Iron in the Soul: Displacement, Livelihood and Health in Cyprus

Peter Loizos
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This book is a labour of commitment to Cyprus and to the community of the Argaki village, which Professor Loizos first started to work with in 1968. It presents an unusually, perhaps, uniquely, deep study on issues of forced migration by providing a long-term perspective into the lives of people now displaced for more than thirty years. Yet, this is also a difficult commitment exemplifying the difficulty of the anthropological project itself, empathy and critical distance, a high-wire balance act that the book strives to achieve.

The first book of Professor Loizos, *The Greek Gift: Politics in a Cypriot Village*, examined local politics in Argaki based on fieldwork he conducted there in 1968, providing an account of social change and the opportunities as well as drawbacks that the local community faced in its interaction with wider state politics. His second book, *The Heart Grown Bitter: A Chronicle of Cypriot War Refugees*, drew a lively image of the processes and hardships of displacement and adjustment after 1974 by using extensive excepts from his interviews, thus allowing the refugee voices to be heard in their disturbing and tragic tonalities. This is now the third book on the Greek Cypriots of Argaki. Taking all three books together provides a deep insight into the social history of Greek Cypriots from the 1960s to the present.

But who exactly are these refugees after almost 40 years? The long term nature of this work inevitably raises this issue, which Professor Loizos attempts to answer through a chapter on the sociology of displacement and the question of the sociological meaning of generation. Another chapter focuses on illness, presenting his results from a comparative study with another village of non-displaced people. How do the refugees compare with non-refugees is the question asked. He explores this beyond health, in the economic sphere too. Were refugees able to catch up? If so how, and at what cost?

Other chapters are equally tantalising both in their intellectual and their political implications. What was it like for a refugee to return to his or her home, not as the owner, but as some kind of guest or visitor after almost 30 years when checkpoints partially opened during 2003? How is this humanly, or humanely even, possible? Then there is the issue of the referendum during 2004, a tense period that strained family relationships and friendships. Why did most refugees from Argaki vote NO which meant voting not to return then? This in turn poses further questions. Do the children of refugees feel like refugees? What does home mean for them, those

who never lived in their so-called homes in the north? What does home mean for young people anyhow whose lives are based on different ontological foundations? The metaphors of roots and uprootment hark back to an agrarian past. But for many young people nowadays, especially those living in highly mobile western societies, their most stable address is their email address, and their most permanent home could be their home page. And do the older people themselves want to return now? Or would this be yet another displacement in their old age, a new life in isolation from their children, friends and kin? The answers are not always blatantly stated, but they are there none the less, contentious and difficult to generalise from given the scale of anthropological research, as they may be.

As with the previous books, this an account mixing theory and data analysis in a highly readable manner that can engage readers irrespective of academic discipline and can be accessible to a wider public. It follows an empiricist tradition that combines quantitative and qualitative research, and the long excerpts from interviews provide a rich emic perspective.

Beyond the academic analysis, which inevitably is rather cold and distant, there lies another story, a powerful human story about perseverance and dignity. And this is a story told not just in word but also through the nineteen photographs by Loizos that appear in *Iron in the Soul.* Ten of the photographs in the book were taken by the author during an earlier period of fieldwork which gave birth to *The Heart Grown Bitter: A Chronicle of Cypriot War Refugees,* mentioned earlier.

In 1975 Peter Loizos located, interviewed and photographed many Argaki refugees scattered around the island after their forced displacement in the summer of 1974. These were members of a then dismantled community which Professor Loizos had previously photographed in its prosperous village during his anthropological field work between the years 1968 and 1973.

None of the pre-displacement photographs appears in *Iron in the Soul.* They nevertheless demonstrate very clearly those characteristics of Loizos' photography that set it apart from dominant – at the time and within similar context – representational traditions. That (the 60s and 70s) was the period during which a local variation of a "Romantic School" in photography established itself and imposed its own aesthetic and set the thematic parameters within which Cyprus and its people were to be represented. These persist to this day. In a nutshell this school displays a preference for the picturesque and for romanticised rustic aesthetics.

In contrast Professor Loizos' photography is direct and his subjects are not reduced to mere actors in a photographer's fantasy of a Cypriot Arcadia. His lens did not shy away from manifestations of modernity and his subjects were given room to compose and portray themselves according to their own perception of the self. The ten 1975 portraits of Argagiotes in *Iron in the Soul* exemplify Loizos' approach. Despite the huge losses these people have suffered just a few months earlier they come across in the photographs as proud and strong and they look back at the lens confidently; they seem to be engaging with the photographer in an almost self-assertive manner.

But these are people with whom Loizos has had very close ties with and the distance between ethnographer and subject is here bridged. The cover photo of his recently published collection of

Argaki photographs (1968-1973 and 1975) titled *Grace in Exile* is characteristic of this. The photograph depicts a family sitting around a table having Sunday lunch. In the foreground at the top of the table there is a vacant space, which we can easily imagine was occupied a moment earlier by Loizos who was, it seems, participating in the party. His light-metering device left sitting on the table next to a bottle of KEO is a testimony to this.

The rest of the photographs in *Iron in the Soul* are from his most recent fieldwork and despite that they have been produced about three decades after his early work they do maintain the same distinctive character, which is defined by directness and intimacy. A photograph published in page 163 exemplifies the nature of Loizos' ethnographic and photographic work. It depicts three Argaki refugees, in a coffee house looking at photographs of Argaki and its people in *Grace in Exile*. This is a manifestation of the integrity of an anthropologist who is very much aware of the balance of power shifting in favour of the researcher within the ethnographic process and who – as a remedy – seeks for the approval of his subjects and not just that of the academic community.

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