

Danforth, Loring M. and Riki Van Boeschoten. 2012. *Children of the Greek Civil War. Refugees and the Politics of Memory*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. xv + 329 pp. Pb.: \$25.00. ISBN: 9780226135991.

Over the last fifteen years, we have witnessed an unprecedented growth of studies on the Greek Civil War, bridging many gaps in the understanding of its social and political dimensions. The book *Children of the Greek Civil War* by Loring Danforth and Riki Van Boeschoten, can be credited for filling a serious gap of knowledge of a politically charged contentious point, of the Cold War period and beyond. In 1948, thirty-eight thousand children were evacuated from their villages in Northern Greece. The evacuation programs were organised by the Greek Communist Party, with relocation of children to orphanages in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, and by the Greek Government, which relocated them to children's home (better known as *paidopolis* (children's cities)) elsewhere in Greece. The book, the outcome of a long-term collaborative research, provides the first comparative historical reconstruction of evacuation programs through the combination of 'unexplored archival sources' (p. 9) and first-hand oral narratives, and a perceptive analysis of the political dimension of the so-called *paidomazoma* (literally: abducting children) in the present, accomplished through a challenging multi-sited ethnography that brings into light the voices and representations of children refugees, the ways they organised their lives and their understanding of the past. Furthermore, the authors have succeeded in pointing out with unusual clarity some crucial theoretical and methodological issues of contemporary debate in anthropology: as interdisciplinary, 'cosmopolitan' ethnography, children's agency, to mention but a few.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One, *Histories*, provides an accurate historical reconstruction in comparative perspective of both evacuation programs of the Greek Communist Party and of the Greek government. The in-depth analysis reveals the evacuations to be much more problematic than pretended by official discourses (of both sides) constructed around reciprocal allegations of 'kidnapping' the children (the instrumental use of the term *paidomazoma* had a precise anti-national meaning as it referred to the *devşirme*, the Ottoman practice of recruiting young Christians for the elite guard of the Sultan). The issue of 'coercion', as an example, is brought back to the complexities of factors and contexts in which the evacuations took place. Instead of relying on the strict alternatives between forced or voluntary evacuation, the authors point to a 'spectrum of coercion' (p. 8), that was also given by the precarious conditions of uncertainty defined by the conflict, in which people had to make their own choices. The contextualisation of the evacuation programs at the beginning of an 'international refugee regime' raises also relevant issues on the same birth of 'the refugee' as a recognisable figure, and the representation of 'displacement' as a fundamentally pathological status in the 'national order of things' (p. 187). The meaningfulness of this point is revealed by the repatriation issue and the different representation of 'home' outlined by the experiences of refugee children, with reference both to their individual trajectories and to the change of the geopolitical contexts in which they live, as the surfacing of ethnic tensions between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia around the official name of the latter.

Departing from the ‘traditional scholarly voice of social historians’ of the previous section, Part Two, *Stories*, ‘restore both agency and voice to the refugee children of the Greek Civil War’ (p. 16). It contains seven life-history narratives, selected among many individual accounts in order to present a broad spectrum of life conditions and trajectories: individual accounts of refugee children in Greek children’s home; refugee children relocated in Eastern Europe, some of whom were brought back as early as the 1950s, while others decide to return themselves after the fall of the military junta in 1970s; and refugee children who did not return or were not allowed to return. It is the case of Slavic-speaking children (‘Macedonians’ or ‘Slavo-Macedonians’), who had come to develop a distinct identity from Greek-speaking children, later consolidated as a consequence of Greece’s refusal of their repatriation and the post-Cold War situation in the region, that made their return ‘impossible’ (p. 197), practically and symbolically, and in fact turned their condition from ‘refugee’ to ‘exiles’ (pp. 8, 213). The changed context in which their returning ‘home’ (a never univocal concept) has become impossible fostered a retrospective ethnicisation of the Greek Civil War, a conflict which was essentially political, although frictions related to ethnicity were not absent.

In Part Three, *Ethnographies*, the authors explore the ‘politics of memory’ and their contexts in the present, combining thick descriptions of official gatherings and commemorations with theoretically grounded reflections on the specificity of the ‘communities of memory’ that are created from the sharing of common experiences (‘experiential communities of memory’) or from the sharing of ideological and political frameworks (‘political communities of memory’) (p. 225). In their ‘multilocale’ ethnography of transnational networks and transnational diaspora communities, the post-Cold War context comes to light as the main political and ideological framework for the production of memory of the Greek Civil War and of the refugee children’s experiences. Mindful of the different layers of memory (individual, public, official etc.), of the dialectics between remembering and forgetting, the authors focus on the ‘memory wars’ that surround the contentious past of refugee children and the transnational settings in which nowadays they recur: from the transnational association of refugee children who identify themselves as Macedonians and are supported by the Republic of Macedonia, to the Greek-oriented Pan-Macedonian Association and the problematic memorialisation of the village Lia, in north-west Greece, birthplace of Nicholas Gage, author of well-known novel *Eleni* (1983).

Assuming Michael Herzfeld’s distinction between ‘history in general’ as an instrument of state ideology and ‘histories’ or ‘stories’ as fragments of social experience and intimate social knowledge, a main concern of the authors throughout the book is ‘the way individual narratives deconstruct both collective narratives of nations and the ideological frameworks in which they exist’ (p. 4). The way the authors deal with tensions between ‘individual’ and ‘collective’ narratives is strikingly balanced, thanks to a skilful combination of ethnographic styles and methodologies and, most of everything, to the empathy and intellectual honesty they disclose. Anything but rhetorical, in the concluding *Epilogue*, is the refugee children’s plea for ‘the value, the virtue, of remembering without rancor’ (p. 225).

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