

The Making of a Refugee: Children Adopting Refugee Identity in Cyprus

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The plight of refugees has been receiving increasing attention in our times, both by humanitarian agencies, but also by world political leaders, the public at large, and social scientists seeking to understand various aspects of the phenomenon. Images transmitted through the media create impressions of refugees as displaced masses of people of alien nationality/ethnicity, fleeing physical, social or political disasters, seeking refuge outside their countries of usual residence, and unable for various reasons to return home. Much like other groups of outsiders introduced into a host society, refugees are expected to gradually 'melt into the pot', to somehow merge, integrate, or assimilate into the receiving whole. When this fails to materialise, the issue turns into one of discovering what went wrong: whether non- assimilation was due to a failure of policy, the instrumental interests of refugees themselves (aiming to use their status for their own purposes), the disintegration of supporting social networks, the stigma associated with being a refugee - and so on. Even more perplexing becomes the issue of the children of refugees failing to assimilate, sticking instead to a separate sense of identity for years and generations after dislocation.

The book under review addresses these paradoxes through focusing on the children of Greek Cypriot refugees. Or, better, 'displaced persons', since according to official definitions Cypriots do not qualify as refugees, since they did not flee from Cyprus but were pushed to another part of their country instead.

The author introduces her subject, that of the perseverance of refugee identity to the second generation after displacement, with a very interesting shift of emphasis: rather than viewing "refugee as a category or a title earned by displacement" she proposes to consider being a refugee as an identity in and of itself. Indeed this "shift in paradigms" enables her to consider the status of refugee as "another aspect of the many faces of the identity of displaced people" much like the other facets of one's identity such as gender, age, nationality/ethnicity and religion, constitutive of people's self-definition.

In this way being a refugee ceases to be a label imposed by others and becomes

a part of one's own self-constitution; thus the author is able to draw from "recent theories of identity studies" which emphasise the constructed, malleable, changing multi-layered nature of identity, so that being a refugee becomes "something or *practices* rather than what one is" after experiencing forced displacement. In the author's words: "Being a refugee is now a matter of becoming, forming, evaluating, experiencing, producing, reproducing and eventually transferring an identity".

The author carries on to demonstrate that in the case of Greek Cypriot refugees their children "do not simply adopt" but instead "construct and nourish" refugee consciousness as a way of "facing their future".

This conscious cultivation of the refugee identity is grounded in their attempt not to forget the perceived injustice and violence of '74, and in their refusal to accept resettlement as a permanent solution; instead, they choose to see the present state of affairs as temporary, a part of the unending process, or the long-term struggle for restoration.

The study is primarily based on in-depth interviews with 100 Greek Cypriots and their refugee parents; the main part of the analysis focuses on the oral narratives of the interviewees, in an attempt to let their own voices be heard, as they themselves describe their experiences and their predicament, and how they "speculate about their own feelings".

The progression of the book revolves around exploring the various dimensions that inform refugee consciousness and the factors contributing to its endurance. After the Introductory Chapter which sets the basic concepts and argument, Chapter 2 proceeds to demonstrate how children of refugees ground their shared identity in the experience of violence and injustice which their families endured. Chapter 3 focuses on the weight of the past and the importance of maintaining a live memory of places lost. Chapter 4 shows how the main vehicle of socialisation into "not forgetting", is not so much national policies (primarily the schools' cultivation of 'den xehno'/1 don't forget), as widely assumed, but the family and the domestic sphere in general. This argument connects to Chapter 5 where the focus is on the role of the children, who do not seem to be passive absorbers of family beliefs but active participants in the process of identity construction. An important emphasis here is on the feelings of loss (of origin, roots, permanence, property status, social network, way of life etc).

Chapter 6 underlines the dynamic character of refugee consciousness, outlining four stages in refugee consciousness construction (parental attachment, projection, memory transfer, and adoption of refugee identity). Chapter 7 completes the analysis by demonstrating how refugee identity is future oriented, refusing to accept

present day realities as final, but adopting hopes and aspirations common to all Cypriots.

This is a very well written book, exemplary in its methodology, the clarity of argumentation and overall presentation. The author convincingly demonstrates that "refugee consciousness is not about refugees failing to adapt and assimilate as much as it is about non-refugees failing to understand". Fortunately, her book rectifies this, providing the evidence necessary to "mend the image of refugees and to reinstall in refugees their humanity".

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