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Ill-Defined ‘Heritage’: Exploring Thessaloniki’s Selective Agenda

Rodanthi Tzanelli
Ill-Defined ‘Heritage’: Exploring Thessaloniki’s Selective Agenda

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Abstract: The paper comprises an aspect of a (British Academy) project on evolving understandings of heritage in the Northern urban centre of Thessaloniki, Greece. The paper reviews politically motivated definitions of ‘heritage’ based on erasures or commoditisation of history, suggesting that such modifications conform to a European meta-narrative that prioritises Christian cosmological themes of suffering and spirituality. The ways these histories clash or collude with the living and evolving cultures of the city is explored. The author enacts a form of death travel (“thanatotourism”) in some of Thessaloniki’s inner areas to examine the role conceptions of “heritage” (Jewish, Ottoman, Turkish and Asia Minor) have in the production of the city’s global tourist image. Priority is given to an analysis of the author’s methodological tools – as a native ethnographer, an “auteur” and a tourist. It is suggested that these critical methodologies do not exist totally outside the cultural frame she analyses as a Western professional. Given its historic associations with Orientalist geographies (as a Northern Balkan city that joined Greece in the early twentieth century only to be swamped by refugees from the crumbling Ottoman empire), Thessaloniki’s multiculturalist archive is the site of historical trauma. It is significant that its once thriving “communities of practice”, exemplified by crafts such as those of chair-making or complementary therapy (as in the production of herbal remedies and concoctions), do not partake in the city’s tourist image. This has often encouraged the development of introversion or competitions that feed into nationalist agendas and play in the hands of those systemic centres (regional, national and transnational) that shape the country’s official historical records. Clashes of voluntary and involuntary tourist mobility are placed under sociological scrutiny – as a complex offshoot of regional policies, national miscommunications and systemic impositions at European level.

Keywords: Christianity, Communities of Practice, Cosmology, Diaspora, Europe, Heritage, History, Populism

Memory, Urbanity and Ethnographic Positionality

THIS EPILOGUE TO a British Academy project (“Reciprocal Orientalisms: Understanding Thessaloniki’s Ottoman Past through Multiple Narrations”, December 2009-January 2011) highlights how manipulations of national memory enable its official custodians to produce the city’s globally plausible tourist image. As someone born in Thessaloniki’s urban periphery and first educated in one of the city’s Universities I too emerged from those structures of memory. Returning to my early student haunts to “do work” as an ethnographic tourist or flâneuse is responsible for any unprocessed empathy I might unwittingly display with my studied subject (Eade 1992; Dann 2002; Herzfeld 2005: 223). For Benjamin (1973: 91; Laing 1978: 55-68) the transformative potential of art is not illuminated solely through a study of changes in artistic mentality but by developing a critical-reflexive stance towards the specific techniques and styles we employ to do such work. My cinematic and photographic encapsulation of the city structurally reproduced the
conundrums of an urban spectacle associated with utopian visions of social and ethnic marginality post-colonial theory and tourism studies view with suspicion (Patke 2000; Crouch & Desforges 2003). Hopefully reflexivity allowed me to critically examine rather than celebrate these native cosmological themes I unfold (Peirce 1998).

I want to explain how Thessaloniki, a city marginalized in Greek national self-presentations, partakes in definitions of heritage contrived by global systemic centers and why this attitude is reproduced by those groups it seeks to erase (Herzfeld 2006). The formulas of heritage proposed by UNESCO take into account what national centers consider worthy for conservation and global display (Harrison 2005: 3-4), but the European Urtext on which this seemingly democratic model is predicated can be manipulated by those who monopolize power (Delanty 1995: 5). Thus, politically insignificant nation-states such as Greece willingly destroy internal reciprocities with those who have little symbolic capital to contribute to a globally reputable national image (Tzanelli 2008: chapter 3). This unleashes emotional demons in localities that policy-makers can conveniently accuse of sabotaging national prestige, discarding the emotions’ etiological trajectory.

Following the Berkeley-Frankfurt School model of the “scapegoat” (McLaughlin 2007: 1805-6), I argue that such emotional reproductions of authoritarian styles stem from European value hierarchies individual nation-states support in search of political prestige. The northern Greek city of Thessaloniki in particular becomes my focus. The analysis necessitates a form of ‘thanatotourism’ or dark tourism, tourism into those pasts the city highlights in the tourist trade for self-beautification. Killing, resurrecting and using different pasts is a political device in the tourist trade. But my own ‘travels’ (by necessity selective too) enact a form of political tourism, as they make a statement that is cultural and political in nature. This necessitates a (however schematic) tour into those presents and envisaged futures of mobility that transform ‘death’ (thanatos) and darkness into a commodity that can be displayed to strangers (Halgreen, 2004). I am already constructing a cinematic lens here to traverse this restricted urban Raum: and it would be inaccurate to deny that my fascination with Thessaloniki’s archaic ethnic Devils, preserved in its Jewish and Ottoman pasts, does not deconstruct a distinctive Greek horror genre, so to speak. Contemporary anthropologists have gone into war with the discipline’s origins in folklore fabulism – a war in which I too once partook. However, fabulist genres have emerged in support of our desire for self-symbolisation and they articulate what no social inquiry can fully articulate in scientific styles. In what follows I move between these two registers, toying with styles and ideas to present a dark picture of my former birthplace that finds today various political uses.

The iconic, spectacular dimensions of national heritage partake in such technological manipulations, enhancing reproductions of tradition (Gabriel 2004: 149). Heritage is a Eurocentric construct; it sustains narrative nodes that thrive on the usual themes of whiteness, Christianity and respectability (Herzfeld 2002). Dikötter’s suggestion that the world has become more racialized and Du Bois’ (1899/1903) identification of the development of individual and communal “double consciousness” must be considered at the structural and systemic levels. However, the ways individual actors interpret them also allows space for the display of some degree of agency. In this essay however I speak more of the systemic forces than of agential motivations. Ironically, all three themes I presented above reflect the conservative Islamic rationale of “honor” and “shame” Greece shares with its former colonizer (Turkey) (Campbell 1964). The Thessalonikiote embeddedness in global systems overdetermines a national heritage hermeneutics (as in Giddens’ (1987) “double hermeneutics”),
which selectively retrieves those pasts that fit in global value hierarchies while simultaneously synchronizing internal formulas of national belonging with these hierarchies (Peristiany 1965; Herzfeld 1980; Blok 1981; Delanty and O’Mahony 2002: 61).

Following the European cosmological superscript of suffering, which conforms to official Christian texts on the life, sacrifice and martyrdom of Christ, Greek narratives of disaster and pain are glorified for internal and external consumption, becoming thus inserted in global capitalist structures (Lash and Urry 1987). Racism beyond color and capitalism are not equated but placed in a conditional and shifting alliance in so far as economic capital communicates with status, whereas race is intersectionally produced through class, education, gender and age disparities (Skeggs 1997). Structurally inferior identities appear in such civilizing narratives in need of management and protection: feminine, working-class and ethnic contributions to Thessaloniki’s memory archive have become both its pillars of primordial being and its trafficked goods abroad, where they can have a voice in the confines of Western markets. Freezing the past for global self-display “monumentalizes” (Nietzsche, 1980, pp. 17–18) national history, assisting the state to rearrange the nation’s internal limits, create ideal citizenries and project desired types of governance abroad (Tzanelli 2008: 49).

The practice found ample use in Greece in marginalized regions (Herzfeld 1991 on Crete) that compensated for lack of access to resources withheld for metropolitan “beautification”, by adopting a precarious performative stance associated with ethno-racial and gendered difference (Butler 1993: 225 & 1997: 16). The will to self-mobility is an agential decision that may be subjected to or obstructed by external forces. I know this too well: my own experience of sexism in this context but also the knowledge that the region suffers from lack of resources (hence jobs) partly brought me where I am now. Having born just outside Thessaloniki in one of its suburban formations that are now cut off even from the city, I know that young people are looking to get out of the region and even the country in search of better career opportunities. Pedagogical migration is the norm where marginality rules social life systematically (nationally and globally) and subsystemically (regionally).

Notably, Greek kleronomiá (heritage) is a feminine term paying homage to Greece’s crypto-Islamic legacy, a form of intergenerational transaction controlled by heads of clans involving the strategic utilization of subaltern human resources (women). Legacy is “a gift of a chattel or an item of personal property by will” (Duhaime.org) – a form of rationalized Maussian exchange between those who share in bloodline (Mauss 1954). Such mergers of legal and symbolic registers are noticed across the globe, embedding the Islamic code of honor and masculinity in global contexts. Heritage begins to be presented as an ethnic and feminine property in need of protection from trespassers by the leaders of the national “kin” (state power) who choose how to display and advertize it abroad. A professional migrant in yesteryear’s colonial West, I have to constantly police myself so that I neither replicate such conservative-romantic conceptions of Thessaloniki nor glorify my passage to Western markets and lose my critical ethnographic purpose.

My inability to be open about my precarious positionality would speak the language of “sexual propriety [that] parallels the defensive posture of the Greek state” (Herzfeld 2008: 149; Herzfeld 2005: 3-4), aligning my take on Thessaloniki’s political marginality with those humanitarian narratives of suffering Western anthropology shares with Christian teachings (Sahlins 1996). Like du Bois’ split subject, I value transparency but am alert that it is easy to lapse into disrespectful criticism of local stances as if I were alien to their resonance – because they do make sense in context. Suffice it to mention that I generated a series
of sort videos/photographic narratives of the visited sites for my project that initially reproduced the Thessaloniki cosmological script. Upon realization, I proceeded to add to these videos music that further enhanced the “script”, so as to use them in my teaching as examples of mobility and immobility. The chosen music is a modern fusion of Western, Asia Minor and even South Asian trends, at once mocking and mimicking Greek national sensibilities of sorrow, grief and loss (see my YouTube channel under the nickname “pulakimu” for both versions of the videos). Photography became an alternative travel diary, the only way to perform a sort of political tourism that can be shared with wider audiences. This is therefore a manifesto of sorts: I contend that in Thessaloniki tourism is hidden (and unexploited) in places hardly visited by foreigners; and that other largely advertised markers entertain restricted and prescribed mobility because of national and global heritage policies.

Is this emotional montage of mine meaningful and analytically relevant? Roseberry contends that a culture is an inchoate set of lived experiences, feelings and relationships within a political and economic system of domination (2002: 188-9), but he does not speak specifically about the potent role of emotions in forging cultural alliances and essentialist divisions such as those that I encountered in the field (and in my own conceptions). For me, “symbolic capital” fluidity and nationalist emotional fixity collude to create a cultural dialogics of identity that treats the past as a scarce resource (as systemic forces allow for its usage in limited ways) (Appadurai 1981). For this reason I cannot defend Islamic or Jewish contributions to the city’s biography just because Christian Thessalonikiot discourse wants to erase them, as any heritage revisionism would continue to exclude while detracting attention from the city’s present problems (it is well documented that too much emphasis on racism can be conservative and detrimental). I wish instead to offer some reflections on the ways particular takes on materiality and spirituality re-arrange understandings of belonging through claims over authenticity and originality in this urban context (Williams 1974). I therefore explain how a dialogics of the “auratic” (as in Benjamin 1989) comes into being from the national margins, then staged in global tourist networks (MacCannell 1973) - and at what political cost. As symbolic capital, “tourism” and the global consumption of Thessaloniki’s specificity are both welcome and treated with suspicion by some of its people who are told that the things they should promote are bad for their identity. In the following three sections I explore how certain pasts became monumentalized for global consumption and in the penultimate section I examine the impact of this process on the city’s social matrix.

Monumentalized History: Strategic Selection in Nodal Narratives

With about half a million dwellers (386,627 in 2001), Thessaloniki remains today the second biggest city of Greece and one of the leading urban enclaves of the Balkans (Regional Policy, Infocregio 2004). Todorova drew attention to the political potency of constructs such as that of the Balkans in Euro-Atlantic policy-making: a buffer zone between “East” and “West” with an Ottoman legacy and a problem of ethno-national conflict, the Balkan Raum has been represented in Western political discourse as a dangerous terrain marked by successive Oriental (and later communist) “contaminations” (Todorova 1997: 113). Despite its strategic location in the commercial routes of the South-eastern Mediterranean, Thessaloniki was stigmatized by these legacies early on: it stayed under Ottoman rule until 1912-3, when it joined the Greek state, after serving for centuries as a meeting ground for various ethno-religious communities (Muslim, Jewish, Armenians and Slavs influenced the city’s cultural
habits and material form). The cultural indeterminacy of Thessaloniki’s profile was stabilized when the Ottomans used Christian Orthodoxy as a definitional axis for its Greek communities (Sofos and Özkirimli 2008: 16-7), transforming Christianity into a solid European urban marker.

Christianity and an alliance with Western models of governance and civility were consolidated with the First World War that Greece joined divided into two factions (1917), an expedition to the Ottoman empire and a military “catastrophe” (Greek-Turkish War, 1919-23) that coerced the self-professed Greek communities of Asia Minor to migrate into the country’s urban centers, including Thessaloniki (1923-). A material survival from this past is Eleftherios Venizelos’ statue (the Cretan politician who pushed for Greece’s expansion eastwards), today visible from Aristotelous Square, one of Thessaloniki’s main commercial districts that global visitors cross for a coffee, a meal, to book a hotel, shop or to watch a movie. These tales of ethnic humiliation, suffering and redemption comply with the European Christian metanarrative, partaking in Greek self-narration in the classroom and the tourist trade (Fendler 1998; Osler 2009). This self-narration appeals to a European Urtext and involves the collection of “signs” legitimated as heritage, then also appropriated by transnational capitalist networks for commoditization purposes (Lash & Urry 1994; Tzanelli 2010).

The city struggled to verify its continuity with ancient Greek antiquity, unanimously recognized as Europe’s civilizational birthplace in the West. The Athens of the Acropolis monopolized this continuity, whereas Thessaloniki was cast as a zone of racial contamination. Jacob Philipp Fallmerayer, (1790-1861), an obscure classicist, claimed in the nineteenth century that sixth-century Slavic invasions from the North adulterated Thessaloniki’s Hellenic purity, condemning the city’s intelligentsia to object to his claims indefinitely. To the date, academic discourse fights against Fallmerayer’s confused theories to “recover” through textual relics of the Byzantine era “evidence” that he was wrong (Skopetea 1999). This hermeneutics treats Byzantium as Greek centuries before the emergence of modern Greek identity. The Slavic connection complemented the Ottoman early on: as mountaneous peasants of the North, Thessalonikiotes kissed cheeks with the Albanian and Vlachs pastoral communities of the Balkan Raum wrongly associated with the Slavs. These nomads became incorporated in Greek Orientalist discourses as both heroic bandits of the Greek Independence War (1821) and ethnic contaminants.

It is significant that today Thessaloniki’s Folklore Museum that holds exhibits from such abject pasts opens irregularly to visitors, whereas the Byzantine and Greek Archaeological Museums open daily. The game of verifying and glorifying links with Hellenic antiquity via the Byzantine era is evident in the special place the city grants to its Archaeological Museum (est. 1962), which holds ancient Greek, Roman and Alexandrian exhibits. Exhibits from Vergina, where archaeologist Andronikos claimed to have found the tombs of Philip II, father of Alexander the Great, were displayed in the museum until 1997. Amongst them are Philip’s “larnax”, a sun or star adopted as the symbol of Greek Macedonia, claimed in the early 1990s by the newly-founded FYROM for its flag and turned into an international controversy over Hellenistic and Hellenic heritage’s custodianship in the Balkans. Such depictions of the sun visually articulated a sort of Greek illumination of the world that occurred somewhere between East and West, a travel Enlightenment discourse of the Mediterranean of immense commercial value in today’s tourist trade (Sharpley 2004).

This convoluted overture might help one dance around the architectural markers I offer in the following section. I place this architectural collage next to its histories of human mo-
bility not to merge and reify the discourse it forms but to examine the intricate ethno-racial matrix on which it was developed from inside out. An uncritical acceptance of national-regional “character”, including its architectural impingements, would de-historicize its pedagogical and performative trajectories, undoing thus my thick description. Bourdieu’s (1977; 1999) constructions of *habitus* as a collection of learned bodily and cultural attributes, skills of expression and articulation reflecting the cultural space in which they were produced is treated as a problematic policy construct in this paper and not sanctioned as such. *Habitus* is not equated with urban architectural landscape which is produced by the manipulations of regional and national sentiment into a plausible façade for global consumption. Thessaloniki’s architectural landscape resembles that of Proyas’ *Dark City* (1998): it is controlled by a humanoid machine (technologies controlled by humans) that hides its calculative nature behind pretentions of protecting the core of human values. It is a machine with regional, national and transnational agendas working against each other or colluding. I contend that Thessaloniki’s current “cosmetic cosmopolitan” agenda (Nederveen Pieterse 2006: 1250) complies with narratives of high culture while preserving the foundations of Christian European cosmology. Below I look at what is strategically conserved and displayed and how its spectacular re-arrangement in the virtual spaces of late modernity endorses or clashes with European self-narrations.

**Illuminations: Christianity and Heritage**

Here I am a dark, cultural tourist, who could have been dining in God’s temples but has instead to wear appropriate clothing to enter the churches of the city. The city has gained in global recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site due to its Paleochristian monuments, amongst which are the Church of Agios Demetrios, named after the city’s Patron-Saint, Agia Sofia and Panagia ton Chalkeon. Figuring in surviving accounts of the city’s heroic defense against the Slavic invasions, Agios Demetrios is proof of Thessaloniki’s European affiliations and still discussed today as such by Byzantinists who pay attention to Fallmerayer’s accusations. Agios Demetrios was listed as a heritage site under criteria supporting hegemonic definitions of “high art”: like Panagia Acheiropoieitos (unmade by mortal hands), another major early Christian shrine, Agios Demetrios shows how the city’s Greco-Roman culture was overwritten by Christian rituals to accommodate national and global pilgrimages to what is now considered a glorious Christian heritage (Mozower 2005: 21).

The religious significance of such survivals often clashes with their tourist potential (Graburn 1977) or even its tourist *heritage value*. Rotonda, a Roman monument subsequently turned into a church, is one such example. In the 1990s it became implicated in a war the religious establishment declared against the city’s Antiquity Office (Ephorate) that closed down the site for restoration, with street battles and abusive priestly marches against the archaeologists who led the restoration project. This ill-advised protest contended that the “sanctity” of the building should not be defiled by apparatuses not fully controlled by the lawful (institutional-religious) custodians of Thessaloniki’s Christian heritage. So, a battle ensued between two institutions: the antiquity officers and the church that blocked the overall mobility of the monument. Agia Sofia, another Roman-Byzantine survival in the city’s centre, was modeled after the original Agia Sofia of Constantinople (Istanbul), a nationalist *lieu de mémoire* connected to twentieth century Greek expansionism in the Turkish East (Nora 1989). Panagia ton Chalkeon (Church of the Virgin of the Coppersmiths) was
named after a proximate area that used to be occupied by the city’s coppersmiths, a mixed crowd of local and migrant artisans. With the conquest of the city in 1430 by the Ottoman Turks, it was turned into a mosque named Kazancilar Camii (“Mosque of the Cauldron-Merchants”) (Greek Ministry of Culture-Odysseus, 2010). Panagia guards the ‘soul’ (psychi) or ‘spirit’ (pneuma) of Thessaloniki as nation’s future vision of salvation and her iconography bridges representations of the community’s kinship with the idea of (home)land (Bryant 2002: 511; Herzfeld 2005: 108). As a sacred temple, its feminine and working class histories are guarded by political agents who can beautify and advertise it abroad. The essentialization of style is the marker of a divide between honor-custodianship and shame-vulnerability that informs Thessaloniki’s self-narration. Indicative of the strong hold such European cosmological scripts have on heritage policies is that all Thessaloniki’s listed Paleochristian and Byzantine monuments are recognized as heritage sites under the same criteria (See UNESCO Paleochristian and Byzantine Monuments of Thessalonica, undated): they allegedly “represent a masterpiece of human creative genius”, while “exhibiting an important interchange of human values” and are “outstanding examples of a type of building, which illustrates a significant stage in human history” (UNESCO criteria i, ii, & iv).

The city’s insertion in digital extensions of capitalist networks (Castells 1996), enables the global trafficking of such heritage markers. Significantly, Thessaloniki’s official website uses the White Tower in the city’s promenade, today a global tourist attraction and a museum, as an urban brand (Lury 2004). Nevertheless, the theme of ‘fortress Europe’ is preserved in the monument’s alleged Venetian origins and superimposed on its Ottoman history (Tracy 2000). Its whitewashing and renaming as “White Tower” when Thessaloniki became part of the Greek state complied with the European racial scripts. As is the case with other surviving Ottoman and Jewish buildings, the Tower did not enter the World Heritage list. Such exclusions propelled a different sort of mobility, and today most of the city’s Jewish and Ottoman architecture hosts art shops and market hubs. Losing their original religious character therefore generated global pilgrimage of the artistic-tourist type in these sites. The change did not occur in organized ways and some such sites were never restored. Some examples include Villa Allatini just off the centre, Alatza Imaret in the old town quarters and Kemal Atatürk’s Turkey’s first President house in Agiou Demetriou’s thoroughfare. The city’s ‘Sightseeing Bus’ passes through the Upper Town but also suggests visits to a selection of Byzantine and Ottoman buildings such as Alatza Imaret or Yeni Hamam (Thessaloniki Sightseeing 2010), providing questionable publicity to those alien sites that have been functionally modified or abandoned.
Alatza Imaret was restored in the 1990s within the framework of restructuring in preparation for Thessaloniki’s inauguration as a European Cultural Capital (1997). Today the neighborhood complains that when it does not host art exhibitions it hosts drug addicts and homeless groups. The Ano Poli or Old Upper Town served as a relocation hub for Asia Minor refugees and thus partakes in local intimations of heritage. Another antithesis is evident in the case of Kemal Atatürk’s (Turkey’s first President and political founder) house in Agiou Demetriou, only a few blocks away from the Cathedral of Agios Demetrios and on the fringes of the Upper Town.
The house was given to Turkey as a present by the Greek government in 1933, and was subsequently restored by the adjacent Turkish consulate to reflect the way it must have been at Atatürk’s birth (Frommer’s 2010). The house’s public presence is currently sustained only because of the Turkish tourist pilgrimage the site receives annually.

Thessaloniki’s Europeanization promotes strategic mourning for particular vanishing Volksgeistes (Ivy 1995) virtually and on site while simultaneously enabling their mobility in global markets (Huyssen 1995; Tzanelli 2007). A deeper investigation into this systemic complex begins when we consider the normative erosion such strategic uses of memory introduce in the sphere of everyday interaction. The whole northern region’s marginalization in hegemonic narratives of nationhood propels the mobility of its “heritage” in virtual domains and generates ample opportunities for the centralized production of populist discourses that valorize regionalism while also producing new forms of exclusion from Thessaloniki’s body politic.

**Articulations of Belonging**

Thessaloniki’s Eurocentric Christian node endorses divides of “public” and “private” spheres to articulate a dominant national-cosmopolitan “type”. Articulation is an apt term: as a way of knowing it conveys transition points from one cosmology to another (Chowdry 2007: 103), but as an allegory of (Durkheimian) organic belonging, it highlights how parts connect
to form a functional whole (Latin *articulatio* from *artus*). This produces hegemonic versions of nationhood (*artus* from *arthrosis*=connection or joint, *arthrōnō*=verbally articulate) in “high” representational registers (*artus as art*; see Said’s (1993) contrapuntalism). Articulation is an audiovisual manifestation of literacy: the term’s Indo-European roots (*arta*) speak of organization akin to that of Greek *kosmos* (=universe but also beauty), “an iconic expression for ‘good order’” (Sandywell 2011: 152). In the age of nations the paradox of literacy, in its print and audiovisual forms, was that it democratized knowledge while making it complicit to the emergence and preservation of political centers (McLuhan 1962, 1964; Anderson 1991).

Thessalonikiote articulations of heritage conform to patterns of knowledge that find expression through dominant artistic styles (Mannheim 2003; de la Fuente 2007, p. 413; Witkin 2005). Such styles produce a chain effect: the city’s Internet self-presentation is modeled after UNESCO’s electronic narrative of heritage – and this involves accommodating images of Roman and Byzantine sites into the city’s official website (see Thessaloniki.org). The city is systemically enmeshed in this game as chains of services are already tied to the technocultural narrative, making it impossible for both regional and capitalist actors to operate outside it. Lest I am accused of externalizing agency to technology I stress once again that Internet narratives of Thessaloniki are man-made; although they might be designed by non-Greeks, they conform to marketable conceptions of Thessalonikiote “cultural essence”. Currently, some travel operators draw upon UNESCO narratives to design visits to the city, complete with hotel bookings next to “heritage” churches and commercialized historic centers such as that of Aristotelous Square (see Expedia.com on combined flights and hotel bookings).

But the city’s virtual narratives also support agential action, as they borrow from the spectacular cultures of the Orient to craft a European urban phantasmagoria (Patke 2000: 4-5) based on subaltern identities adhering to know-how cultures, bohemian styles and “folkish” types. Thessaloniki’s phantasmagoria is assisted by its International Film Festival that further valorizes its global profile (here, the virtual and the visual go hand in hand). As an urban spectacle of late modernity (Debord 1995), Thessalonikiote emphasis on the visual adheres to a tourist-like gaze that works from above and afar (Szerszynski and Urry 2006), entrapping human action (creative work) in museum-like simulacra (Edensor 2004). Thessalonikiote style in trade opens up some global paths for the city, obstructed by bad national infrastructure. The professionalization of this *habitus* in arts and crafts produces the city’s tourist narratives, encoding memory in symbolic and material registers. Developmental obstruction is omnipresent: for its needs, the city does not have a big enough airport to connect to the world. Though significantly improved, the Intercity rail link to Athens takes about six hours to complete a journey though some magnificent mountainous areas - only partly responsible for the delays and problematic timetables. These developmental constraints (see Braudel 1972) coerce Thessaloniki to look to the European North and the West to stabilize its visitor inflow while maintaining its Mediterranean connections to the sea trade and tourism.

Because the northern Prefecture is aware of its disadvantaged position in the nation-state it capitalizes on its exotic marginality in virtual domains. Note for example the Prefecture’s advertising of Thessaloniki as an alternative tourist destination, “an open-air museum” with “unique Byzantine churches co-exist[ing] side by side the contemporary buildings, the modern shops and the numerous coffee shops”, promising that “you come as a stranger and leave as a good friend” (Alternative Greece, undated). The Simmelian image of the stranger (1923) recalls how the region provided shelter to various migrant communities over the
centuries but updates this through desired travel and professional mobility. The image of
the migrant-come-traveler conveys an internally plausible “structural nostalgia” (Herzfeld
2005) for the Edenic “biosphere” of the Thessalonikiote family that once included even mi-
grants. On the other hand, this image claims Thessaloniki’s inclusion in the global romantic
gaze of the knowing traveler, rather than the vulgar gaze of the tourist. Offering visually
rich tours to its idyllic multicultural “home” enacts a sort of digital utopia – a digitopia
possible to be articulated only in a placeless virtual environment. This digitopia is centralized
and de-centered at once, complying with the rules and needs of the market while often
crafting a critical montage on fixed traditions (Papastergiadis 2005). Internet world guides
tend to highlight the cultural plurality of the city, advertising it both as a shopping and
culinary vacation and an opportunity to visit a series of historical sites/signs such as “the
White Tower, Byzantine city walls, traditional Greek architecture, and its pretty waterfront,
which is lined with cafes and shops” (World Guides.com undated). Websites such as
GreekLandscapes.com draw upon Greek iconic narratives of sun and sea without losing the
cultural context of urban flânerie. Hence, Thessalonikiote digitopia is a centripetal and
centrifugal force at once in articulations of identity.

The summer stereotype of Greece certainly owes to the cosmopolitan-come-working-class
Asia Minor cultures of belly-dancing (tsiftetéli), bouzouki-playing and singing. Traditionally
a tourist destination, Greece incorporated such Orientalist themes into a practical Medi-
erraneanist discourse to enable the profitable mobility of its culture. Yet, even such Mediter-
ranean stereotypes prey on nationalist commemorations of ethnic character, rife with
mourning for the nation’s loss of primordial innocence (Connerton 1989). Consider for ex-
ample how global creative industries narrate Zorbas the Greek’s (Anthony Quin) dance
performance as “purely Greek” but discard that this “ethnic character’s” dancing was express-
ing sorrow” (Cowan 1990: xi, 5; Karayanni 2007: 153). In Thessaloniki, as tourist trade ap-
propriated these highly specific styles for global consumption, the European umbilical cord
was severed but the European travel gaze’s potency multiplied.

But I would also claim - within the ambit of my native professional prejudice - that the
actual damage to the city’s body politic remains half-articulated. The conspicuous production
of a hybridized Asia Minor culture by Thessaloniki’s emergent entrepreneurial groups (re-

taurant owners, musicians, dancers and artists) continues to clash with the know-how repro-
ductions of Asia Minor culture by those urban groups disorganized policies demoted to
working-class citizens with no national currency to display (as artisans, market stall owners
and craftsmen). The commoditization of such dissident styles accelerated after the political
restoration of 1974 to eventually become part of a tavern ambiance tourists enjoy in the city
(the Turkish-Greek concept of kéfi or joy encapsulates this oxymoron, ennobling “happy
leisure” as tourist mobility). The survival of this style in a luminal kitsch-like zone of con-
sumption is located in certain styles of Vlachodisko, the derogative term “disco of the Vlachs”
that involves a remix of romantic and Asia Minor proletarian styles with Western rhythms.
(Adorno might have written a treatise on this genre). The same happened to the Asia Minor

tsiftetéli, now danced in night clubs on the tables mainly by women - an embodied expression
of a mixed gendered poetics adhering to the principles of Western individualism. Thes-
saloniki’s plural narrative (Asia Minor, Ottoman, Jewish and European – devilish and holy
at once!) stands today at a crossroads negotiating with the twin devils of capitalism and na-
tionalism.
Electronic manifestations of this secondary nodal narrative are striking in the case of Ladadika, a conserved Jewish quarter just off the city centre. Ladadika’s virtual presence is complete with trip advice on accommodation that does not always follow the Euro-Christian paths of the node (the city’s churches). The quarter’s businesses maintain instead individual virtual profiles, still nevertheless capitalizing on the conspicuous consumerist value of Asia Minor culture. Note for example how Kioupia, a restaurant in Ladadika, draws upon positive commentary by Yianna Angelopoulou-Daskalaki (former President of the Athens Olympic Organising Committee), Agapi Vardinoyianni and Vefa Alexiadou (culinary writer and TV presenter), amongst other famous Greeks to enhance its business (Kioupia, Undated), and contrast this with the virtual absence of Kapani Vlali (one of Thessaloniki’s old market towns populated by Chinese and Eastern European migrant traders). Kapani does not have a website of its own and only independent websites such as Tripadvisor host a number of visitor reviews on the area (demoting it to a family vacation and hence reducing its mobility). Unlike its market towns, Ladadika occupies some space on Thessaloniki’s official website as a tourist attraction. An exclusive photo album on the quarter invites a virtual flânerie through time and space, encouraging this sort of aesthetic performativity that enhances the area’s virtual and actual mobility (the quarter is also advertised by Greeka.com - a major virtual tourist website for Greece).

Obscuring vs. Illuminating

I have followed in this investigation the Greek style of disclosure and concealment for good reasons: what is consumed internally and from afar is what is widely displayed. Such virtual divides dance in the cosmological styles of honor (which has a global face) and shame (which does not), crafting categories of “human” and “citizen”. But my travel remains visually muted thus far: my thanator tourism needs accessible conceptual tools to communicate its markers, and so I am having recourse to photography, a technological tool often used to convey both the intricacies of urban space and family chronicles. As an auteur, I generate spaces of light and darkness because I operate outside them (as a native participant, I used to feel that it was all “too normal” to picture in an article). Consider how Aristotelous’ neo-classical facade today defines the virtual face of Thessaloniki, but the twin market towns behind it do not.
Concealed behind these beautiful buildings that host chain stores, big bookshops, cafes, eateries and banks (including the National Bank of Greece’s central offices), one finds a microcosm of consumption practices addressed to knowing Greek shoppers. On the one side one finds Modiano market (erected by the Serphadic Eli Modiano (1881-1968) whose house hosts the city’s Folklore Museum), Franginis Square and Yahoudi Hamam (a restored sixteenth-century Turkish bath). The area, which is full of shops selling cheap replicas of Christian icons, kitchen utensils, herbs, bric-a-brac, as well as groceries and fresh food, merges ideas of family reproduction with domestic consumption. Kinship utility defies professional mobility as dictated by urban tourist policies.
Behind the Scenes: Shops Selling Reproductions of Icons

The other side is populated (between Egnatias thoroughfare and Avgerinou Street) by rows of tavernas that draw on marketable images of globally known Greek film stars such as Melina Mercouri, declaring thus their participation in mobile visions of Greekness.
The willingness of these entrepreneurs to see their business scrutinized by my lens and trafficked abroad also reveals their justified hunger for advertising (And here was I, the native stranger giving with one hand and taking with the other what I could not fully grant: unconditional recognition). A line of pantopoleía (old-style corner-shops and mini-markets) and karekl - opoieía (chair- making workshops) snuggle in Papamarkou Street alongside emerging modern cafes and pottery shops, speaking the language of a different cultural plurality that is both exclusive and self-exclusive.

By this I mean that the two sites have ended up hosting “behind closed doors” dying communities of craft – of cooking, shoe-mending, or chair-making. The craft of chair-making is part of nationalized and commoditized folklore that is “associated with the emergence of national consciousness and glorified as the repository of ancient skills” (Herzfeld 2004: 5). The bankruptcy of the Greek state has shoved these artisans in an even darker corner: the retiring generation cannot expect to receive a decent pension whereas the younger one is placed at the disadvantage of marginalization in a declining regional market. I cannot imagine anyone endeavoring to enter this trade if they have other career opportunities ready at hand. But the idea of selling souvenirs to tourists instead of chairs to families and middle-class consumers might not be as appealing to such traders.
Stillness where there should be Mobility: An Old Chair-Maker Sank in Piles of Handmade Products. The Street is Picturesque and with Ample Tourist Potential.

Just as Komninon’s trade in cheap holy icons and Modiano’s in herbal concoctions, chair-making is emblematic of those crafts produced at home – hence it is regarded as the opposite of professional labor. As technites (artisans), the human capital of both sides partakes in the silent transformation of a long-standing Historikerstreit (exemplified by the Habermassian battle to rescue repressed pasts) into a Materiellestreit, a dispute over Thessalonikiote culture’s material mobility. Such craftsmen have to speak the language of reproductive art but their concealment from the global tourist gaze restricts their customer pool significantly. As is the case with other heritage markers, there is usually a “public discourse” that precedes and “frames” visits to places “repeatedly mark[ing] the boundaries of significance and value at tourist sites” (Neumann 1988: 24). Yet, not only are these sites obscured by Aristotelous’ neoclassical facade, the city’s administration did not grant them an Internet profile – the latest update in Greek politics of self-presentation (see Herzfeld 1985 on masculinity and self-presentation). Old age and lack of interest or different priorities ensure that these groups are more prone to reproductions of tradition.

The lack of “public face” is overdetermined by changing definitions of craft that now place emphasis on the electronic mastery of goods (Internet). Ubiquitous lack of knowledge and/or learning resources encloses these communities in an entropic heritage discourse, making them either less mobile or more inclined to strike out on their own in search for self-growth. Electronic communications involve the complex mastery of skills that can be both linguistic and interpretive, including standardized professional codes everybody Struggles
to display in foreign cultural environments. Even artistic achievement does not guarantee change of mentality: in Modiano market I was intimated by two herb sellers how a decade ago the mayor did not pursue an American invitation to restore the arcades. Yet, at the same time in Papamarkou an educated pottery artisan also declared her loyalty to the city’s “pure Greek” Byzantine tradition to show solidarity with the Byzantine Museum’s cultural initiatives. “Culture” allows these subjects to claim a spiritual citizenship of sorts whereas complain and accusations of administrative abandonment play the card of secular theodicy – a tactic accommodating the style of Thessaloniki’s politicians who support individual responsibility and disorganized capitalism in practice (Herzfeld 1992). The absence of migrant presence in these spaces (save that of all-sale tradesmen from African zones of exception) is also indicative of the reproductive exclusion and introversion in these areas. As is the case with the rest of Greece, Thessaloniki is becoming multicultural in ethnic profile but not multiculturalist in political mentality (Parekh 2000).

A Traveler by Necessity: Casual Labor Migration in the City Center
Inside the so-called Modiano Arcades One Encounters the Microcosm of the Thessalonikiote Market. Another Potential Stop for Drifter Travelers and Flâneurs.
The past tends to be a foreign *topos* (Lowenthal 1985) we can make enticing to external viewers with a lick of shiny paint. The shine protects the front regions, leaving the backstage filled with garbage and dustbins Thessaloniki’s city council collects irregularly. Its heritage underbelly remained largely inaccessible to the global tourist gaze, until a wave of popular protests against the state’s wrongdoings removed the protective panel and the back regions of nation-building were brutally exposed. The fact that such protests were organized in 2010-11 against rising unemployment close to the waterfront and in Aristotelous Square issued a vengeful return of tradition: within the framework of urban restructuring in preparation for 1997, the awarded project proposals focused on enhancing the city’s European narrative axis that runs almost perpendicular from Agios Demetrios to the waterfront, while “showcasing” the city’s commercial and cultural connection to the sea. The Japanese prize in particular endorsed an auratic model of “restructuring”, viewing the city as a replica of the human body with multiple minds that “prescribe a separation from nature and are equipped by independent egos” (*Restructuring the City* 1997: 29). This Herder-like vision of Thessaloniki was sanctioned by Costas Loizos’ (Managing Director, Thessaloniki 97), Costas Lialiotis’ (Minister of the Environment) and Konstantinos Cosmopoulos’ (Mayor of Thessaloniki) determination to materially “recover” Thessaloniki’s multiple pasts at the expense of its living communities.

The shift from collective to factional “good” is a corollary of the discourse of individualism that defines Greek attachments to reputable self-presentation (*Herzfeld 1987: 160; Herzfeld* ...
2009: 240). It masks the corruption defining Thessaloniki’s own brand of “big society” that supports its politicians’ mimicking of folk styles with a view to gaining more votes (none would dare to point out how this “system” is reproduced by those who have no means to fight it but who can more easily then be “criminalized” by criminogenic institutions!) (on extensive discussion see Herzfeld 2009 who draws useful parallels between religious codes and social incrimination). Although the 1997 project beautified the city, a change in power (from the Socialists to the Conservatives) and the prioritization of Athens 2004 preparations in the south shifted the gravity of funds, ensuring that the project would benefit architectural restoration but not human development in areas such as those I visited in 2010. The conservative government’s involvement in a scandal involving property in Mount Athos, the center of Greek Christianity since Ottoman rule, just a few kilometers off Thessaloniki, was complemented by irregularities in the financial dealings of Panagiotis Psomiadis, the demarch of the region. Psomiadis, who declares a common human being in his Facebook profile (therefore, presumably free to “err” on his financial transactions) is the archetypal example of Greek populist self-styling. Narratives of “being human” have apparently been enmeshed in neo-conservative theologizing by those politicians who use the story of the “Fall from Eden” to build their own secessionist clans (on this one may note that Psomiadis’ new project is to make his own Lega Nord party) (GR Reporter, 12 April 2011). (Alas, the anthropological project has been hijacked by political manipulators). Likewise, the decade-long tenure of conservative mayor Vasilios Papageorgopoulos (1999-2010) concluded with allegations that the former Olympic champion too had swam the dark waters of embezzlement the very moment he was pushing towards a reconstructive urban agenda in preparation for Athens 2004 (Aggelioforos, 13 March 2010).

Development is a thorny issue and impositions from above (by administration or even ethnographers) can be unproductive. Yet, my visits to those exempted zones suggested that its people do feel left out of the electronic revolution due to lack of coordination in electronic presentations of the city – an exclusion that brings to life colonial ghosts of illiteracy (“Who is going to do this [website development?] I have no clue,” jokingly explained a self-declared “illiterate” restaurateur in Franginis). The imagined “node” has populated Aristotelous Square’s backstage with anthropological-historical ghosts, brewing resentment amongst the city’s workers who tend to reify themselves as ergatia instead, a (populist) labor mass that politicians can mobilize during elections but chastise during strikes and protests. Striving to shake off its “Oriental” garments to embrace the cosmopolis of late modernity (another utopian construct of European theory) is impossible under such circumstances. The old crypto-religious image of Ottoman cunning and Jewish betrayal is thus projected onto those who claim to do their outmost in Thessaloniki’s battle for “professional” civility. It is understandable then why my second fieldwork trip (April 2010) opened with demonstrations and strikes in Aristotelous Square against job losses political corruption tied to enterprises such as those of 2004.

“Undoing” Heritage through Political Touring

My overview explained how a distinctive Eurocentric heritage discourse (of Christian recovery, Hellenic civilization but also working-class sacrifice) is “learned”, superimposed by institutions on the ailing social fabric. The “learning” does long-lasting damage when it transmogrifies into intangible heritage of an emotional type - a “national character” that
strives to take back what has been stolen from “hard-working folk” by a shadowy “system” governed by those who diminish or widen their social distance from the electorate as they please to safeguard their own prestige. Today, Greece’s encounters with hegemonic European registers of art are mediated through technological changes. In Thessaloniki’s case a prioritization of Christianity and Hellenic antiquity coupled with aestheticized consumption of place through arts has in practice consolidated divides between lowbrow and highbrow culture but the developmental programme of the political right which steadily governed the region for over a decade obscures this divide. The fact that such corruption finds ardent support amongst the electorate can be considered a consequence of Thessaloniki’s marginalization in Greek topographies of identity, which generated a niche for political opportunism.

This is amply manifested in the domain of culture by those the Greek populist (“big society”) machine addresses as its primary audience. This project uses histories of migration and displacement as a platform on which it can develop the profile of the region. The tourist project is inflected through domestic self-narrations of historical injustices and dislocation but looks to Western consumption demands for growth. As a result, Thessaloniki continues to reside in the interstices of laiki koultoura (folk culture) and popular (Western) culture, today also espoused by a younger generation that increasingly cares less about the city’s troubled ethnic pasts. Perhaps then, eating less of traditional dishes and listening less of folk music alone does not solve the problem. It is the institutional apparatuses of memory (school narratives, national media and adjacent “ethnic” industries) and those who control them to further their own interests one should critique. This essay performed an acrobatics of remembrance to “undo” the structures of such memories, hopefully exposing the dangers of its uncritical embrace.
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