, the television screen and the T-shirt.

Pigi calls herself a pioneer of a new religious Byzantine art that, as she says, could become the Christian Orthodox art movement of the twenty-first century (Katselli 1997, 293). She finds ways to market and sell these icons to Cypriot expatriates in Australia. She exports them in large numbers, “Virgin Marys” and “Saints,” to “many” houses of Cypriot expatriates. Selling these artifacts provides her with an outlet for communication with Cypriots residing abroad, and so for exploring Cypriot identity in other places.

Pigi’s intense historical consciousness is materialized in the Byzantine icons that become a means of participation in the national struggle not for survival, not against extinction, but for renewal and re-birth. The exaggerated way in which Pigi engages Byzantine practices in her everyday life highlights history as a conspicuous feature of the subject’s agentic process in regaining the ability to reinvigorate the past, a process that can be mobilized in new ways. As Pigi reproduces, markets, and sells artifacts of history, she reconstructs history through her art and, at the same time, makes space for women’s adaptations of traditional artistic forms. As she reinvents these iconographies, she reinvents history.

*Istorima*, the subtitle of *Women of Kerinia*, means history by illustration. Katselli provides clues of her autobiographical awakening with illustrations especially of the things she does not explicitly articulate. She rather gives images so that readers can see and judge for themselves. In fact, *Women of Kerinia* in its totality is an *istorima* as denoted by its subtitle. The book incorporates six images, including the cover. The reader needs to connect the narrative and the images in order to reach a coherent understanding of a coherent life story. As Katselli is figuring out the truth about her identity as a homeless person, the reader too engages in a similar process. In fact, Katselli extends the references of her painful uprootedness to other human beings who are not refugees: “Μια λαχτάρα εν η ζωή μας που την ώραν πουννα γεννηθούμεν ως την ώραν ποννα φκεί η ψυσιή μας” [Our life is a longing from the moment we are born until the time we die] (Katselli 1997, 176) and “Κανένας άνθρωπος...πρόσφυγας και μη δεν είναι εντελώς ευχαριστημένος με τον εαυτό του...Υπάρχουν στιγμές που ο καθένας θέλει να είναι κάπου αλλού γιατί η ζωή του τον τρομάζει” [No human being...whether refugee or not, is completely satisfied with themselves... There are moments in everyone’s life when one wants to be somewhere else because his life scares him] (1997, 175).

The book’s peculiar *istorima* model, asking the reader to understand the place of the images in the narrative, renders this life story historical, in the sense of *historein*, inquiry, a process of knowing by inquiry, the “first step [of] the historiographical practice” (Hartog 2000, 394). But to inquire, Francois Hartog says, also means “to go and see for oneself. It expresses...a state of mind and an approach. *Historia* (story) is derived from history, which is related to *idein*, to see, and *oida*, I know” (Hartog 2000, 394). Hartog distinguishes between the *histor* (the historian), whom he calls an “arbiter, or

better yet a guarantor in the context of *neikos* (quarrel): he has never seen for himself what is at stake” (Hartog 2000, 394), and “the seer...the man of knowledge” (Hartog 2000, 395). Hartog evokes the example of Epimenides of Crete, a soothsayer, who applied his “divination skills...to what, having already happened, still remained obscure” (Hartog 2000, 395).<sup>98</sup> In other words, according to Hartog, the historical process has to do with what is visible; someone who, having being there, can then tell what happened. In that sense, the autobiographer, having been a witness of her life, can tell his/her history as a seer and knower, as a soothsayer-historian. But this soothsayer type of history, which is confessional and explicit in terms of how things happened, is threatening to a history that does not wish to inquire or incorporate contrary accounts—the history perhaps which is represented by the vase and its public exhibit. The vase as object cannot articulate its own story. Its story is articulated by the historian and archaeologist. In contrast, autobiography offers a first-person account of what happened may be under certain conditions in a life and a nation. Katselli has a keen sense that telling things as they are may be a threat, to certain forms of official history so she renders their meaning in other ways. Thus, she makes them objects that can be interpreted as history or simply remain illustrative, exhibiting images. Katselli *istori*/illustrates rather than simply narrates her story.

She also uses the word *istorima* [ιστορημένο] in her narrative. The use of the word is a clue for deciphering her sense of history. Orthodoxia, the politician, also a historian by training, appears in the environment of a church during a sermon. She observes the priest’s gown. On his gown she sees the “double-headed eagle, a symbol of Byzantium” (Katselli 1997, 90). The entire passage is significant for its reckoning of the

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<sup>98</sup> See a similar type of soothsayer as historian in the figure of Al-Bi’nawai in *Arabesques* p. 223.

relationships it draws between the “historical” (*istoriko*) monster, its “illustration”

(*istorimeno*), the act of illustration (*istorousan*), and historical (*istoriki*) truth:

Το πουλί ο δικέφαλος αετός τέρας *ιστορικό* που εμείς το έχουμε καμάρι, σύμβολο του Βυζαντίου, ενώ το Βυζάντιο στην ουσία έχει σύμβολο το μισοφέγγαρο, χαραγμένο στα αρχαία νομίσματά του. Αυτό ακριβώς που υιοθέτησαν οι Τούρκοι μετά που εκπόρθησαν την Κωνσταντινούπολη. *Ιστορημένο* ακόμη και στις δικές μας βυζαντινές τοιχογραφίες... Οι βυζαντινοί αυτοκράτορες τον είχαν έμβλημα και τον *ιστορούσαν* πάνω στις μεγαλόπρεπες πορφύρες που φορούσαν... όταν άρχισαν οι βυζαντινοί αυτοκράτορες να αποκτούν εθνικιστικές τάσεις και να θέλουν να ορίζουν Ανατολή και Δύση ταυτόχρονα κάνουν τον αετό τους με δύο κεφάλια, για να επιβλέπει τάχα και προς τις δύο κατευθύνσεις, Ανατολή και Δύση... Αυτό όμως το άτυχο σύμβολο του Βυζαντινού σωβινισμού έμεινε να το συντηρούμε στην Ορθοδοξία μας και αλοίμονο σε όποιον τολμήσει να πει την *ιστορική αλήθεια*. Βέβηλος, ανίερος, άπιστος... όλοι μας ραγιάδες της παράδοσης ανεξέλεγκτα και απροβλημάτιστα. (Katselli 1997, 90 my emphasis)

[The bird, the double-headed eagle, a historical (*istoriko*) monster we have as a prestigious symbol of Byzantium, even if Byzantium actually had the crescent for its symbol, curved on its coins: the same exact crescent that the Turks adapted after the conquered Constantinople. Illustrated (*istorimeno*) even on our own Byzantine tiles... the Byzantine emperors had it as an emblem and illustrated (*istorousan*) it on their gowns ... when they started to have chauvinistic tendencies and wanting to have power both over the East and the West then they transformed their eagle as having two heads, so that, supposedly, would oversee both directions, East and West... But this unlucky symbol of Byzantine chauvinism remained and we preserved it in our Orthodoxy and woe to whomever dare say the historical (*istoriki*) truth. Profane, sacrilegious, faithless... we are all *ragiades* of tradition, unexamined and flawlessly]. (Katselli 1997, 90 my translation)

The eagle, “a historical monster,” as she calls it, was originally just a decorative “illustration” [ιστόρημα] on the gowns of Byzantine emperors. People illustrated it and made it an *istorima*. It was only when the Byzantine emperors started to have “chauvinistic tendencies” to dominate East and West that they transformed it into an “emblem” [σύμβολο] with two heads, to oversee both directions. The eagle, simply an image of a bird, is disfigured as monster by Byzantine imperial history. The two heads, symbolic of the emblematic division of East and West, are also symbols of empire and partition of humanity in East and West. The bird’s transformation into an emblem of

empire makes both the illustration of the bird and history, as imperial, monstrous.

Katselli is aware of the emanating danger of the emblemization of tradition and of the way in which history could potentially become chauvinistic. *Women of Kerinia*, as a post-partition narrative, could itself possibly become an emblematic piece of literature, echoing the national narrative of uprootedness and partition. Lenia's commission to write a book about Kerinia reflects that danger. Acknowledging the danger of Lenia's *Birthplace* to become a national emblematic narrative, Pigi gives her the gift of autobiography. Pigi saves *Birthplace* from national emblematic history by offering it as *The Deep Mystery of Love*. *Women of Kerinia*, an inquiry, the first step towards history, is at the same time just one step away from it as an *istorima*. The book is, like the bird, a decoration on a garment. To prevent it from becoming a monstrous national emblem, Pigi refuses to provide answers to its complex narrative and illustrations: “Ερωτήσεις εν απαντώ! Εν ξέρω τες απαντήσεις! Πρώτα πρώτα αν υπήρχαν απαντήσεις εν θα ήταν μυστήριο” [I will not answer any questions! I don't know the answers! First of all, if there were any answers it wouldn't be a mystery!] (Katselli 1997, 301). Posing the questions but not answering them is the autobiographer's way of disguising the book as *istoria* (inquiry) and *istorima* (illustration), without it becoming national history.

As an iconographer, Pigi is aware that tampering with the art of Byzantine icons may constitute a blasphemous act. To Lenia's warning “Πηγή, οι θρησκευόντες εννα αντιδράσουν, εννα σε πούν βλάσφημη” [Pigi, the religious people will react negatively to this. They will call you blasphemous], Pigi responds:

Οι θρησκόληπτοι, εννοείς, που θέλουν να διατηρηθεί η διδασκαλία του Χριστού στο γύψον άλλων εποχών, αποκλείοντας στον κόσμο τα καλά, που μπορούν να αντλήσουν που την παράδοση τούτων των εποχών ακριβώς! Τούτοι που θέλουν να εμποδίσουν κάθε ανανέωσην τζαι θέλουν να βάλουν τα μυαλά μας σε σκέτην

καρκινογοναν ναφθαλίην!

[You mean that the bigots will call me blasphemous, not the religious/spiritual people. The bigots want to preserve the word of Christ on the plaster of other eras. While closing off the knowledge of the merits of those eras from the people. These bigots just want to prevent any type of reformation and renewal of the tradition]. (Katselli 1997, 294)

As part of her gesture of trying to avoid the danger of historicization, but without explicitly presenting her book as a threat to history and religion, Katselli presents her book cover as an iconographic portrait of three women's faces. While it may seem that these are icons, they are actually disguised icons. The hair of the women is loose and they wear no veils, suggesting their mourning but in the context of the book making these women seductive rather than pious.<sup>99</sup>

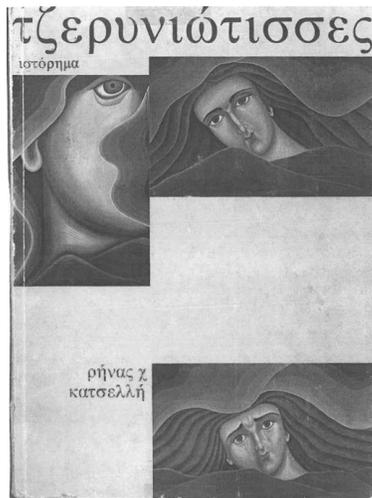


Figure 3-4 Women of Kerinia

The Mediterranean appears explicitly only once in Katselli and not at all in Shammas. This absence is significant, for it conveys the Mediterranean as a concept distant from the personal histories these writers tell. Instead of “Mediterranean,” they

<sup>99</sup> The three images depict the characters Lenia, Maria, and Orthodoxia, but not Pigi, because Pigi is a combination of all of these.

simply call it “sea.” In her single reference to it, Katselli writes: “Άκου Λένια αν μεν μπορείς να γράψεις εν νεν το τέλος του κόσμου. Εν νεν λόγος να υποφέρνεις. Αμαν σκεφτείς τη μικρότητά μας, στο αχανές απέραντο σύμπαν μα ακόμα τζαι σε τούτη τη θάλασσα, τη Μεσόγειο” [Listen Lenia, if you cannot write [the book], it is not the end of the world. This is not a reason for you to suffer, if you think of our smallness in this scattered and vast universe, but even more, in this sea, the Mediterranean] (Katselli 1997, 179).

The Mediterranean enters the narrative almost emblematically for its vastness. Katselli substitutes Mediterranean with Τζεϋνιώτισσες, Kerinia sea-women, “εμείς γνήσιες θαλασσινές Κεϋνιώτισσες κολυπούμε μεσοπέλαγα” [We pure Kerinia sea-women, we swim in the middle of the sea] (Katselli 1997, 178). These sea-women who love the sea and their native city, which is literally on the shore of the Northern part of Cyprus, understand the sea associated with their village, inextricably linked to it. The sea, as far as they can swim it, belongs to them, and its name is given by the surrounding land, Kerinia Sea. Even as they associated the sea with Kerinia, they associate the Mediterranean with the “vast universe.”

For these sea-women, the sea is a spiritual space. The three friends go on an excursion to the sea. This excursion occurs on the same day as the Μεταμόρφωση του Σωτήρος [The Transfiguration of the Savior], the day when according to the Biblical story, Christ went with three of the apostles to the mountain for prayer (a feast day celebrated on August 6). Their entrance into the sea becomes a meditative ascending. “Το αμάραντο πέλαγο δεν ελαφρώνει μόνο το φυσικό βάρος του κορμιού μα και το νοητό των ψυχών μας” [The amaranth sea not only relieves the physical burden of our body but

also the spiritual burden of our souls] (Katselli 1997, 178). As they are in the sea, they feel themselves becoming children again; they feel deeply connected and reborn into new life: “Νιώθ[ω] την ύπαρξή μου να φελιάζει τόσο ωραία μέσα στη δική της όπως το έμβρυο στη μήτρα της μάνας του” [I feel my existence connecting, nestling so beautifully with her own like the embryo in the womb of its mother] (1997, 180). The sea helps them forget their everyday problems. It becomes a space of prayer.<sup>100</sup>

When in Strasbourg, Katselli asks herself whether she can feel at home in this European city: “σε όλο το δρόμο προς το ξενοδοχείο αναρωτιόμουν αν μπορούσα να αγαπήσω αυτή τη πόλη στην καρδιά της Ευρώπης” [On my way to the hotel, I kept wondering whether I could love this city at the heart of Europe] (Katselli 1997, 246). In contrast to the alienation she faces in the city of Strasbourg, she finds the view of the Atlantic naturally familiar. When in the Spanish Canary island of Lanzarote (January 1984), as she looks out from her balcony facing the Atlantic, she says, “Ακούω το κύμα και από το μπαλκόνι μου βλέπω τον Ατλαντικό ωκεανό. Η θάλασσα μου θυμίζει έντονα την Κερόνεια. Νιώθω όλο τον εαυτό μου να ταιριάζει σε τούτο το θαλασσινό περιβάλλον με το εκτυφλωτικό φώς” [I listen to the waves from my balcony and I see the Atlantic ocean. The sea reminds me intensely of Kerinia. I feel all of myself connecting to this sea-borne environment with its blinding light] (Katselli 1997, 259). In this sense, Katselli tells us that Mediterranean and Atlantic people share a sense of belonging to the sea, ταιριάζουν, they are a match, sea and self, even though they are not the same. But even more, she says, those people may feel estranged in a European city like Strasbourg.

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<sup>100</sup> Compare with “corrupting,” in Horden and Purcell.

## Islands of Partition

What I have proposed in this chapter is that unities of empire penetrate the national narrative in seemingly positive ways, i.e. as symbiosis, to promote peace between two inimical parts. Yet desiring unity of two distinct parts is in and of itself a form of perpetuation of the division between parts. These divisions and unions create a dependent autonomy of the self with the “other” and thus prevent each individual community to cultivate an internal “symbiosis.”

Shammas’s *arabesques* and Katselli’s *istorima* are devices of exploring the inhibited internal histories of their partitioned post-colonial communities. One of their devices is to disguise history as autobiography and history as autobiography. *Arabesques* exposes the “mind whirling” in those Palestinians who prefer to remain indifferent rather than to explore the complexities of their communities’ “tangled past” (Shammas 1986, 209, 213). *Istorima* is Katselli’s way to give a different angle to history that is critical to the Greek Cypriot state’s corrupted affairs and to the oppression that the Greek Cypriots impose on themselves. “Όλα τα αδιέξοδα των Κυπραίων καταχωνιασμένα βαθιά μέσα τους και αυτοί ευησυχάζουν πως τάχα τα έχουν πνίξει μαζί με κάθε ιδανικό, όραμα και ανθρώπινη πνευματική αξία, γιατί τωρά μπορούν να κτίζουν μεγάλα σπίτια με γρασίδι και πισίνα” [All the impasses of the Cypriots are buried deep inside them and they calm themselves that they have managed to supposedly suffocate those along with any morality, vision and human spiritual value because they can now build big houses with grass and pool] (Katselli 1997, 80).

Instead of desiring a symbiosis and re-unification with the other, these post-partition narratives seek self-legitimation and unity within themselves, their own cultures

and ethnicities. This does not exclude their connectivity with other places. Connectivities happen in the narratives on their own terms. Katselli and Shamma protest against homelessness, conflict, and isolation, but also open up the space for a broader discussion about autobiography, selfhood, family, and human connectivity. Beyond the political and partisan self that lies in the background in Katselli's narrative, and beyond the intellectual self that lies behind Shamma's, there lies a *poetic* self that is being reborn, coming to terms with the history of perpetual human uncertainty and "homelessness" which is an inextricable fact of life as a concept. This realization of the true history of a perpetual historical homelessness is the *gift* that their creativity helps them uncover and offer themselves and the reader. Creativity is itself a process of inquiry into the limits of human ability. The discovery of those limits constitutes a historic moment in the context of life itself. Rebirth can be a personal, but also political as it is empowering in sustaining creativity not only in the expression of the pain which is a part of life, but also in the expression of love and human creativity.

For people living in partitioned countries, artificial borders determine their mobility on the land but also fix their identity within binary oppositions. The enclaves in Gaza in Palestine today, for instance—which are so isolated and secluded that their people's survival depends on importing products from elsewhere—are islands. Gaza could be added as another case study to Horden's and Purcell's micro-regions the existence of which is determined by their connectivity in order to acquire supplies from other places. The combined total isolation and necessary connectivity of Gaza constitutes its becoming an island. The case of Gaza highlights the point that islands are not naturally and inevitably spaces of isolation and connectivity, but rather become so. Islands are not

simply geographical spaces, but also conceptual categories, as they transform from geographies to spaces of isolation and connectivity. Today's partitions of Cyprus and Palestine/Israel are indicative of the artificiality of islands. Islands are constructed as islands, in contrast to the "freedom" of an imaginary mainland.

As part of these two partitions there is an integral binary distinction: "minority" and "majority" (Mufti 2007, 237). But as Amir Mufti demonstrates, this distinction is integral to any canonical postcolonial nation. Mufti quotes from Adorno to demonstrate this idea succinctly: "The whole cannot be put together by adding the separated halves, but in both they appear, however distantly, the changes of the whole, which only moves in contradiction" (Adorno 1973, 3 cited in Mufti 2007, 237). In other words, each half constitutes a whole in and of itself. Unity is not the outcome of the connectivity of the two, but the unity within the one. Instead of seeing conflict and contradiction as a process which happens between two distinct parts, the texts of this chapter demonstrate to us that conflict occurs within the one, the self. By emphasizing the conflict of the two, we obfuscate, neglect, and extinguish the multiplicities of the one, the human being.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Unregistered Genealogies: Costas Montis and Assia Djébar**

No need to invoke the ancestors united by crusaders and jihads. When the French women glance through the letter from their victorious correspondence, they join their hands as if in prayer; and this devotion from their families casts a halo around the seducers in the act of ravishing the opposite Mediterranean shore.

Assia Djébar, *Fantasia*

The space of the Mediterranean, both as a sea and combinatory territory, remains elusive: a perpetual interrogation.

Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*

#### **Genealogy and Ancestry**

The fictional autobiographies of Costas Montis and Assia Djébar are particularly relevant to postcolonial studies in the Mediterranean because their works exemplify the perpetual interrogation of ancestry: which crusaders, jihadists or colonizers are ancestors? Whose names should be invoked from the past? Their fictional autobiographies, entitled, respectively, *Ο αφέντης Μπατίστας και τ' άλλα* [Afentis Batistas and Other Things] and *L' Amour, la fantasia* [Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade], construct relationships of ancestry with individuals who are both spatially and temporally remote, across the Mediterranean Sea and different historical periods. Affirmations of

kinship become a matter of coincidental occurrences in the fine threads of storytelling rather than blood, honor, and alliance through marriage—the standard categories of kinship. Establishing chance connections between aspects of history and geography that are disparate from one another works against the grain of national descent and the colonial discourses folded into them; it speaks to both the flexibility enabled by the poetic imagination and the genealogical elusiveness of the Mediterranean.

In his discussion of the emergence of Greek nationalism, Stathis Gourgouris argues that ancestry became an especially burdensome phantasmic object of national desire for Greek-speaking subjects of the Ottoman Empire when imposed on them by the agents of Western Hellenism—philologists, archaeologists, historians, and collectors of classical antiquities (Gourgouris 1996, 152-3). While it became a tool for them to secure natural status and a right to property in lands historically linked to ancient Greece (1996, 154), it also erased from their disparate genealogies the key element of chance. In the words of Benedict Anderson, “it is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny” and to make the nation “eternal” (Anderson 2006, 12).

The processes of genealogical inquiry evident in the fictional autobiographies of Montis and Djébar reveal alternative pathways of connectivity between the living and the dead, supplementing and even contradicting national discourses of imagined ancestral destiny. For one thing, they reestablish “chance” as an integral element in the creation and disappearance of human connections. Chance springs unpredictably, not having any programmed or predetermined cause or effect. It may produce of a long-lasting set of circumstances; or it may follow a single course and then disappear. Seen from the point of view of chance, an individual life or a line of genealogical descent emerges as a

coincidence of unpredicted circumstances. Montis and Djébar reintroduce this element of chance.

Secondly, they work against the grain of national histories through storytelling. These fictional autobiographies construct family genealogies and relations of kinship that are often the outcome of stories that their authors have heard or researched themselves and to which they have given a narrative twist. It should be said that the Mediterranean has historically offered the possibility of imaginative expansion. But the national imagination of the present day is structured by a set of specific links of one country with another, dependent on the sharing of language, ethnicity and religion. Montis and Djébar however, escape some of the discursive restrictions of national-historical links. They see the past as an amalgam. The Mediterranean, as a sea-space, contains its own multiple imaginaries, layer upon layer of the views of colonizers, orientalists, Hellenists, philhellenes, merchants, collectors, tourists, and national subjects, and submerged beneath these layers forgotten stories of micro- and macro-kinships, which are particularly elusive. Through their genealogical inquiries into the densely intertwined roots of identity and power relations, these authors raise important questions about what constitutes historical knowledge.

I will begin by summarizing the colonial histories of Cyprus and Algeria, respectively, through which the two writers know themselves as national subjects, and from there will explore how they use storytelling to break through the disguise of natural, national descent.

## Colonial Histories

Montis and Djebbar write against the background of the multiple imperial conquests experienced by their respective countries of origin. The history of both Cyprus and Algeria is marked by a long period of Ottoman rule—from 1571 until 1878 in Cyprus and 1517 until 1830 in Algeria. Modern colonialism followed, with the British rule of Cyprus from 1878 to 1960 and the French rule of Algeria from 1830 to 1962. National independence came to both at approximately the same time in the early 1960s. Most importantly, the two countries have experienced inter-communal divisions in the postcolonial period: Turkish and Greek in Cyprus, Berber and Arab in Algeria.

Postcolonial divisions followed lines drawn during the colonial period. Colonial rule in both of these countries intentionally exacerbated ethnic and religious divisions. The French colonial government in Algeria (1830–1962) emphasized the division between Arabs and Berbers through a network of research centers, archives and journals devoted to the scientific study of Berber language and culture. These promulgated the “Kabyle myth” which conceptualized Arab/Berber ethnic differences in Algeria as primordial (Silverstein 1996).<sup>101</sup> After independence, the Algerian national authority preserved this division of Berbers and Arabs.

Similarly, the British colonial administration of Cyprus (1878–1959) set up structural divisions between Christians and Muslims. The national constitution (1960) was designed to include both populations equally, with two official languages, Turkish

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<sup>101</sup> “Berbers in France and Algeria Realizing Myth” in *Middle East Research*, 26. Accessed 01.02.2014. Web. From the ethnographic point of view of Pierre Bourdieu, “the ‘Kabyle myth’ idealized the Kabyle society and people as racially distinct from and innately superior to Algeria’s Arab populations. It was the Kabyle myth which had encouraged post independence Algerian governments to view any expression of a distinct Berber identity as a form of neo colonialism.” In Lane, F. Jeremy, *Pierre Bourdieu: A Critical Introduction* (2000) p. 114.

and Greek; however, President Makarios (1913–1977) acted in ways that marginalized the Muslim population even if his political public rhetoric was inclusive of them. This widened the division between the two communities and led to violence (1963–1974). Eventually, and paradoxically, Makarios was ousted in a coup d'état by primarily Greek Christian forces. In response to the resulting political vacuum, Turkey invaded Cyprus amidst claims of ensuring the constitutional order and sovereignty of Cyprus and defending Turkish Cypriots. The Turkish invasion led to the island's partition and to the ongoing dispossession of land and homes for both Turkish and Greek Cypriots.<sup>102</sup>

These two bifurcating national narratives, which divide and isolate the populations, position subjects such as Montis and Djebbar as part of a binary distinction, echoing the distinction of colonial savage versus civilized, modernity versus tradition. However, their autobiographical writing complicates their inherited subject positions. In what follows, I will engage with a set of questions about categories of ancestry such as kinship and how the knowledge of ancestry is transmitted, in order to show how the two authors redraw the lines of connectivity and develop alternative temporalities through storytelling.

### **Kinship and Storytelling**

In recent decades anthropologists have reexamined the category of kinship, reaching different conclusions on its nature. A dominant view sees kinship in “primitive”

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<sup>102</sup> In 1983, the North unilaterally declared its independence, with the establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. The founding of the “minority nation” of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus may be compared to the formation of the states of Israel and Pakistan even though Northern Cyprus is not a sovereign state recognized by the larger international community. The migration of the Jews of Germany and Muslims of India fled to Israel and Pakistan respectively to form their own nations. cf. Mufti, A. (2007). *Enlightenment in the Colony. The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*. Princeton UP, NJ: Princeton.

societies as based on “blood,” and in “advanced” societies as based on “soil” and the state (Kuper 1988, 54) while others view kinship as a social and cultural construct much like gender (Yanagisako & Collier 1987, 14). Some scholars consider that the study of kinship needs to be free of biases rooted in assumptions about biology (Yanagisako & Collier 1987, 1; Yanagisako & Delaney 1995, 2; Weston 1992).<sup>103</sup> For many, kinship is not a fixed or stable category.<sup>104</sup>

In regard to the specificity of the Mediterranean region, Jeremy Boissevain, John Davis, and others have argued that there is a tendency toward reliance on the smallest possible kinship units (nuclear families and shallow lineages) (Boissevain, 1976, 1977; Davis 1977). The narratives of Djébar and Montis expand this “small kinship unit” and create for us broader definitions of kinship relations that are contingent on storytelling, imagination, and fiction. Their ideas of kinship do not necessarily have actual biological links with ancestors, but are dependent on the stories that they happen to listen to within or outside the family. Kinship becomes the outcome not of biological links, but of the networks of stories that travel from the mouths of storytellers to the ears of listeners.

Oral storytelling, rather than ties of blood, law (marriage), joint ownership, property, or hereditary social positions, becomes the mechanism for recollecting preserved ancestry. Ancestral continuity is sustained by the continuation and transmission of stories. The ability to remember one's ancestors depends on the ability to remember—and to reiterate—stories within or beyond the same generation. Oral storytelling as the

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<sup>103</sup> An example is that of families created by lesbians and gays in the U.S. that are based on choice and not “blood,” but which are nonetheless conceptualized by the relation or opposition to their “blood” or “straight” families. While such families are not grounded in biology, they are clearly defined in relation to it. Weston, K., *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.

<sup>104</sup> See, for example, Margaret Trawick, *Notes on Love in a Tamil Family* (1990).

means for preserving lineage is also, and simultaneously, the origin of ancestry: this means that ancestry is constructed as it is being narrated. Oral storytelling becomes an important category through which to rethink national ancestry.

Storytelling has captured the interest of critical theorists in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In “The Storyteller. Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Leskov” (1936), Walter Benjamin, reflecting on the crisis of experience threatened by technological control, concentrates on how the storyteller tells his stories by drawing from the experience of other stories passed from mouth to mouth. The process of embedding story within story reflects an open-endedness of experience, according to Benjamin. The experience that storytelling portrays does not have a fixed beginning and end but travels back and forth, from person to person. The sustainability of storytelling, and of the experience that travels along with, it depends on constant transformation. The story travels through a sequence of storytellers to different listeners. Sometimes listeners are unable to separate the story of their lives from the stories they hear, and may themselves one day become storytellers drawing on the experience of the tales they once heard. The storyteller’s gift, according to Benjamin, is his ability to tell his entire life in the story he narrates; the storyteller “is a man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story” (Benjamin 1969). Life and story are conflated and the storyteller’s life may take its place in limbo, uprooted and traveling inside the stories he tells as he bequeaths his life story to his audience. The storyteller’s own life story is a narrative exchanged in the course of interactions with the listeners who will one day become storytellers themselves. His life story may not necessarily be his own, but as he narrates the story of the other, he also narrates his own.

Storytelling as a process that sustains people's life stories is also examined by the Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero in *Relating Narratives. Storytelling and Selfhood* (2000). She discusses the ordinary human desire to hear one's own unique tale, a desire active in the everyday narrative relations between self and other. In making this point, Cavarero invokes Hannah Arendt's idea of relational subjectivity. In defense of storytelling, Arendt discusses the life of Isak Dinesen (the pseudonym of Baroness Karen Blixen) who, as Arendt presents her, believed the world to be full of stories that were waiting to be told (Arendt 2007, 262). This is what Dinesen had done all her life: imagine what had happened, repeat it in her imagination, and find the patience to tell and retell it in stories (Arendt 2007, 263). Dinesen "entrusts her existence to the passion of telling stories – the stories of others...and she knew that she could not see with her own eyes the design of her [own] life" (Cavarero 2000, 3). Cavarero agrees with Arendt that while it is difficult to tell our own life story as it is—we can only tell it as we imagine it—we instead hope that our life story will eventually be a topic of exchange in other people's stories. Cavarero is interested in identity, and particularly in a desire for the unity of the self through the story. Her suggested method for achieving this unity is storytelling.

Due to its interactive and circulative nature, storytelling is a means to a unity of the self that changes as it circulates. The unity of the self, the definition of who one is, is as dependent on others as it is on the history and society in which one lives. The story of one's life is relational to multiple narrators and listeners. The only aspiration that life has given us is to desire to have an answer to the question "Who am I?" (Arendt 2007, 270). And, as Kim Curtis argues in her discussion of Cavarero's work, the process of storytelling relationally and contingently generates identity (Curtis 2002, 852).

Storytelling is given a particular formulation as a vital process of transmission in postcolonial writing, where it becomes a disguised mechanism or a strategy to preserve imagined family histories that do not coincide with the grand narrative of the nation. The trauma caused by layers of empires, each built on top of the residues of the preceding as stories build on one another, resembles the ways in which the postcolonial subject articulates its life story. In certain writers' hands, the life story of the postcolonial subject becomes an amalgam of other people's stories: stories inherited from people of previous generations are embedded in the life story of the postcolonial subject. They make visible the invisible layers, the experience of invisible "ancestors," which constitute the subject's genealogy. Such storytelling reveals lines of associations amongst individuals who would otherwise remain differentiated in the linear historical narratives that cover the ruptures and discontinuities of their lives.

As a way of preserving unregistered genealogies, storytelling also reflects the "micropolitical" agency of postcolonial subjects. In contrast to macropolitics, those large-scale, structural relations of power embodied in institutionalized discourses and practices, micropolitics is defined as "small-scale, local, or minor relations of power directly bearing upon the individual" (Bignall 2011, 136). As an integral part of these personal narratives, storytelling becomes a form of micropolitics which, within a larger network of storytellers, may acquire macropolitical significance.

## Shifting Traditions

[Inherited] traditions, in whatever language they are expressed, are invariably lines as though homogeneous, without contradictions. To suggest otherwise is to contest their authority. If we know that historically all traditions are in debt to others, to the strangers and foreigners they are designed to exclude, this is not what tradition desires to tell us. Yet if tradition draws its power from narcissism, it can only survive, live on, by borrowing from the other, by reproducing itself through encounters that are not of its own making. A tradition never explicitly acknowledges such a transmission (and translation) of the past; if it did it, would no longer be considered tradition.

Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*.

In her fictional autobiography *L' Amour, la fantasia* (1986), Assia Djébar (1936-) imagines herself as part of a tradition of autobiographers including Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) and Saint Augustine (354–430), whose identity—ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic — shifts according to the multiple affiliations that the individual establishes in the course of changing regimes.<sup>105</sup> This can be termed interchangeable subjects.

Djébar introduces some of her chapters with epigraphs from these two writers; according to Anne Donadey, Djébar's epigraphs form a cartography, a type of road map providing guideposts by which to read and interpret her texts (Donadey 2001, 63). As Donadey argues, Djébar subverts the tradition the epigraphs represent, and her text becomes a commentary on its epigraph (2001, 67-8). It is also common knowledge amongst scholars of Djébar's work that *L' Amour, la fantasia*, a combination of archival material and autobiographical elements, is written by way of Ibn Khaldun's *Kitab al-Ibar*, a historiography at the end of which the author includes his autobiography, *Ta arif*.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Steven A. Epstein (2014) has identified a similar phenomenon of a “serial identity never losing its connection to the previous iteration” (to be discussed below).

<sup>106</sup> Ibn Khaldun's history is the first of its kind that established history as a science (Donadey 2001, 71).

According to Donadey, using a quotation from *Ta arif* allowed Djébar to justify her autobiographical project by modeling it on Ibn Khaldun's while also interweaving multiple traditions in her work—Arabic and French, female and male, oral and written. While Donadey's observations are crucial in delineating the shifting and complex amalgamations of the thought of this Algerian writer, there is still more to say about her use of epigraphs by Ibn Khaldun and Augustine, as autobiographers and historians.

First of all, it is worth exploring the role that these and other traditions play in Djébar's work, especially in regard to the ways the epigraphs evoke connections of remote places and times. Moreover, both Augustine and Ibn Khaldun have multiple, and sometimes conflicting, allegiances. While Ibn Khaldun was an Arab official and persecutor of Berbers, he also sought refuge with the Berber tribes where he wrote his *Muqaddimah* or *Prolegomena*, in which he demolished what he called myths and fables of pure ancestral blood (Fromherz 2010, 44).<sup>107</sup> He described how tribal lineages became confused, how settled Arabs of Al-Andalus, the very Arabs who were his ancestors, intermingled with other groups and became identified with their location, their residence, rather than with their lineage (2010, 140). Ibn Khaldun not only held multiple allegiances but also shifted from one to the other depending on the circumstances. Similarly, Augustine combined Christian, Berber, pagan, and Roman characteristics. His mother, Monique, was a Christian of Berber origin, while his father, Patricius, was a pagan. Augustine's last name, Aurelius, suggests that his family was among those made Roman citizens by the edict of Caracalla.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> For most of his career Ibn Khaldun was a courtier to Berber rulers, not Arabs. It is thus not surprising that an Arab should be a source of much of what is known about the medieval Berber past (Fromherz 2010, 140-1).

<sup>108</sup> *The Oxford Encyclopedia of African Thought* (2010). Ed. Abiola F., Jeyifo, B. Oxford UP.

The link that Djébar forges with Augustine and Ibn Khaldun “invents” a tradition that is comprised of writers connected by their multiple identities. Against the national binary of Berber and Arab, Djébar proposes writers who combine both Berber and Arab ethnicity. She too belongs in this tradition with a Berber mother and an Arab father who, as a teacher of French, instructed Djébar in that language from a very young age. The excerpts from Ibn Khaldun’s *Kitab al Ibar* and Augustine’s *Confessions* situate Djébar in the tradition of these two historians and autobiographers from the Maghreb, marked, as she is, by complex genealogies and allegiances.<sup>109</sup>

The specific epigraph by Ibn Khaldun that Djébar uses in *L’Amour, la fantasia* shows precisely the contradiction within his work. The epigraph describes in his own words the subjugation of the Berber people while he was a governor (1365-66). He admits:

I myself had to lead an expedition into the mountainous region of Bejaia, where the Berber tribe had been refusing to pay taxes for some years... After I had penetrated into their country and overcome their resistance, I took hostages to ensure their obedience. (Djébar 47)

Ibn Khaldun exhibits conflicting attitudes in his historiography and autobiography toward the Berbers, praising them on the one hand and persecuting them on the other; Djébar incorporates this ambivalence in her own account, which is written to a large extent in defense of the Berber peoples. Ultimately, she embraces these ethnic oppositions as part of her own experience as both Arab and Berber, and as a woman who writes in French. Djébar emphasizes Ibn Khaldun’s choice of the Arabic language: “Ibn Khaldun rounds off a life of adventure and meditation by composing his autobiography in Arabic” (216).

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<sup>109</sup> For similar biographies of Moses, Paul of Tarsus, Anselm Turmeda, Leo Africanus, Beatrice Michiel see: Steven A. Epstein “Hybridity” (2014) pp. 346-358.

By emphasizing Ibn Khaldun's Arabic, Djébar suggests that she, like him, chooses for her autobiography "the language of the enemy"—in her case, French. Contradiction is an integral part of her identity.

Ibn Khaldun's family ancestry is marked by women who were in charge of educating and influencing the language and culture of the heir apparent. These were mothers of hybrid dynasties: Christian women from Spain became mothers of Arab rulers due to the intermarriage between Muslim emirs and Christian women from Al Andalus. It was these Spanish wives and mothers of Arab rulers who facilitated acculturation between Spanish, Christian, and Muslim cultures (Fromherz 2010, 42). This historical link between the women in Ibn Khaldun's family and the central role of women and language in Djébar's narrative, suggests the particular influence of women as facilitators of these shifts from one language to the other. And she locates herself as part of this tradition of women.

The adaptation of the language of the enemy is also a trait that Djébar identifies in Augustine's *Confessions*, written in Latin between 397 and 398. *Confessions* is widely seen as the first Western autobiography.<sup>110</sup>

After five centuries of Roman occupation, an Algerian named Augustine undertakes to write his own biography in Latin...and his language presses into service, in all innocence, the same language as Caesar or Sulla—writers and generals of the successful "African Campaign." The same language has passed from the conquerors to the assimilated people; has grown more flexible after the corpses of the past have been enshrouded in words. It matters little to him [Augustine] that he writes in a language introduced into the land of his fathers by conquest and accompanied by bloodshed! A language imposed by rape as much as by love. (Djébar 216)

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<sup>110</sup> It is, however, an autobiography of a special kind as it features a dialogue between Augustine and God. While Augustine's *Confessions* emphasizes the symbiotic relation of the human subject with God, Rousseau's *Confessions*, written in 1769 and another canonical example of Western autobiography, describes the subject's symbiosis of worldly experiences and personal feelings within himself.

The quotation shows clearly how language passes from one subject position to another. It constitutes a flexible medium that overcomes the opposition between conqueror and conquered. Language moves from the violence of “rape” to the reconciliation of “love.” It creates connections among things that are initially separated by violence, invasion, and conquest. It is a means to express the violence of war, but it also trespasses that violence. Writing in the language of the oppressor leads to the erasure of the binary conqueror/conquered. Djébar invents a tradition of writers, herself included, who write in the language of the enemy. Her work exemplifies the invention of a tradition of Mediterranean writers who belong not to one but to multiple traditions at once.

While autobiography in a national context is usually featured as a work that reflects one ethnicity, one race, and is written in the national language, Djébar’s autobiography destabilizes this idea. Her choice to invoke the first established autobiography in the West and to expose its hybridity undermines the conventional association of Augustine’s autobiography with the European continent.

In order to show Djébar’s invention of a new tradition, I turn to the excerpt from the *Confessions* that she cites in her autobiography. “And I come to the fields and spreading courts of memory, where are treasures of unnumbered impressions of things of every kind, stored by the senses” (*Confessions* X.8, Djébar 111). This excerpt introduces memory as an archive that is chaotic and formless. The perception of memory as a vast field of “unnumbered impressions” expands the possibilities of the connections that memory can bring forth. In the case of Augustine, memory stores a field of impressions connecting him with God. For Djébar these unnumbered—and uncharted—impressions

enable her to draw connections with the ancestors she appropriates for herself, ancestors buried in deep memory and restored to consciousness through writing.

For example, Djébar forges an imaginary genealogical link between Algerian and French women. One French woman is Pauline Roland, who becomes her spiritual ancestor in language and gender. Deported to Algeria by the French government in 1852, Roland was eventually sent by the colonial government back to France but died en route. In the letters that Roland leaves behind, she compares her experience as a marginalized subject to the experience of Algerian women, also marginalized in Algerian patriarchal society. She describes herself and other Algerian women as the objects of men, who treated them “either as odalisques amid gold and silk or as beasts of burden on the bare ground” (Djébar 223). After reading the letters, Djébar frames Pauline as an ancestor of her own, through a kinship based on language: “She and I are now clasped in each other’s arms, our roots entwined in the rich soil of the French vocabulary” (Djébar 223). Debra Kelly identifies this as a key moment in Djébar’s text: the letters empower not only through the new relationship to history that they forge but also through the lines of communication that they open. Djébar uses history to disrupt monolithic images, and also to promote connections between cultures, especially female cultures (Kelly 2000, 21-22). While the connection that Djébar emphasizes between Pauline and Algerian women may be read as an attempt to create alternative histories of difference, as Kelly argues, it is also a bridging of differences across nations and language. Moreover Djébar finds echoes of her own ideas in Roland’s notions about women’s liberation from patriarchal structures. Roland’s “words are pregnant with the future,” she writes, anticipating her liberation: “they give off light before my eyes and finally set me free” (Djébar 223).

Roland's complex status as an exile from France to Algeria creates a line of connection between the two writers similar to the connections between Augustine and Ibn Khaldun, whose complex lineages allow them to align simultaneously and interchangeably with different religions, ethnicities, and languages. The future that Djébar envisions is of an ancestry that is as flexible and malleable as language.

This constructed kinship of Djébar and Roland expands in order to include other Algerian women—this time, not through language, “the soil of the French vocabulary” but through the sea itself. While Roland dies at sea, Djébar claims her burial in the Algerian land:

Our country became [Pauline's] grave, her true heirs—Cherifa hiding in her tree, Lla Zohra wandering among the fires that ravaged the countryside, the chorus of anonymous women of today—could pay homage to her with that ancestral cry of triumph, the ululation of convulsive sisterhood! (Djébar 223)

Djébar constructs Algeria as Roland's country of burial by the lineage she creates with Algerian women. She projects into the future the idea that Cherifa and Lla Zohra, “women of today,” who participated in the Algerian anti-colonial struggle, are to become the “true heirs” of Roland's revolutionary spirit. The burial at sea affirms Roland's status as a non-national subject. Cherifa and Lla Zohra can claim her as an ancestor by paying homage to her as a fellow revolutionary.<sup>111</sup> Djébar re-contextualizes Roland's death, burial, and memory in a feminist and revolutionary context, and thus creates a genealogy of “sisterhood.” She converts the idea of ancestry from a biological one into a fictive one. Through this fictive ancestry, she invites these “anonymous women of today” to

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<sup>111</sup> Cherifa is a young fighter, and Djébar narrates her story in the movie *La Nouba*. Zohra saw her brother Ahmed, a mujahid, die before her eyes. She spent two nights hiding from the French in a tree (136-8). She was a farmer who had fed the mujahidin, and was punished by the French by having her farm burned down.

reconsider their ancestry and create genealogical lineages of their own. Roland's personal letters become modern evidence of connections between women, connections which the sea represents.

Djebar imagines herself to be the link between the stories of Algerian women storytellers and those she hears in Paris: "I have been banished from my homeland to listen and bring back some traces of liberty to the women of my family. I imagine I constitute the link" (*L'Amour, la fantasia* 218). As she embodies the idea of "constitut[ing] the link" across space, she also expands the network of women storytellers: "Retaining the role of storytelling figurehead at the prow of memory. The legacy will otherwise be lost—night after night, wave upon wave, the whispers take up the tale" (177-8).

In the Islamic tradition the transmission of knowledge is described with the metaphor of a *chain*, in Arabic, *isnad*. In contrast to a European confessional autobiographical tradition, Islamic culture only allows one to speak about the self in the context of validating the chain of transmission of knowledge (Donaday 2001, 72). The principle of the *isnad*—the chain of narrators who establish the authority and authenticate the legitimacy of the sayings or acts of the prophet—makes it necessary to give the biography of the person transmitting that knowledge (Donadey 2001, 72). *Isnad* links those transmitters back to the time of the prophet, as well as to each other (Mojaddedi 2013, 20). In Djebar, women's storytelling supplements the *isnad* while at the same time destabilizing it, because it does not preserve its linearity. Instead she inserts into the *isnad* occasional and coincidental figures. Djebar's is not a chain of the acts and sayings of the prophet, but one of memories of women:

Chain of memories: is it not indeed a “chain,” for do not memories fetter us as well as forming our roots? For every passer-by, the storyteller stands hidden behind the doorway. (Djebar 178)

Against the *isnad*, “the oppressive burden of my heritage,” and its demand to include in the story the biography of the transmitter, Djebar poses the storytelling of women. As with Augustine’s innumerable impressions stored by memory, so it is with the memory of these women storytellers. As they transmit knowledge within their stories to one another, they render an alternative knowledge of women, a new feminine knowledge. Djebar creates a different continuity that includes those things that relate to women’s experiences, such as the story of Pauline Roland.

The link with Roland and the genealogy that it constructs has personal origins. It affirms Djebar’s sentimental connection with her father, who encouraged her to learn the French language. In the same way that Roland’s story took time to be understood as one of cultural communication between Algerian and French women, so Djebar’s unconventional genealogical link via the French language will be shaped through time as the story of a Mediterranean ancestry.

### **We Must Be Relatives**

Djebar’s invention of a tradition of writers with multiple and shifting affiliations, and her imagined genealogies amongst women of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, provide an alternative perspective for the construction of genealogical relations in the Mediterranean region. Costas Montis similarly blends his life narrative with the stories of others. His autobiographical narrative, *Afentis Batistas*, tells the story

of his pursuit of the traces of a seventeenth-century Venetian-Cypriot, Afentis Batistas, who, according to Montis' grandmother, is a family ancestor. Batistas's son, Antonellos, born in Cyprus, constitutes an imaginative genealogical link between Batistas and modern Cypriots. Montis, like Djebbar, creates lines of connection across the sea, joining Venice with Cyprus. His narrative tells us that Venetians, as naturalized Cypriots, are ancestors of present-day Greek and Turkish-Cypriots, since a significant number of Venetians continued to reside in Cyprus after the arrival of Ottoman rule. The connection between Venetian Cypriots and native Cypriots is their common status as subjects of the Ottoman empire but with a crucial difference: Batistas as a Venetian landlord finds a way to maneuver within the empire and retains his sovereign status. His assimilation into the Ottoman regime, his adaptation and acculturation, are mechanisms of survival. These, however, were not adopted by all the populations that suffered the effects of colonization. I will return to this point later.

The ancestral relationship between Montis and Batistas is integral to Montis's autobiographical story. But it is not the only relationship that Montis posits. The imagined ancestral link between Batistas and Montis, in particular, and between Venetians and Cypriots, in general, branches out further. In one of Montis's imaginary dialogues with Batistas, Batistas reveals that he is a friend of the Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis (1883-1957). The title of Kazantzakis' fictional autobiography *Αναφορά στον Γκρέκο* (1961) [Report to Greco] refers to another Venetian subject, the painter Dominikos Theotokopoulos (1541-1641), also known as El Greco. Theotokopoulos was born in Venetian Crete, moved to Venice and then to Rome, and eventually died in Spain. He is thought to have initially been a Christian Orthodox who converted to Catholicism

upon his arrival in Rome. This possible parallelism between El Greco and Batistas becomes important, for it suggests that Montis's and Kazantzakis's Greekness has links with subjects whose ethnicity and religion were interchangeable, as they were obligated to switch allegiances as they traveled from one place to another or as they adapted to different regimes within their homeland. The following dialogue between Montis and Batistas graphically portrays this imagined connection between Batistas and El Greco and subsequently of Montis and Kazantzakis, and the connection of all four of them to one another. Montis begins the dialogue:

— Νομίζω πως δεν είμαι μυθιστοριογράφος.

Γελά.

— Έτσι νόμιζε κι ο Καζαντζάκης.

— Ποιός;

— Ο Νίκος ο Καζαντζάκης.

Ο Νίκος ο Καζαντζάκης; Δεν είμαστε καλά. Πού ήξερε ο αφέντης Μπατίστας τον Καζαντζάκη; Μου υποβάλλει πάλι να τον κοιτάξω για να πεισθώ ότι πραγματικά ήξερε τον Καζαντζάκη. Δεν είχε καμία σημασία αν του προηγήθηκε, δεν είχε καμία σημασία όσα χρόνια κι αν του προηγήθηκε.

Ήμουν ολότελα στην εξουσία του. Θα μπορούσε να μου πει και να πιστέψω πως ήξερε τον Καζαντζάκη και προσωπικά:

— Είμαστε συμμαθητές.

— Όχι και συμμαθητές.

— Συμμαθητές σου λέω.

— Πού;

— Στο γυμνάσιο, στο Παγκύπριο Γυμνάσιο του Ηρακλείου.

— Α ναι, σωστά, στο Παγκύπριο Γυμνάσιο του Ηρακλείου. (Montis 1424)

[— I think I am not a novelist.

He laughs.

— That's what Kazantzakis used to think.

— Who?

— Nikos Kazantzakis.

Nikos Kazantzakis? That can't be right. How in the world did afentis Batistas know Kazantzakis?

He forces me to look at him again so that I can convince myself that he really knows Kazantzakis. It did not matter that he preceded him, it did not matter at all however many years he preceded him.

I was completely under his control. He could tell me that he even knew Kazantzakis personally and I would believe him:

- We were classmates
- Not classmates
- Yes, classmates, I am telling you.
- Where?
- In high school; the Pancyprian Gymnasium of Heracleion.
- Yeah, right, the Pancyprian Gymnasium of Heracleion (Monti 94-95).]

Kazantzakis, Batistas, El Greco, and Montis are linked by parallel but paradoxical relationships. The acquaintance of Batistas with Kazantzakis is located in the imagined combination of a Cretan/Cypriot Gymnasium, “The Pancyprian Gymnasium of Heracleion” which Montis constructs by combining the name of the Nicosian “Pancyprian Gymnasium” [Παγκύπριο Γυμνάσιο] with Heracleion, the Cretan capital. But their acquaintance is also chronologically impossible, since Kazantzakis was born much later than Batistas. Montis acknowledges this by posing this connection in the form of a question, “Nikos Kazantzakis?... Where?” The connection of Kazantzakis, born in Ottoman Crete, with Montis, born in British Cyprus, comes by way of Batistas, born in Venetian Cyprus, and El Greco, born in Venetian Crete. Their imagined connections are affirmed by a real individual: Montis’s grandmother, Kalomoira. She was also an Ottoman subject, not in Crete, like Kazantzakis, but in Cyprus. These connections, constructed by Montis, reveal his vision of an expanded Mediterranean network of kinships, the basis of which is not biological, linear, chronological, legal, economic, or hereditary. These kinships are instead based on a different network—a set of categories that bears further exploration.

The network expands as the story of Batistas’s reputation extends beyond Cyprus to Corfu. A random acquaintance of Montis’s from Corfu claims also to be part of the Batistas family and, through Batistas, he to be the kinsman of Montis.

Κάθε τόσο κάτι είχε να προσθέσει κάποιος...περαστικός απ' τον νησί  
Κερκυραίος Μπατίστας...

- Πρέπει να είμαστε συγγενείς, μούπε. (Montis 1426)

[Every little while someone had something to add [...] someone passing by the  
island, a Batistas from Corfu.... I was godsend for him.

- *We must be relatives*, he told me. (Monti 96-7)]

Because of the Batistas connection, Montis finds that he is part of a relational network of people across the sea whom he does not know personally. Batistas, the object of storytelling, becomes the link between fictive kinships. And Montis's imagined connection with Batistas helps him project Cyprus not as an isolated space but as one connected to others in a Mediterranean context, to Corfu, Greece, and Venice.

Montis's grandmother, the original source of the stories of *afentis* Batistas, transmits this imaginary ancestral link. Her storytelling creates a particular way of knowing and remembering that is revealing as part of the autobiographical process. Montis can remember the stories better than he can remember his grandmother herself: "the more vaguely and incorporeally I remember grandmother, the more alive her fairytales, her songs and most of all, her stories about *afentis*, her strange great grandfather, have remained" (Montis 1987, 1). Fiction comes to replace grandmother who is "absorbed" by his memory of her stories (Montis 1987, 1). She becomes less real than her stories; the fictional genealogy overwhelms the biological one.

Montis's life narrative features a figure who represents his family's Venetian-Cypriot past. It is in competition with British colonial and national narratives of the Greek-Cypriot/Turkish-Cypriot past. His relationality is bound up with the grandmother's Venetian/Cypriot stories, but the nation's relationality is bound up with set of Western

Greek/Turkish heroes' stories. Which is the true history, he leaves disguised under the cloak of storytelling, suggesting that they may all be just fictive stories.

“Relationality,” according to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, implies that “one’s story is bound up with that of another and suggests that the boundaries of an ‘I’ are often shifting and permeable” (Smith & Watson 2010: 86). Smith and Watson explain that these relational others may include historical others, the identifiable figures of a collective past, such as political leaders, who serve as models of identity culturally available to a given narrator. What is interesting in *Afentis Batistas*, however, is that historical others are not rendered as necessarily historical. They are strangers, only known as characters of stories. Perceiving one’s self through the lives of others expands the Lejeunian definition of autobiography as a “retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life” (Gilbert 2009: xxii). The boundaries of self-narration in *Afentis Batistas*, just as in *L’ Amour, la fantasia*, shift from a self-centered soliloquy about one’s own existence to a relational chorus involving the lives of others who might have lived in the past.

### **Life’s Consoling Lie**

As noted in the introduction, a number of poststructuralist and postcolonial thinkers have challenged the basis of history as a received truth by which human subjects know themselves. Franz Fanon pointed out the violent erasure of traditions, languages, and cultures of the non-Western world in the history of the metropolis that presented itself as world history (Fanon 2007, 1). Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Michael Foucault, while not hostile to history, expressed a distrust of history’s

assumptions and its operations (Young 2004, 99). Lyotard was skeptical towards "historicist universal narratives, advocating instead the possibility of a multiplicity of heterogeneous, conflicting and incommensurable histories" (Young 2004, 99). Derrida subordinated historicity to the writing sign. According to him, writing always already precedes history and is engaged in a constant effort to capture the impossibility of history. Writing opens the field of historical becoming with language as its origin (Derrida 1976, 27), its logic simultaneously invoking and working against historical totalities. Finally, Foucault proposed that historical discourse takes part in the construction of the subject, rather than the reverse:

Whereas formerly he had been the subject of history, taking pride of place in God's historical scheme from creation onwards, now the human being no longer has any history: or rather, since he speaks, works, and lives, he finds himself interwoven in his own being with histories that are neither subordinate to him nor homogeneous with him. (Foucault 1980, 368-9 cited in Young 2004, 110)

This "interweaving" with other histories makes the modern human subject a nexus, a vector and instrument, who is always implicated in histories he or she cannot uncover, which are "neither subordinate to him nor homogeneous with him."

In Montis, the centrality of the problem of Western historicism is made clear with the book's division into two sections. The first section is about his childhood memories, dominated by the figure of his grandmother, whom he is trying to remember. These memories move in parallel with his grandmother's storytelling, with her many tales centering on *afentis* Batistas. However, Batistas turns out to be *not* an ancestor, but a mythic character out of folk tales with which he is "συνηφασμέν[ος] με τα παραμύθια" [interwoven with the fairytales] (1987, 1325). Writing as an already acknowledged

Cypriot writer and an older person, Montis remembers Batistas so vividly that Batistas becomes a memory almost equal to the memories of his actual childhood: the story becomes part of the historical reality of his own personal past.

In the second section of the book, Batistas's near-historical reality takes on another life as a figure of Cyprus's colonial history. Montis finds himself perplexed by the question of the evidence for the story of his life, as he wonders if all the stories of Batistas that make him who he is are simply "fiction." Tormented by the spectre of "fiction," halfway through the process of writing his autobiography, he decides to conduct historical research of oral and written sources to affirm the existence of his "fictive" ancestor. He writes:

Μάζενα, λοιπόν, τις ιστορίες της απ' όλες τις γωνιές της μνήμης, τις κοίταζα με καινούργιο βλέμμα, τις μελετούσα. Έπειτα άρχισα να ερευνώ. Κυνήγησα ονόματα πίσω στις ρίζες τους, κυνήγησα περιστατικά στα χείλη γριών και γέρων, αναδίφησα ιστορικές και χρονολογικές μελέτες, αρχεία, ταξιδιωτικές εντυπώσεις να συναρμολογήσω τον αφέντη Μπατίστα που με βασάνιζε τόσα χρόνια, να τον απλώσω στο χαρτί να ησυχάσω. Δε μπορεί, έλεγα, νάταν τέσσερα-πέντε ξεκομμένα ανέκδοτα χωρίς προιστορία και μεθιστορία. (Montis 1987, 1421)

So, I was gathering my grandmother's stories from all corners of memory, I was looking at them with a new gaze. I was studying them. Then I started researching. I chased down names back to their roots, I pursued incidents on the lips of old women and old men, I scrutinized historical studies and chronicles, archives, travel impressions in order to assemble afentis Batistas, who had been tormenting me for so many years, in order to spread him out on paper so I could finally find peace. It is not possible, I was arguing, that there are just four or five disconnected anecdotes without any pre-history or post-history [*methistoria* – metahistory]. (Montis 2000, 92)

Montis attempts to locate Batistas in Cyprus' historical records; in other words, he looks for factual proof, as if he were a historian, of a story he knows to be imaginary. Batistas

torments Montis because he is someone who raises questions about the reality of a hero's existence and the elusiveness of evidence. The method of *historein*, of learning or knowing by inquiry, is integral to Montis's own autobiographical method. He incorporates a scene of historiographical and archival research in a supposedly fictive autobiography, as if affirming Foucault's argument that, as a modern subject, he "speaks, works, and lives, he finds himself interwoven in his own being with histories that are neither subordinate to him nor homogeneous with him." In this sense, it is a work of post-colonial history.

To write autobiography by way of history, however, is to eliminate life as chance, as the outcome of a series of coincidences. We must not forget that Montis's life narrative is a disguised autobiography that hovers between autobiography and novel. It engages Batistas not only as a figure from the past, but also as a tool in order to scrutinize and ask questions about the peculiar nature of Montis's own life. His search of the archive is significant in that it shows the desire of the individual to insert his personal understanding of ancestry and kinship into the national reality, to acquire authority for something that is utterly personal. It is the gesture of a human, post-colonial Mediterranean islander, to be included in the whole. But when read more closely, this deeply allegorical story glossed by irony and cryptic message is Montis's recognition of the fact that his grandmother had been a tenant on the estate of a Venetian master. Grandmother's "familial" connection to Batistas is the outcome, and transposition, of her adoption on this estate.

As a result of his historical research, Montis confirms that Batistas was a Venetian who lived in Cyprus in the sixteenth century when Cyprus was part of the Venetian empire. But he discovers more: he learns that Batistas was married to an Orthodox

woman, Maria, and had a son with her called Antonellos.<sup>112</sup> Batistas remained in Cyprus after the transition from Venetian to Ottoman rule and, as a Venetian and Catholic subject, had to adjust to the new regime. This reflects a common phenomenon of his time: Orthodox and Catholics converted to Islam in order to avoid the Ottomans' heavy taxation and to preserve ownership of the family land. Batistas, then, asked his son Antonellos to convert to Islam for these reasons.

Although in oral accounts Batistas is presented as a Venetian, Montis, in his narrative, complicates his national identity. Batistas is not only a Venetian, but also a Turk and Frank, as is evident from the names attributed to him: Τουρκομπατίστας [Turkobatistas] (1443), ο Φράγκος [the Frank] (1439), Τουρκοφράγκος [Turkofrank] (1467) and Afentis. Even though Batistas resides in Cyprus during Ottoman rule, previous centuries of Frankish domination (1192-1489) explain the name given to him: the Frank (108) a name that associates him with the Roman Catholic Church, the power established in Cyprus during the years of Frankish rule (Skoufari 2008, 283), when Roman Catholics held the reins of power and the Orthodox inhabitants lived in the countryside. The feudal system of Western Europe was carried almost wholesale into Cyprus. Latin Lusignans and their largely French and Italian associates formed a local aristocracy, which, although small, became the predominant social and economic force on the island.<sup>113</sup> Although the Ottoman conquest brought about the near-elimination of this Frankish colony, a small group of Franks eventually formed one of the dominant classes on the island. Some of the most enterprising of the Latin aristocracy found ways

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<sup>112</sup> See Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire* (2012) for the origins of the name Maria which was a name which was given to female converts along with Katerina, Angela, Anna, Maddalena pp. 111, 143.

<sup>113</sup> A similar arrangement occurred in the kingdom of Jerusalem. Both kingdoms, Cyprus and Palestine, were unified in 1268 by Hugh III of Cyprus.

to perpetuate themselves during the Ottoman Empire by becoming Muslim or Orthodox (Jennings 1993, 6). The conversion to Islam of Batistas's son, Antonellos, after the Ottomans took over Cyprus reflects the overlap of Frankish, Venetian and Ottoman traditions. *Turkofrank* (1467) alludes to the preservation of Batistas's aristocratic, feudal, Latin identity, along with the Turkish one.<sup>114</sup> Montis portrays Batistas as a Roman Catholic who adheres to Islam and as a crypto-Christian who has strong ties with the Greek Orthodox Church.

These multivalent portraits of Batistas coexist in a narrative of syncretism, of a "cultural mixture of diverse beliefs" that characterizes the Mediterranean region (Lambropoulos 2001, 225-226). Montis's autobiography moves beyond Manichean distinctions of Muslim-Christian, Greek-Turk and shows, through Batistas's temporary convergences and transitions from one sect to another, the complexity of Montis's identity as a Cypriot.<sup>115</sup> After finding archival evidence for Batistas's existence in the archive, Montis finds himself at pains to correlate the archival version with his grandmother's. Yet Montis desires to confirm his ancestral link with a Venetian protagonist in a Mediterranean history outside the national, Greek-Turkish-Cypriot one. Djébar's remark, "as if archives guarantee the imprint of reality" (Djébar 1985, 177-8), could also be Montis's.

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<sup>114</sup> Turkish identity started to form during the late nineteenth century as Ottoman elites adopted European ideas of nationalism.

<sup>115</sup> The political shifts did not bring about major changes for the lower classes; the great majority of Greek, Maronite, Armenian and other peasants continued to come under the jurisdiction of the feudal lords, the only difference being that these were no longer Greek Orthodox nobles, but mainly European Catholics (Skoufari 2008, 283). The aristocratic ruling class had little sympathy for the peasantry and displayed feelings of religious and perhaps cultural superiority (Jennings 1993: 7). The vast majority of the agricultural workers, who historians agree were essentially slaves were almost certainly Greek Orthodox Cypriots (Jennings 1993, 246). "The Venetian aristocracy of Cyprus profited immensely, living in luxury while exploiting the [majority of the] local people" (Jennings 1993: 305). "Despite the fact that the peasant population in the area where Batista resided was predominantly either Greek, Armenian or Maronite, he was not afraid to define himself as a Venetian" (Montis 1987, 1429).

As an immigrant man from Venice to Cyprus, Batistas at times finds himself nostalgic for Venice, his home country. He tries to instill the memory of Venice in Antonellos. But Antonellos refuses to see himself as a Venetian and calls himself a Cypriot instead. In the context of shifting rulers and empires, Batistas aims to protect his position, and he is then forced to switch alliances, to convert, to marry a Greek woman, to get along with the rest of the Cypriots, to get along with the Muslim *hoja*, as well as with the Christian priest, “the papa.” We should recognize that his immigrant status is not exactly the same as that of “an unacknowledged and unrecognized helot of a planetary order” who “jeopardizes the boundaries, disrupting the desire for controlled difference and distance” (Chambers 2008, 7). Having been part of the Venetian aristocracy, Batistas loses his sovereignty under the Ottoman empire, and thinks that he can be sovereign by converting to Islam and by adhering to the Ottoman authorities, even though cryptically Christian. Thus he preserves an illusion of his sovereignty. And Montis, adhering to this version of his immigrant ancestor, sees him as someone similar to himself.

The memory of Batistas, sovereign but at the same time subjugated, survives in the storytelling of Montis’s grandmother, another subject caught in the web of shifting regimes: for she was initially an Ottoman, who then became a British subject and eventually a Greek Cypriot citizen. The story of Batistas and that of Montis’s grandmother move in parallel in the sense that, in the course of their lives, they both experienced changing regimes—experiences that deeply affected the way in which they view history. As the subjects of different empires, they have naturalized the fact of their subjugation. For them every new oppressor is viewed as a potential liberator and the subject is each time seemingly reborn as free.

What perplexes Montis the most, however, and what forces him to ask questions, is not Batistas's multilayered identity or his immigrant status, but his own reality. Although Batistas initially appears to be nothing other than a childhood memory born out of storytelling, he suddenly becomes, after Montis's historical research, someone else. As a historical figure, Batistas is foreign to Montis, prompting the writer to contemplate changing the title of his book. He writes:

Το “κεφαλόβρυσο” [ο Μπατίστας της Ιστορίας] δεν είχε άμεση επαφή μαζί μου, δεν ήρθε να με βρεί, εγώ τόψαξα, δεν επικοινωνήσε προφορικά χείλια κι αυτί, βγήκε απο άψυχα χαρτιά που αν τα διαβάσεις διαβάζονται κι αν δεν τα διαβάσεις μένουν εκεί. Το ζωντανό, που είχε κτυπήσει ο σφυγμός του στο αίσθημα και στη φαντασία μου, που μάγγιζε κατάσαρκα μέσω της γιαγιάς και των παιδικών μου χρόνων,...ήταν ο αφέντης Μπατίστας (Montis 1987, 1422).

[The “fountainhead” [the historical Batistas] had no direct contact with me, it did not come to find me, I searched for it, it did not communicate orally by lips and ears, it came out of lifeless papers which, if you read them, are read, and if you do not read them, remain in place. The living thing, whose pulse had touched my feeling and my imagination, which was touching my bare skin through grandmother and my childhood years, was afentis Batistas] (Monti 2006, 93).

The tension between Batistas as historical knowledge, on the one hand, and as embodied experience, on the other hand, is a dilemma that Montis cannot resolve. In fact unresolved tension in the dual memory of Batistas is so tormenting that Montis cannot escape his obsession with him. There is something of his own self which is part of this dualism and which he cannot completely grasp. Batistas fills his dreams both night and day. He imagines talking to him. He asks him: “Are you Batistas?” “Are you *afenti* Batistas?” (Montis 1987, 1423). In the course of these imaginary dream-like discussions, Montis finds Batistas insisting that his story must be written down or it will be lost. But

Batistas pointedly asserts not only that just any story of him but the *historical* version must be written. He tells Montis:

Ασ' τη γιαγιά. [Και ο Μόντης απαντά] Ν' αφήσω τη γιαγιά; Πώς ν' αφήσω τη γιαγιά; Μου επιβάλλει να τον κοιτάξω και ν' αναπροσαρμόσω τη γιαγιά στα νέα δεδομένα. Και σα να μούχε πεί τι να κάνω με ρωτά αν τελείωσα. (Montis 1987, 1423)

Forget about grandmother. And Montis responds: Forget about grandmother? How can I forget about grandmother? He is suggesting that I look at him and readjust my memories to the new situation, readjust grandmother to the new data. And as if he had told me what to do, he is now asking me if I am finished. (2006, 94)

Batistas asks Montis to disavow the grandmother as a less important source of knowledge and to privilege instead the historical accounts. He asks Montis to write him down as a fact of history rather than a folk tale. As with Batistas, Montis too seeks an outlet for his personal history to be written. But the only outlet for the writing of Batistas's history is Montis's autobiography. Montis's autobiography becomes the occasion for including the Venetian accounts currently missing from the national history of Cyprus. Autobiography emerges as a new space for history.

While archival research initially seems to offer certain historical truths, it ultimately leads Montis back to the poetic imagination. The archive is a temptation for Montis, not because it discloses certain truth about Batistas, but because in order to reconstruct the historical Batistas through the archive, he needs to *imagine*. He must imagine the links and draw the connections in order to fill in the gaps of the archive. He needs to ask questions, and to investigate. And investigation, it turns out, is the work not only of the historian but also of the writer. Those missing parts can only be filled by what

Montis remembers or what he gathers from the oral narratives of the local people. These gaps make the archive as indeterminate and ultimately open to fictionalizing as his memory of Batistas.

Moreover Batistas, who is simultaneously a human being in the stories of the grandmother, a sovereign ruler in the archive, and a figment of Montis's imagination, seeks to enter the Cypriot national historical narrative. In their imaginary dialogues, Batistas asks Montis to forget about storytelling and to emphasize the archival accounts that are the "legitimate" forms of knowledge in the context of the nation. But Montis instead writes the story of this Venetian ruler, as he enters his own life, for this version is closer than the archive to his reality. This allows the autobiographer to rediscover the historical by drawing on fairytales; the poetic imagination becomes necessary for historical knowledge.

In its totality Montis's text poses the question: who am I? Or, rather, who would I be if I knew who Batistas actually was? But even more, who would I be if *I* knew who I was? The book ends with another set of questions, as Montis asks grandmother to confirm her kinship with Antonellos: "What was Antonellos to you, grandmother?" Montis asks. "Antonellos? Antonellos who?" she replies. Despite having narrated the story in the first place, grandmother is unable to recall Antonellos or her ancestral relationship with him. The grandmother as a sovereign subject of a new regime, the British Empire, refuses any connection with the Venetian Antonellos because those stories are not supposed to be told in public; there should not be any proof of the tenant, and at the same time, privileged status of the grandmother under the old regime.

The stories that grandmother narrates, the stories of Batistas and Antonellos, describe her interactions and relationships with landowners whom she came to think of as kin. But those stories could not be told out in the open—only in isolation, in distant corners, in grandmother’s isolated room, where Montis would go to receive her stories. Those stories of Venetian sovereignty grandmother made her own, disregarding the fact that she herself was the object of their subjugation. Who she was or what she suffered was not important. Subjugation had become a naturalized feature of herself.

It is perhaps for this reason that Montis remembers all the things connected with his grandmother, but not grandmother herself: her reality, her history, lies deep within those stories, in those colonial links, the “connectivities” and the “distributions” that absorbed her. As Montis says, “I wouldn’t have recognized her if we ever happened to cross pathways.” Montis finds himself overtly confused for not having ever asked any questions

Θυμάμαι όσα άλλα συνδεόντουσαν με τη γιαγιά εκτός απ’ την ίδια, λες και την απορρόφησαν εκείνα, λες και διανεμήθηκε σ’ εκείνα κ’ έσβησε. Έτσι που φοβάμαι πως δεν θα τη γνώριζα αν τύχαινε...να περάσει μια Κυριακή απ’ το δρόμο μου. (Η γιαγιά μου; Ποιά ήταν;) Κ’ είν’ επίσης περίεργο που δεν είχα ποτέ μου καμιά απορία, που εξακολουθώ να τις αντιπαρέρχομαι όλες κι όταν αναπολώ τη γιαγιά δεν έχω ερωτήματα, είμαι πλήρως ικανοποιημένος απ’ ότι βλέπω χωρίς να βλέπω σχεδόν τίποτα με τον καθιερωμένο τρόπο που ξέρουμε. (Η γιαγιά. Τίποτ’ άλλο. Φτάνει). Το δωμάτιο της, ένα μικρό μετζανόγι, ήταν στην άκρια του στενόμακρου διαδρόμου, εκεί που στρίβαμε να πάμε στα δικά μας δωμάτια. Μπαινοβγαίνοντας περνούσαμε μπροστά απ’ την ξύλινη σκάλα του και χωρίς να βλέπουμε τη γιαγιά τη χαιρετούσαμε...έστω κι αν δεν τη βλέπαμε. (1317-1318)

[I remember all the things connected to grandmother except my grandmother herself, as if they absorbed her, as if she was distributed in them and erased. I am afraid that if we ever happened to cross pathways I wouldn’t recognized her. (My grandmother? Who was she?) It is even more bizarre that I never asked any questions and I still don’t have any, I overcome questions and when I reminisce

about her I don't have questions, I am simply satisfied with what I see but without seeing anything in the conventional way that people see. (Grandmother. Nothing more. That's enough). Her room, separated from the main house, slightly elevated, at the corner of a long hallway, there just before we turned to go to our own rooms. Going in and out we would cross her staircase and without actually seeing her we would greet her...even if we didn't see her]. (1317-1318)

It is remarkable that in this passage Montis ironically brackets the grandmother as if she is someone insignificant, while he tells us that she is the most significant link, the missing link, for him to understand who he is. She has effaced her own history in favor of that of the colonizer, and the revelation of this fact becomes the missing link in Montis's own self-understanding.

According to Lefteris Papaleontiou, *Afentis Batistas* is “a novel of national self-determination” (2007, 442). As such it leads to a realization not only of the nation's ruptures and discontinuities, but also of the sequence of histories of colonization that present themselves as the history of the people. As these histories are adapted they efface the stories people tell themselves, making them ignorant of who they truly are. In exposing this effaced history, Montis's autobiography is as close to Cyprus' history as it can get.

### **Reverse Chronologies and Anonymity: The Curious Fact of Birth**

The counter-linear chronological links between Batistas and Kazantzakis and the imagined links between Djébar, Augustine, Ibn Khaldun, and Pauline Roland alter the sense of chronology as a progression of time. According to Miriam Cook, war and violence, as transformative and chaotic experiences, are “born through the psyches and bodies of the colonized,” thus breaking “the concept of chronological, linear historical

time into a fragmented, cyclical fictionalized narrative” (1996: 27). While this may reflect Djébar’s and Montis’s treatment of the after-effects of the violence of colonialism, I would argue that the disrupted chronological disparities in *L’Amour, la fantasia*, in particular, are part of a broader accumulation of colonial residue. The text itself contains numerous references to ancient and early modern Algerian history: the ancient Numidians (202 BCE–46 BCE), Julius Caesar (100 BCE–44 BCE), Caesarea, the Roman city known today as Cherchell, the medieval German king Barbarossa (1152–1190), and other generic references to ancient ruins and inscriptions. Considering these scattered references from the deep past, it would appear that Djébar’s sense of time is best viewed as a vast network of seemingly unconnected instances that come together in the present. For to blur the distinctions of “cross-breeding of opposing worlds” is an ongoing pattern in *L’Amour, la fantasia* (128).

As part of this complex framework of dispersed historical references, Djébar sporadically brings in her own personal narrative in order to destabilize further any sense of linear chronology. She does so with her birth date, relocating it to a time prior to her actual birth:

I am forced to acknowledge a curious fact: the date of my birth is 1842, the year when General Saint Arnaud arrives to burn down the Zaouia of the Beni Menacer, the tribe from which I am descended. It is Saint Arnaud’s fire that lights my way out of the harem one hundred years later: because its glow still surrounds me, I find the strength to speak. Before I catch the sound of my voice I can hear the death rattles, the moans of those immured in the Dahra Mountains and the prisons on the island of Saint Marguerite. (Djébar 1985, 217)

Djébar reads in parallel the year that her father took her to French school, 1942, and the fire of Saint Arnaud, 1842. She conflates these two dates, de-essentializing her birth date

as an origin of her life story. “The fire that lights her out of the harem,” i.e. the violence she must reveal because its “glow” still surrounds her, is also the agent of her own liberation, her ability to speak, and especially *write*, in French.

She locates herself as another Djébar ready to uncover the silence of injustice of the Berber tribes, the memory of which she bears. Djébar “curiously factualizes” what she personally has not lived through, but which is a product of a collective memory. The death of these Berbers becomes her own birth date. As she destabilizes historical time by linking her date of birth with the historical event of 1842, she escapes conventional chronology, instead connecting with people, times, and places beyond her own time, similar to those kinships and genealogies that she creates with Augustine, Ibn Khaldun and Pauline Roland.

At the heart of this unconventional chronological arrangement is the preservation of the anonymities of history: “While I intended every step forward to make me more clearly identifiable, I find myself progressively sucked down into the anonymity of these women of old – my ancestors!” (Djébar 1985, 217). As with these women, her ancestry too is anonymous, an empty space to be filled by the coincidence of a name. As she conflates herself with these women, she reinvents herself as part of their lineage. As she moves into the future, she encounters the past and as she moves towards self-identification, she merges with the anonymous women of her past. This reversal moves in parallel to the reversal of chronology; it is a way to construct a new genealogy and chronology.

Afenti Batistas is also an anonymous identification — not because there is a lack of a name, but because this name, afenti and Batistas, is generic and figurative. Afentis,

from the Ottoman *effendi*, and Batistas, from the medieval Venetian *baptista*, reflects the merging of the opposition of Muslim and Catholic, by way of the Greek Orthodox Montis and his grandmother, into one entity. Montis's *afentis* Batistas is a prismatic character who represents both the specificity of Montis's own experience as a Cypriot—postcolonial and Mediterranean—and the multi-ethnic, multi-confessional aspect of the Mediterranean region. The name *afentis* Batistas exemplifies the trajectory of what constitutes the postcolonial in the Mediterranean space both conceptually and theoretically: it is a space of religious, ethnic and linguistic convergence and conversion.

Linguistically, the name *afentis* has a long, mixed genealogy. The Byzantine *afentis*, from Greek *αθεντία*—authenticity and absolute power—was taken over by the Ottomans and changed into *effendi*. *Effendi* was the title given to governmental officials of high rank in the Ottoman Empire; it became in Modern Greek, *afenti*. The term is the sign for what is one and the same, even though interchangeable: power. Spoken by the Greek-Cypriot storyteller—the grandmother, living under British rule in Cyprus (1878-1959)—“*afentis*” becomes the linguistic expression of the history of ever-changing powers. The word travels back and forth in an open-ended process, eliminating hierarchies of rulers that become unified. The grandmother perceives these rulers as interchangeable and speaks their existence by means of one static, unchangeable word, *afentis*.

Djebar too, dissociates women from their specific names. She creates a female archetype, the “anonymous Algerian woman,” whom she poses as an alternative to the “old crone,” the elder Berber women in Djebar's family, whom she recalls from her childhood. These elder women force the practice of reading from the Quran onto younger

women, a practice that becomes oppressive to them: “the presence of this ancient [old crone] ensures that the other women of the household never miss one of their daily prayers” (Djebar 1985, 9-10). The memories of old women, “the burden of heritage,” create an image of the past as a “dead-and-alive hole” (Djebar 1985, 218; 13). Djebar destabilizes names as signifiers of linear family relations, and thus of ancestry. Moreover, by rendering women anonymous, she liberates them from the burden of Islamic tradition that locks them—literarily — to the *chain* of their families and to those Quranic stories.

One of these “anonymous Algerian women” is someone in the diary, *Chronicles of the Missing*, by the painter Eugene Fromentin (1820-1878) (Djebar 1985, 226). Actually, Djebar takes the “anonymous” from Fromentin whom she calls “a second father,” thus creating another non-biological and anachronistic kinship. Fromentin appears walking in Laghouat, “a place of massacre” in “June 1853.” As he is walking, he “picks out of the dust the severed hand of an unknown Algerian woman” but ends up throwing the hand down “in his path” (Djebar 226). The autobiographical “I” presents herself seizing the mutilated hand of this anonymous woman: “I seize on this living hand, hand of mutilation and of memory, and I attempt to bring it the *qalam*” (Djebar 226). Djebar takes his story from the past and continues it in the present, exemplifying her desire to create a new *isnad*, a new chain of transmission of knowledge.

Montis’s and Djebar’s handling of names, derivatives of colonization, generic and suitable to many traditions, exemplifies the Mediterranean as a space of a shared experience of colonial exploitation and historical effacement of its people’s histories. The paradoxes of Djebar’s birth date’s transposition to another time, as well as Montis’s

combination of Kazantakis and Batistas in himself, signify similarities to Mediterranean people in the present, and possibly in a depth of time, who sought alternatives in a space that was swept over by successive rulers. Branching freely from one period of history to another, Montis and Djébar negotiate the limits of their own personal histories.

### **Lives In Disguise**

Autobiographical narratives, according to Benedict Anderson, are products of modernity. They retrieve that which one cannot remember, the beginning of life, and that which one cannot possibly know, its end. Identity, according to Anderson, is a sort of affirmation that who you are in the present is identical to who you were at the earlier stages of your life (Anderson 2006, 204). Autobiography creates a space for that identification. Autobiography, then, is a product of the necessity of continuity, a necessity to link to the present that which is not remembered, tangibly or verifiably, but somehow exists. Nevertheless, autobiography does not offer continuity; it offers a substitute for continuity, a text. If autobiography as a product of modernity is a narrative that we tell to ourselves and about ourselves as a substitute for continuity, then fictional autobiography or an autobiography in disguise may be considered an attempt to come to terms with the illusion of continuity. Instead of fulfilling the modern desire for continuity, the fictional autobiographies of Montis and Djébar disrupt it and *invent* continuity in their own ways. Continuity, origins, ancestry, kinship, and memory are integral categories to autobiography, fictional autobiography and autobiography in disguise; the difference from autobiography proper is that these categories are more often received as the

outcome of coincidence and chance rather than a set of fixed social constructs—birth, family, accomplishment, talent, social class.

If autobiography, fictional or otherwise, is primarily a substitute for continuity for things we cannot know but look for—birth, death, origins, a unified self—then autobiography is primarily an “inquiring” genre. Within the modern, national and historical continuity, difference—ethnic, cultural, religious—is key. To be a Mediterranean subject, not as a totality of identity, but as a subject of discourse in the Foucaultian sense, is to try to think genealogically backward, to before the sociological and historical circumstances of the nation, for as part of the national narrative there are always residues of previous empires with which the nation preserves affinities in complex ways.

Montis gives as the title of his autobiography the name of someone other than himself. *Batistas* lies before the temporal span of the author’s life, and is a product of storytelling. Montis’s identification with *Batistas* exemplifies a disruption of modern chronology and proposes an alternative continuity that has to do with a personal vision of ancestry rather than with a national affirmation of a continuity originating from classical antiquity. This gesture speaks to a Mediterraneanness that Montis constructs on his own terms. If, as Marinos Pourgouris suggests, for Odysseas Elytis and Albert Camus the Mediterranean is posited through a “radical aestheticization of landscape,” for Montis, the Mediterranean is a story of reconstruction and expansion of ancestry beyond the borders of the nation state. According to Pourgouris, Elytis moves towards “the provincial periphery and away from the urban center and situates a metaphysical Greek geography outside the constricted limits of nationalism;” Montis aims to make space for

an interchangeable identity, an identity that disguises, as part of the national narrative (Pourgouris 2011, 63).

This personal vision of ancestry, the Venetian Batistas, coexists with, and works in opposition to, the anti-colonial nationalism which thrived on the island at the time of Montis's childhood. Montis presents himself as a schoolboy drawing caricatures of Batistas next to Greek flags in his notebooks:

Σχεδιάζαμε τον αφέντη Μπατίστα και τον καταγράφαμε στα τετράδια του Νηπιαγωγείου και του Δημοτικού πλάι στις ελληνικές σημαίες και στις πρώτες καριακτούρες σπιτιών και δένδρων. (Montis 1987, 1366)

[We drew Batistas again and again, and we wrote down his name in the kindergarten and elementary school notebooks next to the Greek flags and the first caricatures of trees and houses]. (Montis 2006, 44)

Batistas, the nationally unregistered ancestor reflecting Cyprus' multi-ethnic community that preexisted the colonial and eventually national binarism of Turks and Greeks, once took his place in the national present, a place which Montis's work destabilizes: the juxtaposition with the Greek flag is ambiguous, making Batistas' image both a symbol of and counterweight to the nationalism of the flag.

Both *Ο Αφέντης Μπατίστας και τ' άλλα* and *L' Amour, la fantasia* are generically multivalent. Critics of *Afentis Batistas* referred to it as a novel and "mythistory" (Papaleontiou 1993; Herodotou 1994; Ziras 1986); as "something more than an autobiography and something very different from a historical novel" (Papaleontiou 1999); a "multi-focal and multileveled narrative...a meager fiction replaced by an adventurous narration" (Ziras 1986). The title adds to these categorizations of this indeed

generically complex text, “τ' άλλα” [other things]. As he juxtaposes his life to Batistas', the “big memory,” Montis sees his own life as secondary. The fiction of afentis Batistas becomes Montis's autobiography. This is also the beginning of the book:

Αν και μπορεί να μην είναι το κεντρικό πρόσωπο της αφήγησης ο αφέντης Μπατίστας—ούτε ξέρω πια αν υπάρχει κεντρικό πρόσωπο—αν και μπορεί καθώς τον έψαχνα άλλα να ανασυρόντουσαν, όπως πάμε να πάρουμε ένα κεράσι και σηκώνονται μαζί του άλλα δέκα, αν και μπορεί ακριβώς τ' άλλα π' ανασυρόντουσαν να ψαχνα, αν και μπορεί τ' άλλα νάταν τα σημαντικά κι αφέντης Μπατίστας νάταν απλώς προκάλυμα, δικό μου ή δεν ξέρω ποιού, εν πάση περιπτώση αυτός, τουλάχιστον φαινομενικά, κίνησε πρώτος, και μάλιστα με τόση επιμονή, τη μπάλα. (Montis 1987, 1317)

[Even though afentis Batistas may not be the main character of the narration—nor do I know anymore whether there is a main character—even though, while I was looking for him, *other things* may have surfaced, just as when we pick a cherry and ten more are pulled up with it, even though I may have been looking exactly for the *other things* that surfaced, even though other things may have been the important ones and afentis Batistas was just a pretext, mine or I don't know whose, in any case, he first, at least seemingly, and with so much persistence, set the ball rolling]. (Monti 2006, 1)

Batistas, this unknown figure from the distant past, becomes the channel through which Montis's memory is directed. And Montis wonders whether his memory is a προκάλυμα, a cover-up: “a pretext, even though other things may have been the important ones” (1). Batistas stands for something other than himself. He stands in the place of Montis's deceased family members. Montis shifts the root of his own torment and transposes it onto Batistas. He neglects the fact of his own life for this history of the colonizer. After the death of his mother and brothers, a family tragedy, when Montis was eight years old, he went to the doctor who diagnosed him with depression. The doctor referred to the issues that may have been tormenting Montis as “the other things” [τ' άλλα], as a way to

cover up the psychological torment (1987, 1369). Montis, however, constructs his family tragedy and its aftereffects as if it was “afentis Batistas that was tormenting [him].” This is what he told the doctor. He “others” his own life, intentionally refusing to position his own, insignificant existence at the center, instead giving it up for Batistas. He accepts negation as the central component of his autobiography to the benefit of the history of the colonizer. The historical dominates over the personal.

The generic multivalence of *L' Amour, la fantasia* resides in the text's complex and multiple functions. According to Donadey, *L' Amour* is “a project of rewriting history through fiction” (Donadey 44-5), as it is also a “dialogue between...written and oral traditions” (Donaday 50). According to Najat Rahman, *L' Amour* is “simultaneously an autobiography, a historical narrative of the effacement of Algerian history under French colonization, a rewriting of the French archive, and a transcription of oral testimonies by Algerian women” (Rahman 73). According to Patrick Crowley, “though *L' Amour, la fantasia*'s modal form is autobiographical, the text is also about the failure of autobiography, as conventionally understood” (Crowley 2011, 138). Djébar's own statement about the genre of this work, however, reflects the complexity of the text: “My fiction is this attempt at autobiography, weighted down under the oppressive burden of my heritage” (Djébar 1985, 218). While it is possible that autobiography may turn into fiction in the process of its writing, Djébar tells us that her “fiction” became “autobiography.” “My fiction” designates the process by which she delineates the complexity of her heritage, releases its “oppressive burden,” and comes to terms with a narrative that she can eventually consider her own.

Both texts blur the distinction between fiction and autobiography, but also create a generic category in which autobiography invents genealogies, constructing or accumulating evidence from personal experience to substantiate them. By doing so, they make genealogy an object of negotiation. As part of the genealogical process, the subject comes to know itself not as finite but as dialogical in the process of its making; and fiction, the “attempt” at autobiography, is this process of making.

### **Mediterranean *Mahallae***

Discussing continuity in the context of pre Enlightenment thought, Benedict Anderson describes it as a construction between a fatality and a contingency (Anderson 2006, 11). In the context of the nation, print capitalism provided ways of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together amongst growing numbers of people who started to think and to relate themselves to others (Anderson 2006, 36). In the Mediterranean, the possibility of human connectivity, as Montis and Djebbar exemplify, is realized through stories which local people share, often ways of revealing past oppressions or escaping from current ones. On a micropolitical level these stories supplement the national narratives of continuity with new connectivities across national borders, but primarily amongst individuals. In this context, Montis appropriates the Mediterranean in his own way. For him the Mediterranean is as small as a particular neighborhood in his hometown: “Μεσόγειοι μαχαλλάδες” [Mediterranean *mahallae*/neighborhoods] perceived as such by children who play on the streets (Montis 1987, 1381).

Referring to the example of Greece, Stathis Gourgouris has argued that colonization idealized the ancient traces and made ancestry irretrievable and permanent (1996, 152). But as Djebbar and Montis have showed, ancestry is a category available for negotiation. “Philhellenism’s punishment consists precisely in imbuing the Neohellenic imaginary with the presence of an irretrievable, but permanent, ancestry—a colonial condition” (Gourgouris 1996, 152). If Neohellenism, as Gourgouris argues, is the result of antiquity via Philhellenism, then the Mediterranean can be considered a counter Neohellenic category because it is one that has not—or at least, not yet—been attached to a particular nation.

Cyprus and Algeria as Mediterranean spaces embrace multiplicity—ethnic, religious, cultural—that defies the solidified ethnic binaries of Turks and Greeks, Arabs and Berbers. The instance of the Mediterranean connection of Cyprus with Venice reshapes the *enosis* [union] of Greece and Cyprus from a national into a Mediterranean link. Montis’s Cypriot-Venetian link also counters the Greek national *Μεγάλη Ιδέα* [Grand Idea] which according to Gourgouris is “interested in the political and national unification, annexation, incorporation and return of those regions that are linked to Greece because of ancient connections” (Gourgouris 1996, 147). The national ancestry is linear, with its origins in classical antiquity. Instead, Montis substitutes a “crooked” memory of indigenous immigrant lords and local laborers. Batistas is an offshoot [παρακλάδι] that enters Cyprus in the midst of that constructed ancestral continuity. Batistas enters history *un-traditionally*.

The life-narratives of these multi-colonized subjects, like their lives, are subjected to, and are the outcomes of, inescapable historical references and associations. Figures

from the past, historical and fictional, inhabit their autobiographies, creating lines of association of the self with a multiplicity of personalities who “lived” long before them. Storytelling facilitates the understanding of oppression as a cycle of interchangeable rulers and calls attention to hierarchies, tensions, and lost potentialities in the diversity that preceded ethnic homogenization in the nation-states of Cyprus and Algeria. Rulers alternate and take turns residing and exploiting the local population, forming a pattern of succession of power. Those elites who possessed the means of control in one empire, i.e. the Venetian, find ways to preserve it in the following, i.e. Ottoman. Autobiography breaks the cycle, “spreading” the forces “out on paper,” in Montis’s phrase, so that the subject may finally “find peace.”

## **Epilogue**

### **The Beginning of History**

#### **Odysseus's Tears**

As François Hartog suggests, what was “historiography” for the Greeks, and what for the moderns in the West would later become “history,” presupposed the epic: “Herodotus wished to revive Homer; what he became, ultimately, was Herodotus” (Hartog 2000, 388). The Trojan War, the subject of Homer’s epics, was the “axial” event, what constituted the Greeks as “Greeks” (Hartog 2000, 388-89). The Persian Wars, recounted in Herodotus, transformed the Trojans into Barbarians and the Achaean expedition into the first and decisive victory over Asia. Five centuries later, Virgil would rediscover for the Romans the very beginning of their history in the ashes of Troy and in the exile of Aeneas (Hartog 2000, 389). And nineteen centuries later, Hegel would still celebrate the Trojan War as the victory of Europe over “the Asiatic principle” (Hartog 2000, 389).

The meeting of Odysseus with the bard Demodocus in the *Odyssey*, where, for the first time, the fall of Troy is told, can be seen as the beginning, poetically speaking at least, of the category of history (Hartog 2000, 384). Hartog argues that, for the Greeks, ontologically, their presence in the world was not a question: it was self-evident. To be present, to be there, to see, and to know all go together (Hartog 2000, 386). In other

words, to witness or experience life and to signify its meaning were one and the same thing. Hartog does a close reading of the episode from the *Odyssey* when the bard Demodocus sang to Odysseus the story of his own adventure (Hartog 2000, 389). Hartog asks *for whom* is this first narrative a history? And this question, Hartog continues, is posed first to Odysseus, “because he is the only person who knows, from experience, that what has been sung by Demodocus is at once his own story and history” (Hartog 2000, 390). Odysseus’s reaction to this coalescence, Hartog says, is to cry. For Odysseus is *the witness* of the event (Hartog 2000, 390). Odysseus, when listening to his own story from Demodocus, says, “for all in due order you sing the fate of the Greeks / all what they did and endured and suffered, / as if you yourself were present, or heard it from another” (*Odyssey* 8, 487-492, in Hartog 2000, 390). This statement, according to Hartog, was interpreted and appropriated later as the definition of historiography. Odysseus’s statement was interpreted as if Odysseus, both actor and witness, saw Demodocus’s ability to say all, exactly as it happened, as the sure marker of the truth of the song (Hartog 2000, 390). It was as though Demodocus had himself been at Troy and now came to narrate Odysseus’s story almost identically to his experience (Hartog 2000, 390). The configuration of knowledge as spoken by the bard and recognized by Odysseus constitutes for Hartog a poetics of knowledge, designating a space that does not yet have a name (Hartog 2000, 390). Only a few centuries later would Herodotus fill in the space and name it: *historia* (Hartog 2000, 391).

Hartog addresses the question of Odysseus’ tears and wonders why Odysseus cried when the misfortunes of the Greeks were evoked. In contrast to the idea that Odysseus’s tears become a universal lament for the suffering of all victims of war and the

appropriation of the *Odyssey* as an allusion to other things, Hartog writes: “it seems to me that the weeping Odysseus is in mourning for himself: his tears are shed for himself. From the beginning of his wanderings [Odysseus]...is a missing person: neither dead nor alive, he has lost everything, even his name” (Hartog 2000, 391). Hartog does not perceive Odysseus as a heroic, masculine, glorious figure, but as a lost individual who has suffered. In the circumstance of his upcoming return home, to the real world, Odysseus hears himself celebrated by the songs of Demodocus under his glorious name (Hartog 2000, 392). Moreover as a famous man, Hartog says, Odysseus has a price to pay. “Odysseus finds himself in the terrible position of having to listen to the story of his adventures, told in the third person, as if he were absent, as if he were dead” (Hartog 2000, 392). “Right before he returns home to reunify with his past glory, he experiences a kind of death” (Hartog 2000, 392). Hartog asks, “Is Odysseus dead, is he alive?” This sort of death, Hartog says, is even more radical than his descent into Hades.

What Hartog seems to suggest is that to hear the story of oneself from someone else, which later came to be called *history*, is a kind of burial or death, metaphorically speaking. The limit of life and death is this transitory moment between being as experience and being as hero. This brief moment when Odysseus is *no longer* Odysseus and *not yet* Odysseus (before he returns home) is “a poetic translation of a painful discovery of the non-coincidence of oneself with oneself (or self with self?)” (Hartog 2000, 392). This is a discovery, Hartog says,

That does not yet have words to name it, but what Homer makes visible through tears. Is it not actually the experience of time itself that resides in the gap between otherness and identity? ... The shock of the temporal difference that separates oneself from oneself: not yet and no longer, the first encounter with “historicity?” (Hartog 2000, 392)

This historical moment is a moment of self-realization and of coincidence—a discovery of the self as experience and of the self as identified by others. Odysseus’s encounter with the story of his life sung by Demodocus, which causes his tears, is an encounter similar to those that the writers addressed in this dissertation have with themselves. Their “tears” come when faced with a separateness between themselves and their lives as history. They do not, however, experience this separateness as a temporal distance, as Hartog argues, but as a distance of their own confrontation with *themselves as other*, a recognition of that “self as other” as a self that they are.

### **The Tears of History**

In “The Schooner *Flight*” (1986, 345), Shabine, when leaving his home to set to his journey at sea, faces himself as double and he cries: “I look in the rearview and see a man / exactly like me, and the man was weeping / for the houses, the streets, the whole fucking island” (1986, 345). “The weeping man” in the singular is a combination of both selves, the one leaving and the one being left behind, weeping for the life on the island of which he is also part. Shabine, like Odysseus, weeps for himself whom, as he sees himself distancing from his old life, he knows as one man. Shabine’s previous doubleness, turning into a singularity, causes his tears. He is now coming to terms with the recognition that the corruption of the island is part of him, even if he is leaving. The old woman sweeping her yard whom Shabine encounters on his way ignores him: “The bitch looked through me like I was dead” (1986, 345). Shabine is invisible to her. Shabine’s weeping is also the product of the woman’s gaze that makes him invisible. As Shabine receives her erasing gaze, he has an experience similar to that of Odysseus,

listening to his story as though he were already dead. Her dismissing gaze of the man as dead is, in a metaphorical sense, the gaze of history.

In *Women of Kerinia*, the women keep their tears to themselves, hidden inside. The two friends Orthodoxia and Lenia, when saying goodbye upon Orthodoxia's departure for Greece, want to cry, but do not. "Χύνουμαι στην αγκαλιά της αυθόρμητα. Παρολίγο κλαμένες. Παρολίγο! Τελικά όχι, δεν κλαίμε τα δάκρυα μένουν στην λίμνη των υπολοίπων δακρύων μέσα μας" [I fall into her arms spontaneously. Both of us are almost crying. Almost! But we don't cry after all. Our tears remain in the lake of the rest of our tears inside us" (Katselli 1997, 74). These internal tears that are not externalized transform into an internal death: "Εμέτρησες πόσον θάνατον έχουμε μέσα μας; Πόσον έχεις εσύ μέσα σου; Τόσον που σε εμποδίζει να γράψεις βιβλίο για την Κερόνεια" [Have you counted the amount of death hidden inside us? How much death you have inside you? So much that it prevents your from writing a book about Kerinia] (Katselli 1997, 23). This death is of course schematic and might be better expressed with the Greek word μαράζι [heart/soul ache], which is a constant sadness that prevents Lenia, in particular, and Katselli from writing a book about Kerinia and their experience there. The solution to that impasse and the release of their tears comes in the form of an illustration on the cover of *Women of Kerinia*. Along with the autobiography that Pigi gives to Lenia, Pigi also gives her the cover of the book: "Μια μακέτα που έκαμα για εξώφυλλο. Αν σου αρέσκει χρησιμοποίησέ την, δώρον που μέναν!" [I have created a model for the book cover. If you like it, use it, gift from me!] (Katselli 1997, 301).

The cover of the book exposes these tears on the face of one of the women. The hidden tears, previously held inside, are now not only externalized but exhibited as part

of the disguised icons. The tears, too, are disguised as tears of pain, but they are the gift of tears of relief. The tears previously repressed, now released in their peculiar autobiography, reflect the relief for Katselli of having managed to confront *herself as other* as self.

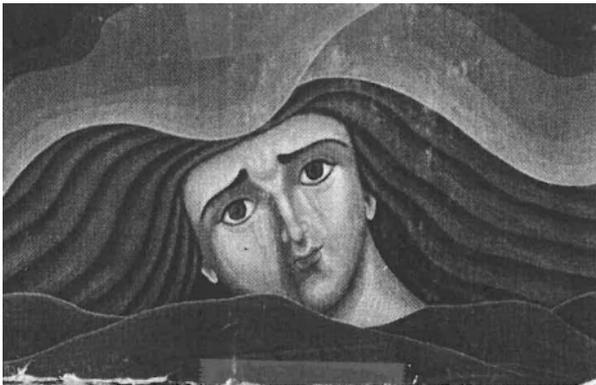


Figure 5-1 The tears of history

Costas Montis's tears are also kept inside. As he wonders about who his grandmother was, he also wonders about his inability to cry on the day of his grandmother's death. "Και δεν έκλαψα. Δεν ξέρω το λόγο, ίσως γιατί ήμουν επηρεασμένος απ' την αφήγηση της γιαγιάς για το θάνατο του αφέντη Μπατίστα...ήταν το πρώτο μου συναπάντημα με τον θάνατο. Όχι το θάνατο των αφηγήσεων, τον αληθινό και δικό μας θάνατο" (Montis 1987, 1374). [I did not cry. I don't know why, maybe because I was influenced by grandmother's narrative of the death of afenti Batistas...it was my first meeting with death. Not the death of the narratives, but the real death, our own death] (Montis 1986, 51). By dismissing the grandmother, Montis is also dismissing and missing a part of himself. His inability to cry reflects his inability to be a "seer" or "knower" of himself.

## History As Consolation

In a number of Montis's poems, history is explicitly posed as a problem, for it effaces the everyday lives of the ordinary people and instead focuses on events of larger European concern. Written with a tone of irony in the form of short, sharp verses, they point to history that tends to ignore "the unimportant" events of life. For instance, in "An Unimportant Neighborhood" he remarks:

Μια ασήμαντη φτωχογειτονιά  
Πέρασε δύο φορές η ιστορία, τρεις φορές,  
Και δε βρήκε τίποτα να σημειώσει.

[History passed twice, three times,  
through an unimportant poor neighborhood  
But did not find anything to take note of] (*Και τότε' εν ειναλίη Κύπρω* 1974)

Montis bluntly shows the tendency of "history," as a passerby, to find the life of Cyprus, as a "poor neighborhood," unworthy of particular notice. Montis's critique of history in the poem echoes less Said, Bhabha, and Spivak and more the Subaltern Studies Group, a school of historiography that emerged in India in the 1980s. These historians of the subaltern were interested in the history of the Indian peasantry. A leading figure of the group, Ranajit Guha (1922–), urged historians to engage creatively with the past "as a story of man's being in the everyday world. It is, in short, a call for historicity to be rescued from its containment in world-history" (Hunt 2008, 124).

Historicity for Guha is associated with "what is humble and habitual" and is more easily accessed through literature or poetry than through the usual documents of history, which emphasize elite politics and state concerns.<sup>116</sup> The ordinary men and women of the Indian countryside, he insisted, were "never annexed fully to the statist

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<sup>116</sup> See Ranajit Guha (2000) and Lynn Hunt. *Measuring time, Making History* (2008), pp. 124-125. For further reading Chakraparty, Dipesh. "History and the Politics of Recognition" (2007).

World-history narratives introduced in South Asia by the West.” Even though Montis and the Subaltern group seem to share similar perspectives on history, what differentiates Montis is his emphasis on a multi-layered past and on alternative registers of genealogy and kinship with connections across the Mediterranean Sea.

Beyond the postcolonial critique of history as a universal category, there are further problems of content and procedure identified by historians themselves and which relate to Montis’s work.<sup>117</sup> The term “historical imagination” has been used to refer to at least two distinct intellectual attitudes, one predictive and the other descriptive. In the first, imagination is possessed by all those who look to the past as a means of understanding their place in the contemporary world. It is the understanding of history as an indicator of the present and future, that is to say, predictive (Claus and Marriott 2012, 4). The second historical imagination has to do with the ability to look at material that is by definition foreign, if only in time, and to relate to it sufficiently to make claims about it in and for itself.

Montis keeps a distance from this descriptive sense history. He ironically points to the intrinsic difficulty of history to extract meaning out of a collection of evidence.<sup>118</sup>

Κι’ όλα τάγραφαν,  
Είχαν “ειδικούς” που τάγραφαν!  
Εκείνοι, βέβαια, δεν τόλεξαν “παραμύθι”  
“ιστορία” το λεγαν! (1982)

[They wrote everything,

---

<sup>117</sup> For R. G. Collingwood, imagining is simply a process we use to construct or re-construct pictures, ideas or concepts in our minds, and he points out that this process should not necessarily be correlated with either the fictitious or the real. “The historian’s picture of the past is...in every detail an imaginary picture” (1946, 245). In Hayden White’s view, beyond the surface level of the historical text there is a deep structural, or latent, content that is generally poetic and specifically linguistic in nature, the metahistorical element. See also Hayden White (1975).

<sup>118</sup> The poem reveals a critical perspective coming from historians themselves of history’s “conservative definition . . . as a ‘science’ that can capture the truth, a method of rational inquiry,” a scientific method for preserving national memory (Claus and Marriott 2012, 5).

they had “specialists” who wrote things down!  
They, of course, did not call it “a fairytale.”  
They called it “history”!] ]

The undertone of the poem is ironic and ambiguous. It starts as a critique of national history and ends up as an opening for opportunities for alternative definitions of history. The body of the written evidence the “specialists” call “history;” alternatively, it would have been called a “fairytale.” In fairytale there is no historical evidence, or it is evidence that is imagined, constructed by storytellers and listeners alike. History as fairytale moves in the realm of doubt and arbitrariness. By putting “history” in quotation marks, the poem holds history at an ironic distance from its meaning. Like a metaphor, history is extracted and abstracted, made into a poetic concept, “a fairytale.”

A fairytale, in Greek, is a παραμύθι, but παραμύθι is also a παραμυθία. Παραμυθία, from παρα and μύθος, is a story offered to someone else in consolation. In its active verbal form “to fairytale someone” να παραμυθιάζεις is to tell a story to someone close to you, who might be suffering. Να παραμυθιάζεις is to speak to someone else in consolation. History, here constructed as “fairytale,” is a substitute for what actually happened. It is a consoling lie. Because of its written form, history as a παραμυθία, is misinterpreted and instituted as “history” by “specialists” who solidify this doubtful story and this consolation as an absolute truth. Without acknowledging this fabulous and consoling aspect of the historical process, the poem tells us, “history” remains a metaphor, something other than itself. In all, through poetic utterance the poem reclaims the name of history, as a fairytale. Acknowledging history as “fairytale” leads to the understanding of the solidification of national boundaries, geographic and narratological, as an arbitrary praxis. History adopted as a scientific process draws on the power of

naming. The historians, professional readers of the past, name the fairytale “history” for if they called it a “fairytale” they or their stories would not be “important” or “noteworthy” for the nation.

Another untitled poem from 1960 offers a reading of the link between contemporary Cypriots and ancient ancestors.

Σοφοί άνθρωποι οι αρχαίοι μας πρόγονοι μά, ξέρω κι εγώ, κανένας δεν επέζησε.  
(1960)

[These ancient ancestors must have been indeed wise human beings. But, as far as I know, none of them survived].

This is one of Montis’s Nietzschean poems par excellence. The poem is clearly not criticizing the “ancient ancestors” for having died. But it is caustic about the tendency of history to create links with the dead while ignoring the living. Nietzsche’s seminal essay *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* (1874) advocates against the tendency of individuals, societies, and nations to dwell on the past at the expense of the present life. Nietzsche proposes a view of history as a way of to move “forward and not to remain still, if only we always just learn better to carry on history for the purposes of the living!” Nietzsche perceives this view of history as a way of serving humans and their lives, providing inspiration for creating new ideas, new works, new lives, new histories. “History,” Nietzsche tells us, “belongs to the living person: it belongs to him as an active and striving person; it belongs to him as a person who preserves and admires; it belongs to him as a suffering person in need of emancipation.” Brief as it is, Montis’s poem condemns the use of history defined by dead “ancestors.”

Another of Montis’s poems has a similar theme:

Εμένα οι πρόγονοί μου δεν ήταν απ’ αυτούς των αγγείων

Θ' απέφυγαν.  
Εμένα οι πρόγονοί μου δεν θάκαναν για απεικόνιση (1962).

[My ancestors were not those of the ancient vases.  
They would have avoided such a thing.  
My ancestors would not do for depiction]

The poem reflects on the experience of confrontation with “history”—history that, in this case, takes the form of “ancient vases.” The poem urges the reader to ask the question, how do you regard historical artifacts? What sort of reflection does that confrontation evoke in you? The poem posits the absence of Montis’s ancestors, presumably Greek Cypriots, from the most visible sites of world history. To avoid being visible in world history is not necessarily to avoid being part of history altogether, but to avoid that part of history which does not represent you, that which you do not feel close to. By avoiding aligning with that which is alien, we create a history of our own. History as avoidance, marked by the personal choice not to be part of these depictions, is what empowers Montis to reclaim the ability to imagine his own ancestors, rather than to accept a pre-given image of who they may be.

Even though Montis’s poem is in the affirmative—it does not, after all, ask questions in any grammatical sense—it is in one sense interrogative. Because of its epigrammatic, abbreviated form, it preserves the gaps and absences of history and forces readers to ask their own questions and fill in those gaps themselves. By doing so, readers reconstruct their own sense of history. This way of *historein* gives the opportunity to the national subject to imagine who their ancestors may be. This imaginative, “inquiring” process renders Montis’s poem historical and affirms historical imagination as equivalent to poetic imagination.

The critic Afrodite Athanasopoulou rightly suggested that the target of Montis's critique of history was not necessarily the "ancient heritage of the ancestors [and] the tradition of Hellenism" itself, but different political positions that use "Hellenism" for ideological purposes. These ideologies, she continues, "create a closed circuit of two poles: the worship of the heroes (the 'glory') and the worship of forms [τυπολατρία] (the 'mimetism') of the ancestors" (Athanasopoulou 2008, 180). According to Athanasopoulou, Montis's poetry criticizes the structural logic of the past as glorious and as the instigator for ideologies. Similarly, Montis's poetry constitutes an indirect critique of the colonial discourse that valorized Cyprus's classical antiquity through an Orientalist and romantic vision of its past that led to a national understanding of the past as a structural logic, a typology for the purposes of national and political ideologies. The verse, "My ancestors would not do for such a depiction," destabilizes the veneration of classical antiquity not only as a political ideology but also a colonial and national one.

Another poem, published in 1976, two years after the Turkish invasion that led to the partition of Cyprus, presents history as an occupying force:

Δώστε μου επιτέλους ένα τετράγωνο γής  
Απ' όπου δεν πέρασε η ιστορία,  
Δώστε μου επιτέλους ένα τετράγωνο ελεύθερης γής (*Κύπρος Εν Αυλίδι* 1976).

[Give me, at last, a square of land  
That history did not pass.  
Give me, at last, a square of free land.]

This poem reveals the lack of available space, "a square of land" where the "I" can articulate its own narrative as the history of the present. This poem presents history as a force sweeping through the land and by doing so enslaving it, leaving not even "a square" free. History defines and determines the land, and consequently the people of the land.

And yet, the repetition of “give me” suggests that the “I” looks for a space to make a history to call its own, reflecting the desire of the poetic subject to find a niche to articulate the narrative of his own life.

### **History and Autobiography**

Scholars of postcolonial autobiography have focused their research on categories of identity such as gender (Edwards 2011; Cheref 2010; Donadey 2001; Smith & Watson 1992; Lionnet 1989), language (Sankara 2011; Kelly 2005) and indigenous or emergent modernities (Holden 2008). Scholars often engage in discussion on the relation of autobiography to history writing. This scholarly engagement is the outcome of a larger interest in autobiographical works and their relations to western autobiography, their reinvention of modernity, and the generic boundaries of autobiography between history and non-history. Bart Moore-Gilbert, for example, in his *Postcolonial Life Writing: Culture, Politics and Self-Representation* (2009) calls attention to the discursive space which postcolonial life-writing provides for troubling the borderlines between autobiography and history. He reads Nirad C. Chauduri's *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951) as a historiography in disguise, as “more of an exercise in descriptive ethnology than autobiography” (Gilbert 2009, 78-9). Chauduri's *The Autobiography*, Gilbert says, aspires to the objectivity more commonly associated with traditional history than autobiography (Gilbert 2009, 78-9). Gilbert is mostly concerned with autobiography as a genre and the pressure of history “on traditional conceptions of autobiographical [generic] boundaries” (2009, 78). He argues that a number of authors, such as Gandhi, James, Soyinka, Morgan, Djébar, Allende, and Behan, challenge the

dominant historiography of (neo)colonialism, while others, such as McKay, Behan, El Saadawi, Suleri, and Djebbar, provide a critique of national elite historiography (2009, 82). Their approaches reflect a range of emphases and techniques more commonly associated with “people’s history” or “history from below,” rather than being consonant with traditional forms of history.

First-wave scholars of autobiography have adopted approaches that excluded its being a historical account in its totality. For them, autobiography can be a source for history, a supplement to history, but not itself a history. In other words, there is a clear-cut distinction between the two genres. Georg Misch (1878-1965) argued that “autobiography provides the foundation of public forms of history for it encompasses them as part of the autobiographical narrative” (Gilbert 2009, 77). George Gusdorf (1912-2000) argued that the autobiographer locates his account of private motives in relation to the objective course of events (Gilbert 2009, 77). Laura Marcus suggested that autobiography studies since their inception have expended considerable effort on the project of rescuing autobiography from incorporation into history and history-writing. Similarly to Marcus, James Olney described as naive the idea that an autobiography can approach the condition of an objective historical account (2009, 77). But these discussions ignore the possibility that autobiography can constitute an interrogation of history, exploring and uncovering, through the search for “self,” the buried or unspoken genealogies that complicate those of the “nation.” The texts of this dissertation engage the media of the historian and the poet to investigate the lost pieces of their life archives—broadly defined—to explore who they are, who is their family, who are their ancestors, what is the local history of their people.

In their comprehensive study *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson are attentive to the liquid generic boundaries of life-writing, and they argue that “autobiographical narrators establish for their reader a different set of expectations from those established in either the verisimilitude or suspension of disbelief of the novel or the verifiable evidence and professional norms of biography and history writing” (2010, 14). Such expectations, however, arise from the tradition of the autobiographical genre and other literary forms. The writers studied here confound these expectations by breaking the conventions of genre. Smith and Watson also argue that life-writing “privileges a temporal framework based on the individual author’s lifespan, whereas historical narrative takes place in collective time” (2010, 13). However, the autobiographies discussed here nearly all locate their life narratives in a temporal framework extending beyond that of their biological lives. The “arbitrary and concrete” personal time of experience in life-writing does not have to engage the moments of shared experience that historians identify as significant in the collective time of an era, nation, or culture, or to present “the big picture” expected of a historian (2010, 13).

In his *Autobiography and Decolonization: Modernity, Masculinity and the Nation State* (2008), Philip Holden observes that national autobiographies offer unique possibilities as an arena where “the micronarratives of the literary text and the metanarratives of nation and history meet” (Holden 2008, 9, 7). Analyzing autobiographies of postcolonial leaders such as Nehru, Mandela, and others as national autobiographies, Holden argues they display the manner in which culture becomes gendered and embedded within the bodies of citizen-subjects. These national

autobiographies make us “aware of histories of culture and the manner in which cultural identities are bound up with the stories of development, modernization, and capitalism. They offer us the possibility of writing a history of our present, of coming to know the ways in which narrative can make and unmake social imaginaries, so that what seems solid now may not always be so” (Holden 2008, 209).

In this dissertation I have similarly aimed to demonstrate the historicity of post-colonial autobiography in the Mediterranean context, be it geographical or conceptual. In examining how the postcolonial autobiographical subjects interrogate and reinvent history when writing their life story, I have sought to show their rejection of the colonial and national historical projects of their countries. My focus on islands, and in particular on Cyprus, has brought out the ambiguous connectivities which mask colonial or imperial expansion, and the assertion of different connectivities across time, languages, cultures, and literatures. Even as they may be seen as fictional, a step away from history (*istorima*), these autobiographies undeniably move within the realm of historical thinking, claiming that space for themselves and their subjects.

As I have sought to show, poetics can thus be a historical medium. In life-writing, the ability to imagine creatively, to reclaim and repossess historical knowledge becomes the self-constituting act of the subject. In this poetic definition of history, humans create history, rather than being subject to it. Such autobiography contains life's internal ruptures, its ambiguous or hidden moments, its multiple pasts. It is malleable and mutable. Autobiography becomes less a generic category and more an approach and practice that helps us think about new ways of doing history, ways that place the human subject at the center. History and self are not transcendental categories outside the text,

but categories internal to the narrative that configures them.

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