COSMOPOETICS OR COSMOPOLITICS? A PERSPECTIVE FROM A LEVANTINE ISLAND

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Abstract

This essay wants to reclaim the critical potential of the cosmopolitan idea in Mediterranean antinquity. Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers advocate the term cosmopolitic to question post-Kantian, post-Enlightenment, or modernist rationality, taking issue with the cosmopolitan idea derived from a cosmopolitan law introduced in Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, 1795. In the name of one common world, the consequence of one universal idea of the cosmopolitan, works against practices, and/or legislates against different kinds of worlds. The world is not naturally one world; there are many worlds and many natures as there are also many perceptions of the idea of the cosmopolitan with its politics and its poetics. Rather than replace the word cosmopolitan, I would reclaim the original critical potential embedded in the idea of cosmopolitanism. If we probe and de-layer the term and its uses, it brings into symbiosis and uneasy coupling of the cosmos with the polis, a coupling that is tense and conflicting, which calls for a cosmopoetics and a cosmopolitics in the interstitial space created by this fractious and fractured relationship, which requires mediation by its human and non-human agents. The aporia that arises in this uneasy relationship will shape the strategies and tactics of mediation, and how we conceive, construct and imagine the cosmos and the polis will shape our cosmopoetics and our cosmopolitics. With reference to ancient texts, contemporary critical theory, and the author's own experience as a native of the divided island of Cyprus, the essay explores what kind of politics and poetics we create in response to the friction between the cosmos and the polis. We observe the cosmos, and the cosmos looks back at us. It hides from us while simultaneously revealing itself to us., as does an object of art.

Key Words: Cosmopolitan, Cosmopoetics, Cosmopolitics, Cynics, Stoics, Bakhtin, Braudel, Blanchot, Deleuze, Cavafy, Pamuk, Cyprus

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If I were to choose, as Bruno Latour (2004) asks us to do, between cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitics, I would tend to advocate for the cosmopolitan. This is not to refute the ideas and concerns raised by Bruno Latour and Isabelle Stengers as advocates of the term cosmopolitics; they wish to question post-Kantian, post-Enlightenment, or modernist rationality, taking issue with the cosmopolitan idea derived from a cosmopolitan law introduced in Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, 1795. In the name of one common world, the consequence of one universal idea of the cosmopolitan, works against practices, and/or legislates against different kinds of worlds. The world is not naturally one world; there are many worlds and many natures, as there are also many perceptions of the idea of the cosmopolitan with its politics and its poetics. Rather than replace the word cosmopolitan, I would reclaim the original critical potential embedded in the idea of cosmopolitanism. If we probe and de-layer the term and its uses, it brings into symbiosis an uneasy coupling of the cosmos with the polis, a coupling that is tense and conflicting, which calls for a cosmopoetics and a cosmopolitics in the interstitial space created by this fractious and fractured relationship, which requires mediation by its human and non-human agents. The aporia that arises in this uneasy relationship will shape the strategies and tactics of mediation, and how we conceive, construct and imagine the cosmos and the polis will shape our cosmopoetics and our cosmopolitics. The aporia then is not on whether we replace the cosmopolitanism with cosmopolitics, but in what kind of politics and poetics we create in response to the friction between the cosmos and the polis. Adrienne Rich approaches the idea of the cosmos lyrically in her tribute to the Hubble Space Telescope': 'the ex-stasis of galaxies /so out from us there's no vocabulary /but mathematics and optics /equations letting sight pierce through time /into liberations, lacerations of light and dust.' (2005). We observe the cosmos but we are also part of it, and the cosmos looks back at us. It hides from us while simultaneously revealing itself to us, as does an object of art.

I would want to return and reclaim the cosmopolitan as a discourse of dissent, as a critical voice challenging the power and authority of the polis. Diogenes the Cynic purportedly was the first to use the term. When asked where he was from, he answered he was a 'cosmopolite'— a citizen of the cosmos. Diogenes brings in the cosmos to challenge the truth of the polis. By saying that the cosmos is my polis he is both making a statement in favour of the cosmos and against the polis. As the story goes, when Alexander the Great visited him as he became curious about his philosophy, Diogenes, speaking from the barrel

where he dwelt, asked Alexander to step aside as his shadow interfered with his direct access to the sunlight. There is a productive tension between the cosmos and the polis. The attribute Cynic (dog-like), given to Diogenes because of his impoverished and bohemian style of life, transgresses the boundaries of an anthropocentric humanism, through a performative poetics (or politics?) of assuming the role of a dog. He is critically engaging in the failures of the polis and breaking its boundaries, not through direct participation in its politics, but through performative intervention that transgresses the polis. He pits the boundless cosmos against the boundaries of the polis, in his gruff style, which is why he was called a Cynic, the etymology of which is the ancient Greek word for dog. Diogenes is figuratively a dog, not literally, and I would therefore argue that he brings a theatrical performance in the practice of everyday life. It is said that he masturbated in the market place and pissed on a man who called him a dog.

This is a poetics of performance (not a mimetic poetics) that probes the tense relation between object qua event qua polis and its shifting qualities, as the 'event' is caught between our experiential perception, and an unknowable cosmos that precedes and exceeds human experience, but we attempt to access it in a figurative language of mediation. The task of cosmopoetics is to fuse different modalities of our sense of worldly belonging, expanding our economies of seeing, and stretching the boundaries between limit and possibility. Diogenes and the School of Cynics he inspired include the satirical writing of Mennipus of Gadara that became known as Menippean satire. This inspired Lucian of Samosata (a Syrian who wrote in Greek) whose dystopian fiction *A True Story*, tests the boundaries of the notion of the real and the 'true' in philosophy and in literature. Lucian in turn influenced the writing of Apuleius. Apuleius, from the North African Roman province of Madauros, was fluent in Greek and Latin, and travelled and studied extensively in the East Mediterranean. In his masterpiece *Metamorphosis* aka *The Golden Ass*, the protagonist is metamorphosed into an ass as a result of a clumsy experiment in witchcraft and thereafter perceives human society through the ass's perceptions until he is finally redeemed and becomes a devotee of the goddess Isis in Rome. This highly influential Latin comic novel is remarkable for its polyphonic performance plays with different linguistic and literary registers. Bakhtin associated the Menippean satire with the carnivalesque and polyphonic, and traces the lineage of the form through transformational moments in European culture from the ancients to the moderns, and gives special attention to the work of Dostoevsky.

I believe that when Stengers claims the term cosmopolitics, her definition would be better served by cosmopoetics. When she states that cosmopolitical proposal is 'idiotic', she is borrowing the figure of the idiot from Deleuze, who took it from Dostoevsky, and thereby seeking out the performative function of art as a mode of social intervention. The idiot resists the common or consensual way, not because he has an alternative to propose, but because he senses 'there is something more important' (Stengers 2005: 994), although he does not know himself what the great force is. As a result, he becomes 'idiotic', or a producer of interstice, signalling the fractures, frictions and imperfections of the polis, signalling its dangers, and inciting its hidden cosmopolitics.

Artists and intellectuals have played key roles at the intersection of culture and state, and in the mediation of political demands and cultural desire. However, this role is not unambiguous as the processes of mediation are not simple or transparent. Moreover, the relationship the intelligentsia and artists have with culture and state may veer between a bohemian condition and a Mandarin status. Are they agents of cultural change or do they articulate its effects? Cosmopoetics and cosmopolitics are inextricably linked. To what extent are artists able to disinvest or distance themselves from the state and state culture in a quest for autonomy in art? The state itself, through its academic institutions, museums and learned societies, confirms the virtue of their artistic and intellectual labour. The neo-liberal state cedes some discursive legitimacy to intellectuals and artists, but increasingly rewards the services of technocrats rather than intellectuals who will make a bridge between state and people. Culture and language are caught between the nation state, which nationalises and territorialises, and the flow of organised and disorganised capital of globalisation, which is often misappropriated as a mechanism for the cosmopolitan. Embedded within the cosmos is the feeling of incompleteness, and whatever promise it may offer to the human may never be fulfilled. It is unknowable and unruly, and the deeper our sense of our cosmic belonging, the deeper our sense of estrangement, and our aporia of what it means to belong to the world and belong to a polis.

Stengers, following Deleuze, seeks to offer an immanent critique, situated within the societal rules and practices she is seeking to change. Deleuze (1969), in developing a perspective on cosmopolitanism, in his *Logic of Sense*, turns to a speculative reading of the Stoics to reclaim the cosmos as a constituent part in the ontology of the polis. He discusses the Stoic theory of time, and affirms the Stoic ethics 'not to be unworthy of what happens to us'. His reading

can only be speculative since the writings of Zeno, the founder of the Stoic School, have been lost and we know his thinking through the citations of his followers and the discourse it opened up in the Hellenistic period through the Roman period, most notably in Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. It is said that it was after experiencing the catastrophe of a shipwreck that the merchant Zeno turned to philosophy and the ascetic life as a response to the unplanned rhythm of the cosmos. Zeno was a Phoenician from the polyglot ancient port and city kingdom of Citium, in Cyprus. After being shipwrecked in Athens, he met Craton of Thebes, a philosopher of the School of Cynics who became his mentor. Zeno wrote in Greek and was well known as a philosopher and teacher in Athens, yet he apparently refused Athenian citizenship and preferred to remain in his native city. For him, the cosmos, the *pyr technikon* (the fire that creates), was the source of everything. Unlike Diogenes who turned away from the polis, Zeno believed that as social animals, we inevitably participate in the life of the polis. However, our life choices and ethics in the polis should attempt to be in harmony with the cosmos. Though appropriated into Greek philosophy, he was a Phoenician just like the Phoenician princess Europa, who gives her name to the continent, who was abducted by Zeus in the form of a white bull, and carried off to Crete (bypassing Cyprus, it seems).

As the most well known philosopher from my native island of Cyprus, Zeno may serve as a cornerstone for reflection on the island's cultural topography: an island in the Levant, the Middle Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, which in Turkish is called Akdeniz (the White Sea in contrast to the Black Sea). A place I was taken from, longed to return to, and always looking for a way out or a way in. More of an interstitial space than a nation, the buffer zone, dead zone or no man's land that divide the island, shape its consciousness and sense of belonging. Cyprus is an insular example and metonymy of the state of the region and the politics and economy of global modernity, and a fault line for its tensions and conflicts. Separatist nationalisms have characterised the Cypriot political and cultural mainstream during the second half of the 20th century, and post-colonial politics have been marked by incompatible and shifting teleologies. One may recall that Archbishop Makarios, the first President of the post-colonial Republic, played a leading role in the Non-aligned Movement, and that less than half a century later, in 2004, the Republic became a European Union member state while also remaining a Commonwealth nation.

As the easternmost region of the European Union, it is a chiasmus of the East in the West or the West in the East, an overlay and rift of cultural imaginaries. The island has links to

multiple locations of the East: it had strong links with the Eastern communist bloc and links to Eastern Orthodoxy and the Islamic East of the territories close to its shores. Economic developments in the last two decades have attracted immigrants from Eastern Europe, South Asia, the Philippines, refugees from Lebanon and Syria, and, in the Turkish-occupied north of the island, Anatolian settlers have been brought in from Turkey. In Cyprus**,** a unified sense of national identity has not held together in the post-colonial state**,** as is testified by ethnic conflict in the 1960s**,** and the de facto partition of the island in 1974**,** when Turkey invaded and occupied the north of the island. The challenge is to find a cosmopoetics that de-reifies un-dialectical divisions and imperial geopolitical discourse, resists the pressure on both the existing socioeconomic entity, the Europe of capital, and its cultural-cum-political support, the Europe of the Enlightenment, which have re-inscribed the political and cultural space with the forces of historical conflict.

After the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, the European Union (EU) took a turn to eastward expansion. The issue at stake is how to recover or reinvent the East or the multiple Easts that are Europe's irrevocable origins and antagonists, whose layers have drifted and converged on this island. An article from *Forbes Magazine*, which I read several years ago, entitled 'Fantasy Island', gives a sardonic and scathing perspective on the island's cultural positioning. Once part of the Byzantine Empire, Cyprus is a great place to make things disappear, the reporter states. The island of Aphrodite has always been a place of intrigue, he continues. The article depicts the island as a haven for dirty money and sex slavery. He points out that the island is just 150 miles from Beirut, closer to the Middle East than to Europe, a Mecca for money laundering, arms trading, and Russians of immense wealth but dubious provenance who were drawn by the low tax rate, and a shared religious heritage with the island.

The division of the island in 1974 led to the displacement of 40 per cent of the population**,** when Turkey invaded and occupied the northern 37 per cent of the island**,** subsequently declaring unilaterally a separate independent Republic (The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus). While not recognised internationally as a separate Republic, it is a de facto partition. The supranational force of EU membership and the impact of globalisation brought a political turn, which led to the opening of the checkpoints allowing people to cross the divide in 2003 for the first time since 1974. The crossings aroused an uncanny feeling of the intensely familiar and the strange in an uncomfortable plenitude with a vague promise of

fulfilment. Many dislocated islanders, eager to cross to the other side, lined up in droves on foot or in their cars to cross and find their lost homes and their lost villages.

This was not enough to eradicate the politics of ethnic nationalism, nor the geopolitics that incited the violent division in the first place. Nonetheless, it was an important turning point for life on the island. The bewilderment at this moment of disjuncture created possibilities of a life lived differently. Crossing the line would impact on forms of sociation and on everyday life. The opening up enabled new encounters between writers, artists and intellectuals from across the divide, and the first year especially was brimming with literary and artistic activity, seeking a poetics that would bring a new turn to the experiential economies of sense and affect. It was a moment of crisis to uncover constructions of discursive dominance and the paradoxical embodiments that disclose the enigma of memory.   A space was opened to chase ghosts, traversing the deathly places of struggle on a ruptured island to seek moments of memory, beyond knowledge, that would come like flashes of illumination in the undecided subjectivity of a traumatised borderland nation. Imagination was caught between a nostalgia for something already dead-and-buried, and a nostalgia for a future anticipated but yet to unfold, and to be told.

The most eminent historian of the Mediterranean, Fernand Braudel, observes that islands are subjected to historical pressures that push them at once 'far ahead and far behind […] general history,' dividing them, 'often brutally, between the two opposite poles of archaism and innovation' (Braudel 1973: 150). Braudel (in addition to a historical vision) has opened up my imagination of what I conceive as cosmopoetics. In expounding his notion of the 'longue durée', Braudel emphasises that 'It is not duration itself that is the product of our mind, but rather the fragmentation of duration' (Braudel 1972: 36). The memory of the longue durée emerges through fractures, which must also be conceived historically.   Fractures give breathing space for the conjuncture or 'court durée', also referred to by historians as the 'event'.   Artistic forms like events find time density when read within an economy of seeing in the 'longue durée'.   Memory of the long duration makes available ways for cultures and societies to imagine a future.   The short duration demands a rapid turnaround of information. Braudel (2001) asks us to recall that this quasi Inland Sea is immeasurably older than the oldest of the human histories it has cradled, and may be fully understood if we view it in the long perspective of its geological history, its shape, its architecture, the basic realities of its life, yesterday, today or tomorrow, to intimate our destiny as historical beings.

The idea of the long duration might be understood in literary terms in relation to Bakhtin's notion of 'great time' (*bolshoye vremya*): 'Everything that belongs only to the present dies along with the present' (Bakhtin 1986: 4). While physical geography sets the framework of the long duration, for the artist, poet and seer, one would need to speak of the traces in deep memory of the very long duration or the invisible world beyond historical memory. Memory and economy of seeing are shaped by moments of fractures and ruptures, arrivals and departures, exits and entries. This creates a situation of not knowing which time one is in, as found in Bloch's (1991) famous concept of *Ungleichzeitigkeit* (temporal incommensurability). The spatialisation of the temporal brings dissimilarities next to each other, which call for a transcultural poetics that opens up our relation-making capacity, the possibility to recover what might have been denied or seem obsolete, and transform our experience of worldliness through a process of 'unforgetting'. Unforgetting is a word coined by Heidegger by deconstructing the Greek word for 'aletheia', meaning truth. The root 'lethe' means forgetfulness, which is negated by the prefix 'a'. The work or art comes to presence through an experience of unforgetting. Similarly, in *The Space of Literature*, Maurice Blanchot suggests that if nature offers as well as denies itself to utilisation, then it forgets itself in the real, and the experience of art is 'is always original and at all moments a beginning', and 'the mirage of the future's inaccessible truth' (1989: 229), and thus intervenes in the reigning order of experience.

Blanchot like Braudel is pointing to excess in the experience of nature, as the original experience, as what is remembered with an uncanny and transpersonal or communal memory. Now that the globe has moved into the centre of historical gravity, we must reclaim the worlding capacities of the cosmos in the worldly text against the forces of the inexorable movement of capital in the globalisation process. Cosmopoetic forces inevitably will get caught up in geopolitical forces.

For example, Orhan Pamuk's *My Name is Red* (2001)was coincidentally published a week before 9\11, which no doubt affected its reading within the so-called 'clash of civilizations'. However, I began to read Pamuk with intimacy, affective tonality and absorption after 23 April 2003— a date perhaps not known to anyone outside Cyprus—a week after the Republic of Cyprus had signed the *acquis communitaire* and Turkey followed with the move of partially opening up the check points across the island's divide for the first time since the war of 1974, which brought about the island's partition. This unexpected political opening

unleashed a flood of memory and sudden movement of people crossing borders. The crossings after three decades aroused an uncanny feeling of intimate estrangement, an uncomfortable plenitude with a vague promise of fulfilment. The atmosphere for a while was pervaded with *huzun*, a word I learnt from reading Pamuk's *Istanbul (2005)*, to describe an ambiguous form of melancholy, a kind of negative capability when we know that we do not know or we face the possibility of the impossible, subjectivity grounded in uncertainty. This paradoxical absent centre recalls the ontology of the imagination in the work of Ibn 'Arabi, the 13th century Andalucian poet and philosopher who was concerned with the role of the imagination in the search for divine truth. He approaches the experience of perplexity (in Arabic, *hayrah*) as a path to truth in the imagination beyond the restrictions of reason. In the eye of reason, ideas may be either true or false, whereas imagination perceives notions as images, whose truth can be both true and false, and at the same time neither true nor false. It incites *hayrah*, a perplexity that disables our rational faculty and enables an opening of a visual economy. In *al-Futûhât*, he talks about imagination as one of the heart's two eyes. The one eye that is *qur'ân* unifies and brings together, whereas the other eye that is *furqân* differentiates (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-arabi/. Accessed August 15, 2017). The word *khayâl* (synonymous with the term *mithâl*) means image, shadows, dream and vision: for Ibn 'Arabî, images bring together two sides and unite them as one. It is the mirror as well as the object that it reflects, and neither the mirror nor the object. So any image I may have is both true and false, neither true nor false. There is a doubling in the economies of seeing, which seeks a moment of transformation in the mediation.

Orhan Pamuk frequently quotes Ibn 'Arabi (for example, in the opening epigraph of *The Black Book*, 1994), evoking the mystic and mysterious realm that is hidden from those who are confined to a world of what they believe to be empirical fact. In Pamuk's *My Name is Red,* everything unfolds around the image, enacting an allegorical process where the real is somewhere between the ineffable source and its reflection. Ibn 'Arabi and his ontology of the imagination take on flesh in Pamuk's novel, creating what Bakhtin would call a chronotope in its 'intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed' (Bakhtin 1981: 258). These two writers, from opposite ends of the Mediterranean, come together in a chronotope, placing in counterpoint the world of a writer before the conquest/defeat of al-Andalus with the world after the conquest/defeat of Constantinople in 1452. Pamuk explores dominant discourses of colonialism, orientalism,

secularism, nationalism, and modernity, giving particular attention to the mediating role of art and literature. The *kalem* (the pen) of the writer and the illustrator is the potential of art to accommodate or give agency to heterogenous desires, where the constraints of ideology and politics fail, and by extension explores the relationship between poetics and politics. Göknar (2013) argues that by introducing Ottoman Islamic and Sufi forms into the Turkish Republican novel, Pamuk is caught in the East/West quagmire, often misread in Turkey as being neo-Orientalist, or simply not Turkish enough, but writing for the West. Some saw the awarding of the Nobel prize as a political statement. His admirers saw it as a good choice at bad times, while Turkish nationalists denounced the choice of Pamuk as belittling national values for his recognition of the Armenian genocide.

I read *My Name is Red* as a project of re-imagining the region and displacing the nation as the default category of analysis, so as to explore the polyglot cities and empires with their ethnic and religious diversity that comprise the pre- and early modern Mediterranean. How might we see times before knowledge became nationalised, and what possibilities does it have for our world-making capacities? The novel is set in Istanbul at the end of the 16th century (just after Cyprus became part of the Ottoman Empire). It triggered my reflection on the island's Oriental past within a present that has stubbornly moved the island toward Western Europe and the EU. I wondered what collusions there are in aesthetic taste and social values that may have been denied by the differences and contests of administration, hierarchy and sovereignty over land and territory. The novel focuses on short narratives that are forms of ekphrasis or commentaries on issues of style and representation in the golden age of Ottoman art and its various layers of cultural influence from Persia, India and China, and more provocatively Frankish, which 'use the science of perspective and the methods of the Venetian masters'. The novel essentially explores worldliness through an economy of seeing, with reference to aesthetic and philosophical or religious debates. The birth of new style is the result of years of disagreements, jealousies, rivalries, and studies in colour and painting. The paintings reveal divine perfection in their human imperfection. In the task of infinite replication, each miniature is a metonym, an incomplete partial and perpetual challenge, layering desire for a cosmic or paradisiacal vision always flawed with the singularity of style, which renders the originary divine vision untranslatable. The paintings are not about melancholy and regret for a lost vision, but the impossible desire to depict the world as god saw it.

The literature of the region has been shaped across a spectrum of languages and trans-cultural relations, which may range from confrontation, indifference or mutual exclusion, to creative engagement, depending on the social and cultural processes and historical moments. In post-colonial Cyprus, literary practice has reflected the tenacity of the nation and its presumptions about the homogeneity of language, ethnicity and religion as the institutionalised category of analysis. Cyprus became a British protectorate and was eventually annexed by Britain at the outbreak of World War I. In the transition from the Ottoman to the British Empire, the change of power affected hierarchical relationships. An identity system based on Moslems and Christians turned into an identity based on ethnic Turks and ethnic Greeks, and this sowed the seed of separate nationalist teleology. During the first decades of British rule, the combination of colonialism and Cypriot diasporic consciousness brought about its own kind of cross-fertilisation and intervention in the island's culture. There was a Cypriot diaspora in Egypt, Asia Minor and the Levant, which engaged with Eastern languages and cultures. The newly arrived English education and culture may have given further impetus to knowledge of the East through British Orientalism. In the 1880s, the first decade of British colonialism, Alexandrian Greeks gifted the first printing press to the island.

However, these communities of the Eastern Mediterranean Cypriot diaspora dissolved in the course of the 20th century for various reasons. Most notably the Greco–Turkish war of 1919–22, which led to the Treaty of Lausanne recognising Turkish sovereignty over Asia Minor, and agreement to an exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey— deracinating two million people from their homelands. Also, the aftermath of World War I saw the rise of Egyptian nationalism and the beginning of the exodus of Egypt's community of Egyptianised foreigners known as the Mutanassirun. This culminated with the Suez crisis of 1956, which led to the expulsion and exodus of most of the remaining communities of Europeans and Jews. Civil war and strife in Lebanon from 1975 to 1990 caused an exodus of one million people from the country.

A few years ago, I was intrigued to discover one of Cavafy's posthumously published poems. Cavafy, born in Alexandria, was a cosmopolitan Hellene whose family hailed from Constantinople (officially re-named Istanbul in post-Ottoman Turkey in the 1920s). In his 1914 poem, 'Returning Home from Greece' (1990: 110), Cavafy expresses post-orientalist resistance (*avant la lettre*) in longing for a homecoming in an Orient that the new territorialised nation excluded. It was written the year World War I began marking the demise

of the Ottoman Empire and the shrinking of the Hellenic diaspora in the Eastern Mediterranean. Cavafy employs the classical rhetorical trope of apostrophe and addresses Hermippus. We assume this is Hermippus of Smyrna, peripatetic philosopher and follower of Callimachus, and who (like Cavafy) was an Asia Minor Hellene who lived in Alexandria. Here Hermippus silently listens to the poet's voice:

<div align="center">

So we are close to arrival Hermippus

The day after tomorrow, the captain said;

But now we sail on our own sea,

Waters of Cyprus, Syria, and Egypt,

Waters of our beloved homelands,

Why so silent? Ask your heart

Didn't you rejoice

The further away we sailed from Greece?

Why fool ourselves?

This certainly wouldn't be proper of Hellenes.

Let's own up to the truth;

We are also Hellenes—what else are we?

But with Asian loves and emotions of Asia,

But with loves and emotions

sometimes estranged by Hellenism.

The blood of Syria and Egypt

That flows through our veins

Let us honour and display.

(translated by Stephanides and Karayiannis 2015: xix-xxi).

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There is a paradox in this homecoming: the boat is not taking them to Greece, but away from Greece. This is a departure from national territory, and a process of artistic remembering (or unforgetting) that weaves its narrative of identification through the waters between Cyprus, Syria and Egypt. The poem thus embraces kinship with Asia, and an Asian Hellenism estranged by the Hellenism of European post-Enlightenment, which triggered the emergence

of the modern Greek nation state. The poem unfolds new centres of gravity in one's spatial vision, and a feeling of intimate estrangement, as if anticipating a loss of affective affinities and cultural symbiosis in the Asian roots of Hellenism. Pamuk (2013) writes about Cavafy (whom he read in translation a century later) with the admiration and affection of a fellow Istanbulite, rekindling an affective affinity a century after Cavafy, and with a sense of loss for the departure or expulsion of the city's religious minorities. The affective gesture disentangles the historical forces of the nation state to reveal a moment that came before, while at the same time suggesting the possibility of a new moment of becoming.

Given the multitude of ways in which the world has insinuated itself in the configuration of our ostensibly minor island, and ways that we, with our geo-cultural specificities, have insinuated ourselves into the world, how do we renegotiate the tensions that short circuit the relationship between inside and outside to create an island of layered transculturation? What are the theoretical, historiographic, geographical, ethical and hermeneutic problems relating to questions that advance the claim to the imperative of what Walter Mignolo (2000) calls 'border thinking'? Ultimately, this means to seek a new poetics of the imaginary and the imagined, seeing them as social facts, as political and ethical ways of renegotiating the tensions between incorporation and dispersion in the process of transformation.

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