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## Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

**Danforth, Loring M., and Riki Van Boeschoten, *Children of the Greek Civil War: Refugees and the Politics of Memory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012, 352 pages.**

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Loring M. Danforth and Riki Van Boeschoten open their book with the advertisement for a workshop the authors gave at the Program in Hellenic Studies, Princeton University, on 10 May 2005. The subject of the workshop was the evacuation of about 25,000 children by members of the Communist Party of Greece from Northern Greece to Eastern Europe during the Greek Civil War of 1946–49—an operation characterized by the Greek government as “genocide” and a “crime against humanity.” As per the advertisement, Danforth and Van Boeschoten would draw on the life stories of refugee children to offer a critique of political master narratives informed by ideologically motivated interpretations of the evacuation program.

The workshop became a “crucial moment” (4) for the authors. Leading up to the event, they received numerous angry messages and threats both from academics (Hellenists working in various academic disciplines) and, more generally, from members of the Greek diaspora. The hostility reached a crescendo at the workshop itself, which, following Danforth and Van Boeschoten’s presentation, saw a prominent member of the Greek diaspora (a rather well-known author and columnist) set off on an angry tirade and storm out of the room when asked to give Danforth and Van Boeschoten a chance to respond. He, and others, accused the authors of misrepresenting *what really happened*. Emotions ran high.

In a testament to their professionalism and dedication to the project, the authors explain in these opening pages of the book that they followed up with each critic, reconsidered the terms of their inquiry and revisited the analysis of their primary data. What follows is a masterful, innovative text that makes multiple notable contributions to anthropology, intervenes positively into various dangerous political trajectories and, crucially, remains grounded in, respectful of, and committed to the memories, understandings and desires of the authors’ primary consultants. This is ethnography at its finest.

Opening the text with this difficult scene and with a notably auto-ethnographic tone is certainly a clever move. It helps

the reader to connect with Danforth and Van Boeschoten while introducing the ongoing importance and contentiousness of their subject. This opening section also hints at the various analytical and methodological innovations the text has to offer. One of their critical moves, we discover, was to expand the ethnographic base of the project following the workshop to include not only children sent away from Greece by Communist Party members, but also children who were sent to *paidopoleis* (lit. “children’s cities”) in other parts of the country by the Greek government during the same period—indeed, both the political left and right evacuated children during the Greek Civil War. This brings the lived experience of the war, separation, exile and life thereafter among refugee children into more direct analytical focus. This also makes more provocative the authors’ assertion that various commonalities run through the stories of child refugees and, moreover, that these commonalities challenge various collective narratives and the national “history” of the event.

In general terms, the book offers significant theoretical contributions to refugee studies, the anthropology of children and childhood, and the politics of memory, and it challenges researchers to consider the unique positionality of children in history, political geography and ideological conflict. However, I would argue that it achieves something further, something positive for the consultants who contributed to the text. Danforth and Van Boeschoten explain that one of their strategies in critiquing master narratives is to question the universalisms that underpin these. They do this by way of giving power, agency and voice to those who lived the events in question rather than those who interpret them. In doing so, the refugee children who until now have been lumped into categories defined by others, and whose individual stories have been glossed, redacted or ignored, are permitted to step out front, past lingering political frames, to contribute to the building of mutual recognition and the healing of lingering traumas.

The book is organized into three tidy parts. In the first, “Histories,” Danforth and Van Boeschoten situate the evacuation programs in larger historical context. The reader is led through the Axis occupation of Greece in 1941, to the rise of the communist-sponsored resistance organization National Liberation Front (and its military wing, the Greek Popular Liberation Army), to the liberation of Greece and the increasing tension between the political left and the royalist right, and finally to 1946, when the political right won national elections and the stage was set for the Civil War. They detail the parti-

san evacuation of about 20,000 children to Eastern Europe and the Greek government evacuation program, which, under the auspices of Queen Frederica of the Hellenes, sent about 18,000 children to 54 *paidopoleis* throughout Greece.

The authors explain that both sides were motivated by humanitarian impulses to remove children from harm, which they did according to various logistical constraints and with an awareness of the broader optics of their actions (the evacuation of children was used by both sides in propaganda campaigns). What's more, both sides were motivated by the ideological goal of producing a generation of young, loyal adults. The similarities between the two programs continue as the authors turn their attention to the life led by child refugees in Eastern Europe and in the *paidopoleis*. Children on both sides were put into tightly controlled and politicized environments where they were actively indoctrinated into certain beliefs and values. Moreover, children on both sides were put into education programs. Most of children evacuated to Eastern Europe became skilled workers, with a handful moving on to gain university degrees, while the children evacuated by the nationalists received primary education and technical skills.

One of the more fascinating aspects of this section is the authors' consideration of Greece's political geography at the time: the communists held the mountains of northern Greece, the Greek government was based in Athens, gruesome fighting and terror campaigns deterritorialized the nation village by village. Claiming, defending and challenging are familiar modes by which political space is made, maintained and remade. However, we discover, the evacuation of children complicates the temporal dimension of active political space-making during periods of conflict. The evacuation of children—essentially a coordinated mobilization of non-combatants—set up a circuit intended by each party to strengthen their claim to particular regions *post-combat* through the active cultivation of loyal political subjects. The imagining and creation of political potentials is a concept worthy of further consideration.

The second part of the book, "Stories," is intimate, complex and moving. It allows the reader to engage directly with the life-history narratives of seven refugee children: four sent to Eastern Europe and three sent to *paidopoleis*. The stories effectively disempower essentializing ideological accounts of the evacuation programs, while showcasing refugee children as active agents rather than passive victims. While there is much to say about this part of the book, I'd like to highlight the following. First, the voice of each ethnographer is directly accessible only in the short summaries that precede each story. Following each summary, the reader is able to engage with each consultant, free of intervention. "Stories," then, reads like an interaction of multiple voices producing a dialogical space representative of the social intervention the authors intend the book to make. Second, readers might note the moments in each of these stories where individuals locate their transitions from childhood to adulthood. These transition moments challenge the association of adulthood with the gaining of agency, offering instead an alternative view whereby individuals approach adulthood through the creation of cohesive pasts and meaningful futures.

The final part of the text, "Ethnographies," is more theoretical and engages directly with refugee studies and the anthropology of memory. In terms of the former, Danforth and Van Boeschoten bring together sedentarist and cosmopolitan perspectives of the lived refugee experience to suggest that refugee children make the emotionally disturbing separation from "home," a fixed location, meaningful in the context of global processes and according to individual experiences of displacement and mobility. Over time, refugee children construct and reconstruct their identities by situating themselves in relation to a multiplicity of homes—places where the children currently live, places to where they were taken and where they became situated, and places they remember—linked by complex events that are both (and sometimes simultaneously) negative and positive. This analytical framework comes alive as the authors consider various cases where refugee children have returned or attempted to return to their first homes and the conflicts that ensue. I found myself tacking between this part of the book and "Stories" over and again.

In terms of the anthropology of memory, Danforth and Van Boeschoten invite the reader to consider the persistent and public "memory war" (220) that continues in relation to refugee children. Both sides of the conflict continue to claim authentic master narratives and ownership of historical truth. This is significant for multiple reasons, but I will highlight one consideration. The narratives to do with this historical event shape the way Greeks think about such issues as departure, property and empowerment. Questioning these narratives is critical at a time when Greeks are struggling to deal with the fallout of financial crisis (dispossession, precarity, disempowerment, etc.), massive and utterly unmanaged inflows of migrants (including refugee claimants) from across Africa and Asia, and a mass exodus of young Greeks leaving the country once again.

*Children of the Greek Civil War* is an extraordinary text. By attending to the stories of child refugees, Danforth and Van Boeschoten undercut divisive and, in some cases, dangerous ongoing political projects specific to both sides at this crucial moment in the country's history. What's more, they showcase how dialogue and attention to the experiences of those who lived through and continue to live with defining historical moments can create respectful space and the foundations for co-existence today.

Three interesting points of engagement with this text for students and scholars include the question of how individuals experience agency relative to series of events, the ongoing affects of trauma and witnessing on individual subjectivities and the question of collaboration as a key methodology. This book might also be read alongside Neni Panourgia's recent outstanding ethnography *Dangerous Citizens* (2009). Both texts reengage with the history of Greece, experiment with communities of memory and offer inspiring methodological and textual innovations.

## Reference

- Panourgia, Neni  
2009 *Dangerous Citizens: The Greek Left and the Terror of the State*. New York: Fordham University Press.