Postmemory of Trauma as Transgenerational Empathy: Remembering the Santa Pain in Pontic Dialogical Singing

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Пост-сећање на трауму као трансгенерацијска емпатија: памћење бола Санте кроз понтско дијалошко певање

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Abstract

This article examines the relation between music and the transgenerational trauma of the Pontic Greeks – the descendants of the 1923 Black Sea [Karadeniz] refugees. More specifically, the article concerns the 1921 destruction of the Santa locality, in Gümüşhane province, and how the memory of this violence is negotiated in the practice of dialogical and participatory singing called *parakathi* or *muhabeti*. It is demonstrated how *muhabeti* enables Pontians to cultivate an empathic postmemory of the 1920s refugees' Santa trauma and what this might mean for trauma theory in general.

Keywords: music performance, dialogue, monumentalization, postmemory, empathy.

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Апстракт

Овај чланак испитује однос између музике и трансгенерацијске трауме Понтских Грка – потомака избеглица из турске области Црног мора из 1923. године. Конкретно, чланак реферише о уништењу локалитета Санта у провинцији Гумушхане 1921. године и проучава преговарање сећања на ово насиље кроз праксу дијалошког и партиципативног певања познатог као *ѝаракаѝи* или *мухабеѝи*. Приказано је како *мухабеѝи* омогућава Понтима да негују емпатично пост-сећање на трауму избеглица из 1920-их, као и шта би то генерално могло значити за теорију трауме.

Кључне речи: музичко извођење, дијалог, монументализација, пост-сећање, емпатија.

Trauma references life- and subject-shattering experiences that escape narrativization (Whitehead 2007, 186–187). Traumatic experiences trap the subject in latency and repression while opposing the phallic divisiveness (Crapanzano 1992, 44) and world-ordering agency of language (Caruth 1995, 3–5; LaCapra 2004, 117–123). The dual genealogy of trauma theory, from psychiatry and poststructuralism, has triggered a fascination with collective suffering and testimony which, since the 1980s, has led to a re-understanding of collective identity discourses (Davis and Meretoja 2020, 2–4). This fascination has had an indirect effect that can, borrowing from Derrida, be described as part of a broader trend of hauntology (1994, 95–125). In general, the term refers to sentiments of ethical inheritance and responsibility towards the past, a feature that can generally be traced in the construction of diachronic collective identity, that of the nation included (Bubandt 2014, 121). In one common political manifestation, the ethical persistence of the past involves the appropriation of testimony discourse that involves tropes of trauma that validate certain groups over others on the grounds of collective past suffering and injustices (for a complete analysis see, Hirsch and Spitzer 2010).

More recent trauma theorisations have connected hauntology with the discontinuities of the trauma ineffability presumption. The identification of the traumatic experience with the unspeakable and the ensuing designation of narrativization as post-traumatic can contribute to the silencing of the traumatized expressions and to the devaluation of suffering experiences that do not comply with the shattering event principle and its potential top-down appropriations. At the same time, the poststructuralist emphasis on the ineffable creates an impossibility of trauma negotiation beyond the medicalized

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approaches. These potentials for silencing are central in the hauntological appropriation of the trauma discourse. The same line of criticism proposes expressive arts as alternative approaches to suffering negotiation that might enable an escape from the effable versus the ineffable dichotomy (Meretoja 2020, 23–26).

In this article, I offer an analysis of a musicking practice that partially responds to the criticism of classical trauma theory. The practice of dialogical singing of the Pontic Greeks or Pontians – the descendants of the 1916–1923 Black Sea refugees – known as *parakathi* or *muhabeti*, entails ontologies of suffering and of the "pained subject" that emerge in between representations of ineffability and discursivity. More specifically, my analysis focuses on the *parakathi* remembering of the 1921 destruction of one major locality in the pre-1923 Black Sea region, the mountainous area of Santa, and how this trauma-inflected remembering relates to personal suffering through musicking.

Given the demise of the generation that experienced the destruction, my case study, and more broadly, the Pontic trauma, belong to the category of transgenerational trauma. In this sense, the case study already concerns a fluid realm, between the ineffability of the shattering event, here the Santa destruction, and the remembering of this event by the descendants of the survivors. Transgenerational trauma suggests some kind of transference of the suffering-related feelings to the people who have neither witnessed nor have been victimized by this event. I demonstrate how *muhabeti* musicking enables a transgenerational empathy that constitutes a postmemory of the Santa trauma.

My analysis draws from fieldwork conducted among Pontic Greeks in the region of Greek Macedonia where the majority of the Pontians settled after the displacement in 1916–1923. Most of the data were collected between 2011 and 2014 during the fieldwork for my dissertation (Tsekouras 2016). In reality, though, the fieldwork has not stopped since, as I have been in constant communication with the fieldwork associates. For this article, I have used the data collected from music gatherings of the Pontians of Santa origin, including the communities of Georgiani and Nea Santa in the Veria and Kilkis prefectures of Greek Macedonia respectively, as well as the discourse of renown musicians of Santa origin (e.g. Labis Pavlidis, Dimitris Piperidis, Thanasis Stylidis), and the specialists in the Santa style (e.g. Serafeim Marmaridis, Natasa Tsakiridou).

Parakathi or *muhabeti* can be a highly personal and confessional process, including the expression of personal suffering. However, as I will demonstrate, the *muhabeti* entails mechanisms that allow protection of the individual from ill-intended outsiders, uncontrolled exposure, and latency. Exposure to the re-experiencing of suffering is mitigated by the allegorical singing of known poetry that enables a circumvention of literal articulation. Therefore, no highly

detailed protocol was issued, other than the fundamental ethics of anthropological research: I followed a model of participant observation of the performances, combined with interviews with practitioners. Reflexivity is dominant in my ethnography, making it clear who speaks and when. Some caution was used in the interviews, where I avoided to directly address motives, experiences, and emotions that I have witnessed being expressed in *muhabeti*, unless the interlocutor wanted to talk about them. In addition, I have also avoided sharing interlocutor's personal information and, unless they requested otherwise, subjects have been protected by anonymity.

After a succinct presentation of the Pontians, of Santa and its destruction, as well as the monumentalizing discourses of the Santa trauma, I offer a detailed exploration of *muhabeti* and its poetics as they relate to trauma theories. My main conclusion is that *muhabeti* poetics both support and negate the monumentalization of the Santa trauma, offering, though, the ultimate experiences of empathic identification with the suffering individuals, in ways that elevate a common generic humanness of pain beyond the hauntological privileging of the suffering.

The Pontic Greeks or the Pontians

The Pontians are Greeks from the region of "Pontos," in the Black Sea areas of Turkey, and specifically the littoral areas delineated by the northeastern Anatolian mountains (King 2004; E.O. [= Olhausen, Echart] and J.N. [= Niehoff, Johannes] 2007; Samouilides 2002). Pontos was cleansed of its Orthodox Christian population between 1916 and 1923 during the "Christian genocide" (Akçam, Kyriakidis, Chatzikyriakidis et al. 2023; Hoffman 2012; IAGS 2007) that sealed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and as part of the policies that Fridtjof Nasnen called 'unmixing of populations,' namely the Lausanne Treaty's population exchange, which solidified contemporary Greece and Turkey (Stroebel and Gedgaudaitė 2022, vii-x, xiii). The genocide claim has constituted a central element of the Pontic identity politics, dominating the Pontic public self-representation and identity discourse since the 1980s (e.g. Charalambidis 2004).

The survivors of the purges fled to Greece, becoming part of the Lausanne Treaty's (1923) exchanged populations (Hirschon 2006; Kontogiorgi 2006). There, they developed a Pontic identity. They emphasized their origin from the region of Pontos, reminding the broader Greek public of their inclusion in the philosophical map (Wolf 1994) of pre-modern Hellenism, thus declaring their Greek ethnicity and claiming membership in the Greek citizenry (Voutira 2011, 66–76). Pontic identity discourse is described

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as ethnoregionalist: the memory of the region frames the cultural alterity as ethnically Greek, while simultaneously being mediated by this alterity (Vergeti 2000, 57).[1]

Traumas of massive violence and displacement have been central in Pontic identity, but they have been negotiated within different discursive contexts depending on the period. In the first decades of the settlement, the displacement traumas were filtered through representations of heroism and resilience. In the context of Pontic ethnoregionalism, the main concern was the salvation of the Pontic cultural heritage, or the Pontic tradition. This implied focusing on objectified cultural truths that elevate the Greekness of the Pontians. The interest in testimony, trauma experience included, emerged earnestly after 1980, as a result of the articulation of a Pontic genocide discourse and of the demise of the refugee generation (Tsekouras 2022, 397–401). In this article, I explore the negotiation of trauma from a particular Pontic locality, Santa.

Santa and Its Destruction

Santa, today Dumanlı, was a cluster of seven hamlets, located on the southern slopes of the Pontic Alps, at an altitude of 2000 meters. The nearest urban centres were Gümüşhane at around 60 km to the southwest, and Trabzon circa 70 km to the north. The remote location attracted settlers in the seventeenth century due to its proximity to the Gümüşhane (Turkish "a place of silver") and its silver deposits and mines (Samouilides 2002, 132–148). Santa had an exclusively Greek Orthodox population. The majority of the population in the mountainous provinces between Trabzon and Gümüşhane, where major monasteries operated, were Rum (Greek Orthodox), thus defining a Christian pocket (Bryer 1991). The monasteries, supported by the Porte, provided economic structures of stability and protection as well as spiritual leadership, therefore, their surrounding provinces did not follow the broader seventeenth century Islamization of the Ottoman Black Sea (Samouilides 2002).

Since the early nineteenth century, the silver mines have declined. High altitude meant long and cold winters with an especially thick fog,[2] so the agricultural production was low, hardly satisfying domestic needs. As a result,

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[1]   Vergeti translates her Greek term (εθνοτοπική ταυτότητα) into English as "ethnolocal identity." I prefer the translation "ethnoregional identity" and for the discourse "ethnoregionalism," because my fieldwork associates bear in mind the entire region of Pontos when theorising their Pontic identity (Tsekouras 2016, 18–22).

[2]   From December through March, Santa had an exceptional thick fog, known in Turkish as duman [smoke], hence the toponym Dumanlı, "the smoky place."

the Santans turned to migration. Men married early and migrated to Trabzon, Istanbul, and the Russian Empire; women stayed behind taking care of the family property and the children. By the 1910s, Santa was part of an extensive diaspora network that spanned to Georgia, Armenia, and Southern Russia. Money orders was the main income source. The Santans had espoused the Karadeniz "horizons of elsewhere" (Meeker 2001, 98).

The destruction of Santa was part of the long wars and related ethnic cleansing that marked the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (1912–1923). The Santa destruction was particularly violent involving different kinds of massive violence: massacre, deportation, and self-sacrifice. Post-WWI instability and the rise of nationalism during the Greco-Turkish war (1919–1922) exposed the Santans to simultaneous violence by local thugs and nationalist paramilitaries. Incidents of murder, abduction, and robbery, as well as pressure on the men to join the Ottoman army, forced the Santans to organize self-defence groups (Kourtidis 2007, 1–4; Kourtidou 2015). By the 1920s, an organized resistance had developed that defied the authorities. Although testimonies reveal that common ground could be found, there was a decision to neutralize the guerrillas by cleansing their locality.

In September 1921, the seven hamlets were surrounded by infantry and an artillery squadron. By 21 September, the army had managed to establish control, bombing parts of the hamlets and pushing out the guerillas. On the same day the locals were commanded to concentrate in one of the central hamlets. The majority obeyed and found themselves deported to the inland. The deportation evolved into a death march with the deportees exposed to the elements and the typhoid fever. The losses amounted to more than 50% (Tryantafillidi 2015). The emptied hamlets were first pillaged and then burned. After the Lausanne Treaty, the surviving deportees moved to Greece. Today, Dumanlı remains deserted.

At the same time, small groups defied the orders and hid. The largest, consisting of several guerrilla families led by captain Euclides Kourtidis, barricaded itself in a cave and resisted the army for an entire day. They escaped to safety during the night through a nearby forest. To secure their escape, they killed their babies, seven in number, so that they would not betray the group's location with their crying. Allegedly, the Turkish officers were shocked upon finding the dead babies, and they decided to abandon the chase of such "bestial and desperate" people (Pilidis 2015). The escapees remained in the mountains for several months, surviving through robbery, before starting to move to Trabzon and then Greece, secretly and in small numbers. The fragments of the surviving Santans reunited in Greece. Two villages, one in the Kilkis prefecture of Macedonia, and one in the Rhodope

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prefecture of Thrace, bear the name "New Santa." However, many reunited with migrant kin who came from outside Pontos settling elsewhere in Greece.

The Santa Trauma Narrative

It is difficult to discern when the Santa destruction testimonies solidified into a single narrative. Descriptions and reports were released shortly after the 1923 population exchange (e.g. Valavanis 1925). However, these texts, following broader trends, do not contain testimonies, but general accounts, looking for causes and perpetrators (Exertzoglou 2016).

Testimonies of the infanticide and the deportations were systematically recorded in the 1950s and the 1960s, by the Centre of Asia Minor Studies and by the Pontic folklorists Stathis Eustathiadis and Simos Lianidis (1995). The 1950s and the 1960s witnessed the development of refugee identity discourses (Kailaris 2002), and a systematic effort to salvage refugee memory (Exertzoglou 2016; Salvanou 2018). Systematic mediation of the Santa testimonies appears after the 1980s. Today the Santa Catastrophe is commemorated in various monuments erected all over Greece, in documentaries, historical fiction novels, media tributes, and TV series.

In short, the destruction of Santa has been subjected to monumentalization (Young 2007). It is mentioned as a token of the genocide and commemorated as an incident exemplary of the heroic spirit of the Santa Greeks. Monumentalization is evident in the likening of the Santa infanticide to the 1803 Zalogo incident. The Zalogo incident, or "Zalogo dance" as it is known, was the epilogue of the conflict between a group of Albanian-speaking Rum highlanders from Souli of Epirus and Ali Pasha of Tepelena. Ali Pasha destroyed Souli in 1803. While most men died fighting, most women committed collective suicide with their children by jumping off a cliff in the Zalogo location. This collective suicide, among else, an act of despair against enslavement and rape, has been presented in Greek popular history as a freedom-embracing self-sacrifice exemplary of the Greek spirit that gave birth to the 1821 Greek revolution.

In Pontic public discourse, the Santa destruction is often compared to the Zalogo incident with Santa referred as the "Souli of Pontos" (Kontogiannidis 2021; Kourtidis 2007, 92). The infanticide is presented as exemplary of the freedom-loving nature of the Greek highlanders. Still, the Santa destruction narrative appears as an intra-Pontic affair, with most Greeks being oblivious of the incident. *Muhabeti* or *parakathi* is an insider Pontic practice with a central place in Pontic collective memory (Tsekouras 2022).

Muhabeti or Parakathi

The term *muhabeti* or *parakathi* refers to a banquet. Today, the two terms are used interchangeably, however, this has not always been the case. The term *parakathi* is of a broader content referencing a gathering in general, while the Ottoman term *muhabeti,* similarly to other such practices of the same name from the ex-Ottoman world (e.g. Gill 2018; Sugarman 1999), refers to a special socialization practice, characterized by comradeship and intimacy. The two terms have merged as a result of the urbanization of Greece, the dissolution of the socially autonomous rural communities with their everyday sociality, and the consequent collapse of Pontic socialization into exceptional, music events. Staying closer to the initial meanings of the concepts, from now on I will refer to the practice only as *muhabeti.* Since the 1980s, *muhabetia* (pl.) are accompanied by an authenticity discourse of special connection to a nostalgically envisioned Pontic rurality, independence, and distance from the folkloric stage, and of exclusively Pontic linguistic identity. They are maybe the only examples, outside the family, where the Pontic dialect is the dominant idiom (Tsekouras 2024).

Optimal *muhabeti* socialization – the sociality frame that satisfies, at best, the *muhabeti* poetics – involves confessional and intersubjective communication that ideally culminates in dialogical singing. In this optimal scenario, singing is an exemplary emergent performance (Bauman 1975, 38); it happens, without prior arrangement, "by itself," when "emotion prevails." Singing emerges when the intimate conversation reaches a stage of emotional reflection that cannot fit into everyday prosaic language – hence the Ottoman name *muhabbet*, meaning "conversation of friendship, love, or affection" (Akdikmen 2006, 302).

The *muhabeti* repertoire is called *epitrapezia,* meaning "table songs."[3] It consists in rhyming distichs in fifteen-syllable iambic or trochaic poetic meter that are sung on repeated, riff-like tunes, provided by a Pontic *lyra* or *kemençe* – the Karadeniz fiddle. Music is usually homorhythmic to the poetry with most of the tunes being in 5/8 (3+2 or 2+3) meter. The most common textures, provided by the *kemençe*, are parallel polyphony in fourths and a melody with movable drone. The melodic structure follows the form of the poetic delivery. The tunes present an eight-measure form which is divided into two phrases of four measures each. Every verse of the distich is repeated; hence, every tune

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[3]   Not to be confused with the epitrapezia category of the Greek mainland, non-Pontic music. In the latter case, the term refers to unmetered songs. In the Pontic case, the term has a functional content referring to music preferred for the table, without necessarily referencing to free-metered music.

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is usually in an *ab* or *aa'* form with each phrase corresponding to one verse of the distich.

All these features describe the most typical case of the Pontic folk music, which is, depending on the context, called the *tik* or distich form (Kilpatrick 1980, 189–199). *Tik* refers to the most common Pontic dance genre that abounds in different variations among the Pontians; distich refers to the poetic form that the *tik* songs follow. *Epitrapezia* songs refer to music that is not danced, but listened to around the table. The sharing of the same form with the *tik* repertoire defines the features of the *epitrapezia* repertoire as stylistic. *Epitrapezia* repertoire is thus defined by elements of melodic and rhythmic structuration that follow the flow of the poetic dialogue and not the succession of the dance movements (Tsekouras 2016, 202–237).[4]

Distichs and tunes form two parallel repertoires that are combined at will, but according to a series of conventions. Hence, in both the *epitrapezia* and the *tik* repertoires there are no songs in the conventional sense of the term, as multiversed poems set into unifying music. For this reason, distichs constitute their own category of poetic form and musical genre in Pontic folklore without falling in the typical taxa of repertoire classification (epic poetry, laments, dirges, narrative songs or ballads, love songs, etc.). Distichs (and *tiks*), being short poetic and melodic forms, afford multiple allusions to all the typical categories in an endless semi-improvisatory game of signification that is ultimately determined by the performative occasion.

Regarding the *epitrapezia* repertoire of the *muhabeti,* the most important principle for matching the verses with the tunes is the respect for the flow of the dialogue. Every participant sings one distich at a time, as a response to the distich just performed by another tablemate. The singing exchange of poetry takes place according to topics (e.g. romantic love, friendship, exile, death, etc.). The poetic topic changes through accepted associations, common poetic images or metaphors, and word play.

The centrality of dialogue points to participation. A *muhabeti* is assessed according to the degree, intensity, and duration of the participation in singing. Ideally, everybody should sing. Utterances out of tune and rhythm are welcomed, as long as they serve the dialogue. On the contrary, a virtuosic utterance is condemnable if it disrupts the dialogical flow. Beautiful poetry and beautiful singing, but too loud and too long, more than one distich at a time, or off-topic, disturbing the dialogical flow, are considered a demonstration of a "lack of respect:" anti-social behaviour – which violates the frame of the performance.

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4   A detailed analysis exceeds the span of this article.

Similar criteria pertain to the instrumentalist. The *lyra* player provides the sonic constancy necessary for participation (Turino 2008, 22–27). The instrumentalist's roles are to coordinate the rhythmic delivery of the tablemate's singing; to accommodate flawed utterances, by modifying and neutralizing any tonal and metric lapses; and to fill in the pauses between the utterances, with related, but new and inspiring, melodic material. The fill-in melodic material is known as "branches" (*kladhia*) and it consists of semi-improvisatory formulaic riffs. The ability to imaginatively use the *kladhia* defines the skilful musician suggesting a participatory virtuosity. An instrumentalist who demonstrates virtuosity by playing too loudly, too fast, too long, or a complicated melodic material "does not listen or respect," and is therefore unfit for *muhabeti* (Tsekouras 2016, 283–284).

The centrality of dialogical participation is the foundation of the stylistic differentiation of the repertoire. Dialogical structure translates into metrical and structural malleability, where the common sense of the rhythm emerges out of the coordinating agency of the instrumentalists in dialogue with the singing participants. Similarly, the alternation of the *kladhia* to the main tunes follows the degree and intensity of the singing participation, resulting in a varied melodic soundscape or rich improvisation and "participatory discrepancies" (see Keil 1995): intentional and semi-calculated disruptions of the canonicity of the form that aim at the evocation of participation (Tsekouras 2016, 283–284).

Muhabeti and the Suffering Subject

The connection between *muhabeti* and trauma is, first of all, detectable in the music poetics of ineffability. Since singing happens with the emergence of deeper feelings, which cannot fit in the prosaic language, the music amounts to an expression of the ineffable as a liberating revelation of the self. Labis Pavlidis, a famous *muhabeti* master, declares:

> *Muhabeti* reaches under the whole situation. [...] the *psihi* [psyche or soul] is released. No matter how much you try to pretend, you will release it. [...] *muhabeti* means laying your soul bare. [...] (Labis Pavlidis, Research Interview, 22 April 2012).

The word *psichi,* meaning both soul and psyche, suggests that the subject is defined by an inner immaterial core. Music releases this immaterial inner nature ("laying your soul bare") against external restrictions.

The release of the subject's core is understood as an expression of pain. Subjects are defined by their suffering. The *psihi* is formed by painful

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experiences, their recall, related emotions, and accompanying sentiments of loss and nostalgia. The acclaimed singer Natasa Tsakiridou mentions:

> The *psichi* [soul/psyche] opens at that time [when the distich is sung] and you understand that he has a wound here [pointing to her chest]. He is in pain and he sings (Natasa Tsakiridou, Research Interview, 26 November 2012).

Tsakiridou makes an explicit connection with trauma by likening singing to the opening of a psychic wound. Literally, trauma means injury. A wound is a visible injury. The opening of an emotional wound equals to a revelation of trauma.

Psychic wound is referenced with the Turkish word for injury, *yar*. The Turkish linguistic identity distinguishes emotional wound from the Pontic Greek vocabulary adding to the concept's significance. It also points to connections with Sufism. In both devotional Islam and Orthodox Christianity, personal suffering is the soul's way to the divine. In Mevlevi Sufism, a manifestation of personal suffering is also the sentiment of *hüzün,* a subject-defining existential nostalgia that results from the soul's separation from God (Gill 2017, 20–21; Mirmiroglou 2000, 299–302). Similarly, the Pontians use the concept of *arothymia*, which does not have theological overtones, but carries a similar existential dynamic. *Arothymia* literally means longing, but in its most powerful manifestation, it refers to existential nostalgia: subject-defining unrequited longing; a sentiment of existential incompleteness and painful awareness of separation that makes the person who they are. The optimal *muhabeti* is dominated by *arothymia*. The ineffable feelings of the subject's psycho-spiritual core translate to nostalgia as an emotional awareness of the lack.

A phenomenological approach verifies the identification of pain with a sense of self. As Sarah Ahmed remarks, pain is the most subjective and thus a more universal feeling (2004, 28–31). One's pain cannot be claimed by anybody else, and hence it cannot be mediated. But, at the same time, everybody has experienced pain. Expression of pain constitutes the most genuine performance of the self. Sharing this expression allows intersubjective communication as performance of empathy – hence the equating liminality of the *muhabeti* dialogue. Nobody can participate in another person's pain, only to demonstrate empathy by imitating the pained person's behaviour (2004, 28–31). *Muhabeti* singing is a dialogical performance of empathy. Every utterance is an expression and mirroring of pain and therefore empathic acknowledgment of the other tablemate's pain.

The stability of music-poetic form and performance supports this mirroring. Every utterance follows a stylized manner of music and vocal performance, as

well as body gesturing, that contributes to the equating participatory spirit and to the empathy as mirroring of behaviour. The known status of distichs and tunes supports empathic dialogue. While improvisation is highly valued, known repertoire is deemed more appropriate as it carries emotional capital – especially repertoire attributed to the refugee generation. Sharing of pain happens through a personalizing use of traditional music and poetry. Thus, the distichs and the tunes function as emotional quotations or affective citations (Gill 2017, 18). Every utterance is a statement – "I feel like (in) this distich."

Emotional quotation involves allegory between the poetry and the experiences and emotions of the performer. The tablemate sings a known distich in order to signify their own suffering. The poetry and personal story relation is both iconic, through similarity, and indexical, through association. The allegory lies in this indexical iconicity connection. The allegorical use of the emotional citation allows expression without explanation. The singer externalizes their psychological state without explicit descriptions of the experience behind the feelings. The tablemates decode the poetic allegory because they know their comrade's story. Thus, the poetic dialogue involves an encoded communication beyond explication. Afroditi Zamanidou, an avid *muhabeti* practitioner, mentions:

> When I perform a distich the only thing I have to do is to turn and look at a friend. I do not have to explain anything. He knows why I sing it. He understands (Afroditi Zamanidou, Research Interview, 10 October 2012).

In summary, *muhabeti* pain poetics suggest subject and injury ontologies that resemble those of classical trauma theory, of both medical and poststructuralist genealogies (Sütterlin 2020, 14–18). The subject is understood as incomplete, defined by the painful awareness of existential separation. This painful awareness, the *arothymia*, similarly to trauma, escapes literal linguistic mediation.

However, a more careful examination reveals fundamental differences: *muhabeti* pain presents neither medicalized characteristics of psychoanalytical trauma nor an anti-discursive quality of poststructuralist latency. The poetic allegories involve the encoded narrative of the traumatic experiences. What defies the language are the feelings that these experiences have generated. Therefore, the *muhabeti* wound is broader than post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the repressed and re-experienced event of Caruth (1995) and Felman and Laub (1992).

For these reasons, *muhabeti* is not approached according to healing outcomes. There is no specific objective of cure. Psychic health benefits, of course, but healing is understood more as a process of betterment than an achieved

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outcome of narrativization. Contrary to both Freudian psychoanalysis and the PTSD psychiatry, there is no objective of narrativization. *Muhabeti* functions reversely. It involves de-narrativization: the liberation of the experience from prosaic language towards an awareness of its pain through multi-sensory and dialogical performances of empathy. Psychoanalysis and psychiatry help the individual to narrativise the traumatic event against repression, thus enabling a reconstitution of the self. *Muhabeti* singing makes the subject aware of existential pain, of themselves and of others, against externally imposed narratives. The status of the distichs and the tunes as emotional citation, capsules of affective capital, have a crucial function in this process. Music and poetry deconstruct the opacity of language reconnecting the subject with a genuine Pontic feeling of self.

In this sense, *muhabeti* subject lies closer to poststructuralist ontology. However, contrary to poststructuralism, where trauma reveals the inherently fragmented nature of individuality, the *muhabeti* subject emerges as the common humanness of intersubjectively shared personal pain. The individual is not shattered by the violence of language, like in Lacanian approaches. On the contrary, *muhabeti* poetics suggest a telos of selfhood beyond language in the ineffable personal pain. This pain is understood as collectively human, reconnecting the singing subject with the vocally embodied presence of intersubjectivity. This is why *muhabeti* does not provide palpable and countable psychotherapeutic outcomes, but rather protects the suffering subject by exposure and the possibility of latency-like re-experiencing of pain. The "telos" of the individual also suggests a self-controlled subject and, therefore, a degree of self-narrativization prior to the expression of the psyche, as it takes place through the discursive component of the *muhabeti* occasion before the emergence of singing.

The embodied presence of intersubjectivity is audibly performed in both the claiming of participation and the use of the known repertoire. Every distich utterance is preceded by the exclamation of an open vowel, which equals to asking for singing permission. The exclamation differs according to the sonic environment of the moment, varying from a sigh, to a yell, cry, or even a roar. Hence, it signifies the subject as "voice and nothing more" (Dollar 2006, 66): a vocally embodied presence independent of linguistic semantics. This vocal presence is completed and extended with the singing of distichs that, comprising a common repertoire, connects the subject with the generic humanity of collectively shared significations of pain. Brevity of poetic and music form enables a condensing encoding of subjectivity through deindividualization of the self. The subject connects themself with the collectively shared, protecting and expressing their individual core. In summary, the *muhabeti*

subject is ruptured, but not fragmented. The generic humanity of the subject is respected as ineffable sonic presence mediated allegorically through emotional citations into intersubjective experiences of empathy. The connection between the subject and the collectively shared poetry and music is the realm where the collective Santa trauma is negotiated.

Remembering Santa and Its People

The Santa trauma can be explored in the *muhabeti* memory of Pontos. Allegory as emotional citation juxtaposes two texts – the overtly articulated poetry and the allegorically signified unarticulated personal narrative. The memory of Pontos emerges as a third text, more precisely as contextual information involving geographical association. Geography and its related narratives are attached to the distich, posing (as I explain below) an important criterion regarding the matching of distich to tune. Much (but not all) of the repertoire is recognized as originating from specific localities. Santa is represented by a sizeable number of distichs and tunes.

Poetry's origin is evoked as background information. Consider the following distich:

> I sometime cry, other times I laugh, my days are passing,
>   I am waiting for the river's cloudy water to turn clean.

This distich entails an image of uncomfortable expectancy. The stated expectation, the change of the river water's clarity, obviously stands for something else. The waiting can be painful for the textual subject as indicated by the awareness of the time's passing and the possibly erratic behaviour of crying and laughing. The distich can have many allegorical uses, since we all wait for something. The water's clarity can signify expectation of a situation change. The cloudy water suggests haziness and negativity; the clean water is associated with mental clarity, prospects, favourable conditions, etc.

When I asked *muhabeti* practitioners and musicians about the topic of the distich, I was told that it is about exile, and that the poetry originates from Santa. Santa was bounded by the Yambolis (Yanbolu) stream in the east. During the winter and early spring months, the Yambolis swells by the melting snow, becomes fast-flowing and sweeps along mud and dirt, becoming murky. In late spring, with most of the snow melted, the river decreases in volume and the water becomes crystal clear. Late spring, when the stream was also crossable, was one of the periods when the migrants visited Santa. In short, the distich references the expectation of the women

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left behind for the return of their beloved ones. The contextual interpretation provides significant information about the life in pre-1923 Santa: about migration, related gender roles, seasons, the terrain, geography, and natural boundaries.

This condensation of contextual information through the distich and the tune (see below) is typical of the *muhabeti epitrapezia* repertoire. Not all distichs carry such wealth of contextual associations, but those that do, demand specific tunes and topics that exemplify specific memory narratives about the pre-1923 places.[5] Generally speaking, most of the Santa distichs are classified under the topics of migration/exile (*ksenitia*) or death. Romantic love, especially unrequited, has its fair share also, however, it is present as major topic in other local repertoires (Tsekouras 2022, 406–407). Unrequited love, death, and migration define the broader topic of separation and of its awareness as *arothymia*. Therefore, the three topics share metaphors and poetic images. The dominance of the exile and death topics makes the Santa repertoire especially affective.

The music of Santa matches the topics of poetry. Santa-style tunes are of slower tempo and of a longer form, either with two distinct phrases, *ab*, or ternary, *aab* or *abb'*, where the last phrase corresponds to the poetic refrain. Santa tunes present an angular metric structure. The dominant meter of 5/8 (3+2 or 2+3) entails dotted rhythmic patterns that emphasize the tilting sensation between the long and the short beat groups. Syncopating accentuation and hemiolic structures (triplets over the 2-beat group and dotted eights over the 3-beat group) add to the groove. Modal structure involves a narrow range, typically less than a sixth, and similarly narrow, often chromatic, intervals. The use of augmented seconds is very common. Modal material alludes to the harmonic minor and the European Phrygian, the chromatic genus of Greek Orthodox chant, and the Ottoman *hicaz*, *segah* and *kyurdi* makams.[6] All these elements are interpreted as building a sad and mournful style that matches the painful poetry topics of exile and death.

Returning to the distich used here as an example, its most popular rendition is by Sabbas Lazaridis (2010), a well-known musicians of Santa origin and representative of the style. Lazaridis follows a typical Pontic practice of song releases. He combines what are essentially independent *epitrapezia* distichs of similar topic into unified constructs. What appears here as a song is, in reality,

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5   For other examples of distich-centered memory mediation, both from Santa and from other localities in the pre-1923 Pontos, see Tsekouras 2022, 405–408.

6   Here, I follow the discourse of my interlocutors. Whether the interchangeable use of names for the description of the modality corresponds to the cited theories should be the topic of another article.

a combination of known, traditional distichs on a single traditional tune: a version of folk music and poetry.[7]

Lazaridis's rendition presents most of the characteristics mentioned above. The distich opens Lazaridis's song providing also its title "I sometime cry, other times I laugh." Singing is preceded by an introductory *kladhi* (2010, 0:00–0:37)*,* which is varied and provides the interlude material performed in between the various verses. The *kladhi* establishes the modal environment into a "*kyurdi*" or a "minor" tetrachord (Phrygian as, f#-g-a-b). Notice the "pulling" or attraction (*elksis* in Greek church music theory) of b by f# through an emphatic piano colouration of the tetrachord's higher pitch b by the *lyra*, accompanied also by a trill (*tremolo* in Pontic Greek) that destabilizes its tonal specificity towards a microtonal embellishment. These ornamental devices emphasize the descending contour of the melody towards the tonic.

The singer utters the introductory sigh ("eeeh") of participation request (Lazaridis 2010, 0:37), like if he was around the table. The actual singing starts on the upbeat (*levare*), in the second half of the long part of the iambic beat pattern (0:40), establishing a dotted pattern on the 3 eights of the 5/8 meter. This tilting rhythm characterizes the entire singing. The first verse, corresponding to a four-measure phrase (0:40–0:54) ends via the subtonic (e) on the third pitch of the tetrachord, a minor third (or augmented second) over the tonic. The second phrase (0:54–1:07) begins with the same melodic pattern but introduces (the two last measures) the second pitch of the tetrachord reaching in a step melodic movement the tonic at the very end of the form. Hence, although the overall modality is diatonic, there is a structural use of the minor third, an allusion to the harmonic minor or *hicaz* tetrachord. The texture provided by the *kemence* or *lyra* and alternating between parallel fourths (usually at the two higher pitches of the tetrachord) and melody with movable drone, emphasizes these tonal subtleties and the general gravity of the mood. These stylistic devices and elements can be traced, to various degrees, in the entire *epitrapezia* repertoire that is recognized as Santan, both in its original performance in the *muhabeti* and in song-like releases of the discography.[8]

The association between migration and death and Santa is so strong that mournful distichs and tunes are often interpreted as being from Santa without evidence. The mournful character of the repertoire and memories of a rough

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7   For all the lyrics with a Greek translation and discography examples, see the digital library Pontiakós Stíchos – Pontian Lyrics 2024.

8   Maybe the most celebrated such work is the 2010 album *Yambolis*, carrying the very name of the river alluded in our distich example, by Giotis Gavrilidis and Thanasis Stylidis (2010). The entire album (Gavrielidis, Pavlidis and Stylidis 2010) exemplifies most of the Santa style elements, as well as a couple of songs that refer specifically to the Santa destruction.

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landscape, poverty, exile, and separation have been filtered through folkloric narratives, supporting a representation of Santa as a rough place inhabited by tough, yet tormented people. The Santans are further described as austere in ethos and of conservative morals, constantly dealing with the hardships of survival. The memories of brigandage and guerrilla warfare also add a heroic component. Hence, the Santa Pontians also emerge in *muhabeti* imagination as tough, dynamic, potentially belligerent, and free-spirited.

These representations are so strong that they form an ethnological type. The ethnological type is only partially verified by historical research. Santa was indeed a locality attached to migration and armed activity. However, brigandage and guerrilla resistance were endemic in late Ottoman Empire, particularly in eastern Karadeniz, as a result of political instability, scarcity of resources, and inter-community competitions. Similarly, translocal mobility, seasonal and long-term, has been common in the entire region (Meeker 2001, 9).

With all this said, the association of Santa with these practices was indeed stronger in comparison to other localities. Therefore, the ethnological type of the heroic but tormented Santans mediates the pre-1923 local sensitivities. However, it also reproduces Herderian tropes of nativism: the interpretation of the people as collectively grown out of the landscape. Elements of collective memory – the distichs – have merged with top-down folkloric ethnoregionalist tropes, leading to a folkloric schematization (Wertsch 2002, 28–29) of *muhabeti* memory (Tsekouras 2022, 410).

Monumentalization and the Ethnological Stereotype

The question that emerges here concerns the place of the Santa trauma. This question becomes more pressing given the general lack of explicit references to the destruction in *muhabeti* poetry. Apart from one explicit song and a couple more about the deeds of Captain Euclides with indirect references, the poetic repertoire mostly concerns the pre-1921 life. Still, the mournful and heroic character is prevalent.

My initial hypothesis was that the ethnological type functions as a kind of screen memory, revealing the repression of the trauma. However, this hypothesis is deeply problematic as it suggests a kind of collective subconscious. It is also defied by the loud articulation of the Santa destruction outside *muhabeti*. Actually, the ethnological (stereo)type emerges as part of a top-down appropriation of the trauma memories into a monumentalizing narrative. The testimonies have solidified into a unified discourse that idealizes the Santans, representing their acts as manifestations of exemplary Greekness. The

designation of the Santans as inherently tough, heroic, and freedom-loving abounds in texts about the disaster. See how the aforementioned journalist Romanos Kontogiannidis describes Santa:

> [Santa] gave birth to heroic young men who did not count at all their own lives if they had to defend the homeland; they constantly resisted first the Ottomans and then the Kemalists (2021).

Kontogiannidis proceeds with the description of the catastrophe and of the infanticide, interpreting the latter as a manifestation of the self-sacrificial and freedom-loving spirit of the locals. Thus, he supports the Zalogo simile, which is unequivocally stated in the article's title, "The seven hamlets of Santa: the Souli of Pontos" (2021).

The heroism interpretation does not agree with all testimonies. Euclides' brother, Kostas Kourtidis, mentions the infanticide in his diary as a mothers' decision induced by the fear for their lives and that of their families (2007, 58). Spyrantis, who was hiding in another cave and with a smaller unarmed group, mentions in his memoir an incident of infanticide as the result of pressure that the men of the group exerted on the mothers (1990, 98–128). Finally, the destruction narrative overtly focuses on the escapee groups, neglecting the testimonies of the deportees.

Still, the interpretation that the ethnological (stereo)type has been shaped by the monumentalization discourse presents certain shortcomings. First of all, it does not account for the mournfulness of the repertoire. Mournfulness is not necessarily compatible with heroism. Secondly, it does not account for the monumentalizing discourse itself. If monumentalization emerged out of a public and top-down negotiation of the Santa trauma, then the stereotype is a secondary product of the trauma. A study of how the first refugee generation negotiated their traumatic memories could answer these questions. But such an inquiry is not possible anymore, hence any kind of research cannot be but post-memorial and post-traumatic. In the light of all the above, what is today's role of *muhabeti* practice in relation to Santa trauma?

Allusions of Trauma, Postmemory, and Transgenerational Empathy

Most of my fieldwork associates, when asked about the ethnological type and the Santa trauma relation, answered that the destruction was the reasonable outcome of the Santans' character. They claimed that the hardened by suffering, free-spirited highlanders paid the price for their resistance. In this

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sense, the Santan character and the monumentalization are parts of the same memory discourse. At the same time, all interlocutors agreed that any representation of the refugee memory can only be incomplete and distorted, due both to temporal distance and to the demise of the refugee generation.

They finally pointed to me that *muhabeti* is not about remembering historical events, but about transferring something of the pain of history. This transference is inevitably incomplete, given the ineffable and unmediated character of personal pain. Contrary to the singing participants, the refugees cannot be present in any *muhabeti*. The intensity of the suffering makes any suggestion of trauma mediation even more impossible. All these are usually expressed with general aphorisms: "They had suffered more than what somebody could ever imagine," "they had to endure Jesus's sufferings," "you cannot imagine what they had to go through."

When asked about the conjoining of heroism, suffering, and emotional pain, most interlocutors answered that the relationship is dialectical. Hence, most *muhabeti* practitioners agree that the heroism of the Santa refugees lies in the fact that they lived with the pragmatic, psychological, and emotional burdens of their traumas. The suffering that resulted from these burdens and the awareness of the trauma as *arothymia* made the Santa survivors better people and their music and poetry more affective; they had a higher capacity for empathy, a special awareness of the painful existence of other humans. This special empathic capability has its own share of stereotypical phrases: "These people knew how to feel;" "they had suffered, so they knew about pain." Often, contemporary Pontians compare the suffering of the refugee generations with contemporary comparative comfort, attributing to the latter's lack of emotional awareness the reason for a broader cultural and moral decline.

All these interpretations resonate with the *muhabeti* ontologies of subjectivity and wound: the designation of suffering and its awareness (*arothymia*) as existential principles. In this sense, singing the *muhabeti* repertoire performs one more process of humanizing denarrativization. In the same way that the poetic allegories signify the personal narrative of trauma, without articulating it, they also index the suffering of the refugees, in this particular case, of the Santa survivors. The mournful poetry and music of Santa connects the participants with the psychological and emotional burdens of the Santa trauma without the articulation of the disaster story. In this sense, the ethnological (stereo)type emerges similarly to the distichs as a condensation of the Santa suffering. Still, it does not have the status of an allegory. The stereotype emerges in between the memories of trauma and the distich, as a general denarrativizing condensation. It reminds the contemporary participants that the survivors were some *other* people, whose reflections are not reproducible.

Historically, geographically, and existentially, these people belong elsewhere. The singing of their poetry makes their absence felt, by reminding us of the intense suffering in all its ineffability.

In this sense, the ethnological stereotype is a part of a Pontic postmemory. Hirsch suggests the concept of postmemory not only as the memory of memories, but as an emotional process of identifying with traumatic experiences that you know cannot be yours exactly because of their traumatic character (2012, 6). It is an empathic identification: an acknowledgment of the telos of the other's pain, a recognition of the impossibility of its mediation, and an effort to sense and share something of their pain by mirroring their emotions. Even more, it is an awareness of the exceptionality of the traumatized pain. In this sense, *muhabeti* singing offers personalizing allusions to the Santa survivors' trauma: a Pontic affective postmemory that enables an identity formulating empathic and personalizing association with Santans' trauma.

Conclusions

One of the most important contributions of trauma scholarship is the demonstration of how the past haunts the present. Ironically, it can be argued that the post-1980s fascination with trauma and traumatic testimony has also contributed to politics of hauntology that opposes, the initial intentions of the trauma scholars. Politicians from the entire spectrum, but particularly from the right, have invested in the cultivation of collective sentiments of victimhood and injustice through the focus on past, imaginary or real, collective traumas.

Contemporary trauma theorists recognize, in the radically different, psychoanalytical and poststructuralist beginnings of trauma discourses, elements that, publicly mediated and distorted, have facilitated the phenomenon of hauntology politics. These can be summarized into three major presumptions: (1) a covert and uncritical acceptance of the empiricist dichotomy between objective sensation and subjective discourse; (2) a trauma-premised individualizing essentialization of the collective; and (3) an obfuscating identification of trauma experience with ineffability. The first presumption generates pseudo-scientific discourses of historical objectivity that elevate certain collective experiences of pain and suffering as more valid than others. In the second presumption, the designation of a collective trauma facilitates essentializing likening of the group to the traumatized individual. The individualizing definition of the collective further supports the elevation of normative trauma narratives that exclude certain testimonies. Finally, the identification of the traumatic experience as ineffable might lead to the silencing of alternative negotiations of trauma and of culturally alternative ontologies of pain. Critics of trauma

theory have pointed to the importance of phenomenological and hermeneutic accounts that focus on implicit theories of trauma through the examination of broader discourses and practices of pain negotiation (Meretoja 2020, 23–26).

In this article I have offered such an analysis by exploring relations between trauma theory, the Pontic politics of collective trauma, and the Pontic *muhabeti* ontologies of pain. More specifically, my analysis focused on the traumatic destruction of the Santa locality in September of 1921 and the ways that this is alluded to and remembered in different genres of Pontic discourse, but ultimately in the musicking of empathy that defines the *muhabeti*.

The Pontic *muhabeti* case offers interesting insights into the negotiation of collective pain. Obviously, the Pontians are not free from hauntology. On the contrary. What can be concluded from this analysis is that Santa *muhabeti,* and more broadly Pontic *muhabeti*, remembrance of Santa presents the characteristic polyglossia (Bakhtin 1986; 1981) of collective memory (Hammilton 2010; Olick et al 2011). Memory texts of poetry (the distichs) and of witnessing (the memories of destruction) are schematized through top-down, world-ordering discourses (folklore, nationalism) into unilinear narratives of ethnological characters. The *muhabeti* remembrance of the Santa traumatic destruction verifies, to a high extent, the ethnological stereotype, through the indexical connection between the locality of Santa and the musical-poetic representations of suffering, namely, exile and death – the very traumas that universally define the refugeehood.

At the same time, my analysis demonstrates how the fluid indexicalities of musicking can open the door to anti-normative experiences that oppose the politics of hauntology. On one hand, these experiences exemplify the difference between trauma and its postmemory and, on the other, navigate the trauma and the suffering away from the effable versus ineffable dichotomy. Emotional and psychological pain, the *muhabeti* wound, suggests a fluid and implicit understanding of the trauma, as a shattering experience that can be approached by others through an awareness of its pain. In contemporary *muhabeti,* this nostalgic awareness, the *arothymia,* emerges as a presence of absence of the refugees' pain: an awareness of the absence of their pain, as empathic realization of the ineffable exceptionality of their traumatic feelings.

Thus, the Pontic *muhabeti* teaches that the feelings stemming from trauma belong to the individual, defining an existential telos and core that can only be alluded to through the performance of empathy. In this way, Pontic cultural alterity is redefined as structures of empathic identification with the refugees' suffering, and Pontic ethos is delineated as a philosophy of empathy. The Pontic wound emerges fluidly between the effable of the experience's narrative and the ineffable of the emotional and sensory imprints of this experience. It is

partaking to the poetic metaphors and music indexicalities that approach the ineffability of the feelings and enable the Pontians to be aware of the other's pain. The Pontic identity politics where the genocide claim rejects also demands of reparation from Turkey, and the empathic response of Pontic institutions to the 2015 refugee crisis, prove that awareness of trauma does not have to succumb to the politics of hauntology.

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Пост-сећање на трауму као трансгенерацијска емпатија: памћење бола Санте кроз понтско дијалошко певање

(Резиме)

Једна од главних претпоставки у вези с траумом јесте да она избегава језик: искуство патње и сећање на њу, због њиховог карактера који разара живот и уништава субјект, не може бити објашњено приповедањем. Језик се појављује када траума престаје да постоји, то јест када се она трансформише у стандардизоване нarative. Новији приступи довели су у питање догму неизрецивости, указујући на алтернативна посредовања сопства и патње која премашују ограничену темпоралност потресног догађаја. Иако су ови приступи обогатили теорију трауме, они су критиковани због банализовања трауме, чинећи сам концепт бескорисним.

Инспирисан новијим теоријским приступима трауми, у чланку се фокусирам на однос музике и трансгенерацијске трауме – случај када је известан степен наративизације неизбежан. Тема моје етнографске студије случаја су Понтски Грци или Понти, потомци грчких избеглица из 1923. године из турске области Црног мора, тачније Понти из Санте, грчког локалитета који је 1921. године доживео посебно насилно уништење. Ослањајући се на опсежан теренски рад, кроз анализу праксе дијалошког певања познате као *мухабети* или *паракати* истражујем како савремени Понти памте свој локалитет пре 1923. године и његово насилно уништење.

Представљајући *мухабети* као трансгенерацијско посредовање неизрецивости трауме, овај чланак избегава крајности искључивих ставова о неизрецивости. *Мухабети* певање не посредује трауму Понтских Грка из Санте, али представља афективну неизрецивост осећања патње жртава. Ови поетски и музички прикази алудирају на нарative трауме, али их не репродукују. У чланку долазимо до закључка да трансгенерацијска динамика *мухабети* музике не лежи ни у репродукцији ни у лечењу трауме, већ у пост-сећању: препознавању неизрецивости сећања и, самим тим, снажном поистовећивању с осећањем бола учесника и наглашеној емпатији.