

'THE DIFFERENTIAL EMBODIMENT OF HOME': REFUGEEENESS UNDER REVISION

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Introduction

Previous studies on Greek-Cypriot refugees treat the terms “refugeeness” and “home” as fixed, static and similarly shared by different people. This study shows that, refugeeness is a social product under constant revision that cannot be understood outside the framework in which is produced and reproduced. The study was conducted within the context of *Voices of the Mediterranean* project which is funded by Euromed.

I. Dislocation and 1974: Some other studies

A. The housing issue (Zetter, 1982)

- 49,000 dwellings
- Three directions of the housing program: Estates, self-help housing and the use of Turkish-Cypriot dwellings.
=> Temporary rehousing not constructing integrated communities.

■ The program was a quantitative success rather than qualitative (Zetter, 1982). Reinforcing the refugee consciousness.

=> Zetter (1994) argues that people who leave in refugee estates will be likely to return to the north and reconstruct their past social networks.

B. Social implications

- Losing land and property: Losing “key structures of meaning” (Loizos, 1977:8, a study in Argaki village).
 - Some time after dislocation, refugees from Argaki were not willing to make a new start.

- Hadjiyianni (2002) and “The making of a refugee”: How the children of refugees in Cyprus adopt the refugee identity (interviews with 100 children; 67 girls and 33 boys; 100 parents; 70 mother and 30 fathers).
 - The majority of children (60%) identified themselves as refugees.

– Their arguments: Having been forced to leave one's place or origin, lack of understanding by non-refugees and sharing feelings with their parents.

=>The refugee identity has been transmitted to children through education, the media and the family. However, parents were children's main source of information.

II. The fluidity of the term “refugeeness”

A. The example of Tahtakallas refugee estate

- Tahtakallas' location and background.
- The study: in-depth interviews and ethnography (25 interviewees aged 9 to 86 six years old).
- Four groups: (1). interviewees who became refugees at the age of 40 to 50; (2). refugees who settled the south at the age of 25 to 35 and some individuals who were younger than 12 years old in 1974; (3). younger people aged 16 to 18 years old; (4). children aged 9 to 12 years old.
- May-June 2003.

B. Tahtakallas as a non-community

The older participants of the study (Groups 1 and 2) do not claim to come from Tahtakallas and like the area. Their four attributes:

(a) The land

“The only thing I wish I had here was a *sihoriano* [a fellow villager] even if was my worst enemy. We would understand each other. We would say that we had that piece of land and we would know that it was true. He or she would believe me. Somebody from another village would think that I was a liar.”

(b) The deep knowledge about people and the place: lack of knowledge about others' life (e.g. marriage); who is a good and who is a bad person; communicating and sharing daily experiences; "*ti na thimoume afou oulloi ine klidomenoi esso tous*" [what to remember, all are locked up in their house].

"I would definitely feel better if the residents here came from my village in the north. It is actually my big complaint that this area does not have *sihiorianous*. It is sad for my daughters because they do not know who their relatives are and this had consequences. Because even if your relatives hurt you they will not 'eat you'. The *xenos* may 'push you'".

(c) The importance of the house

“sto horkon eixame ta terkasta mas, tous fournous mas tze kamname psoumia tze fai” [in the village we had what we needed in the house, our stoves and we made food and bread]; *“itan polla orea, etraoudousamen oules mazi”* [it was so nice, we sang all together]. Women were more likely than men to talk about the loss of the house whereas men mentioned the loss of jobs and land.

(d) Rituals and the sharing of customs.

- As a way of reinforcing people's social and personal identity, and the sense of belonging.

C. Tahtakallas as a place of belonging

(a) Differences among the older refugees

“It will hurt me if they tell me to leave in case the Cyprus problem is solved. Where are they going to take me? If I go to Morfou I will not mind only if one of my children is close to me. Here in Tahtakallas I have one daughter. I am getting older and less able to support myself; if I go somewhere else I will not have somebody close to me”.
Anastasia.

=> Arguably, Anastasia's experiences in the town of Morfou may reflect her experiences in Tahtakallas as she did not own land and had little contact with neighbors and relatives.

(b) Arguments from some male refugees from group 2 who happened to work in Tahtakallas for years before 1974.

“I have Tahtakallas in my heart [...] It takes a part of my life. I have been coming here since 1963. It is a neighborhood that we love. It is more than a second home”.

“I have many friends here. The whole neighborhood is full of friends. We have our daily problems but we never stop helping each other. When we meet we talk about everything, kouventes tou kefene, gossip, politics, our problems. We talk about our village in the north. This is the first thing we discuss. We come from different villages but we talk, it does not matter. We talk about how we lived in our village, our customs during the big celebration of Easter and Christma”. Yiannakis.

=> Tahtakallas is seen as a place of belonging when it reflects the past experiences of its residents. Thus, as a physical and social place, Tahtakallas does not appear to reinforce the refugee consciousness.

(c) 'Belonging to nowhere'

- Four of the participants were younger than 12 years old in 1974. They expressed ambiguous feelings towards both the north and the south.

1. "If there is a solution I will not go back. Because I was too young, Aggastina is a military zone. My mother will go, I will not. En eho tipota na riso [my roots are not there] ... I feel it like my topos but I do not know, I was very young and Aggastina did not remind me anything when I visited it recently. If I had to choose between Aggastina and Tahtakalas, perhaps I would prefer Aggastina".

"I feel I am a refugee because I do not have anything here to own. Nothing belongs to me here. If they give me the house I do not think that I will stop feeling a refugee. But it is good if they give it to me. I have nothing to own and I am not from here". Chrystalla.

2. “From the three places I have experienced I do not feel any of those as my topos. I feel Ayios Dometios more than Tahtakalas because I spent my childhood there. I do not feel Zodia close to me especially after I saw it. The passion to return was there but when I saw it I felt like something cut it. I found everything too small and narrow. I remembered it as a kid, I saw it again as an adult”. Niki.

(d) “I am from Tahtakallas”

- The words from the younger participants (children of refugees aged 16-18 years old) reveal that Tahtakallas becomes a place of belonging through constructing their identities there.

1.”These days I have gone to Dikomo. I basically tried to support my parents when they saw their places. I was moved because they were moved. My feelings were mixed. In the event of a solution, I would prefer to have a house here, one in Dikomo and one in Aggastina. I love this place, I like it. Wherever you have experiences you like it, I just cannot leave. But if it were for the common good, surely I would agree to leave”. Leandros.

2. “I am a refugee because my father is and I would like to visit the place where he grew up. I want to go now but it is not right because we do not have to show our passport to visit our *topos*”.

3. “I feel I am a refugee because I did not experience the places in the north. I visited the north and I liked it. I would like to stay here and have another house there”.

4. “I do not feel I am a refugee, I have not visited my parents’ village in the north and I do not want to”. Melani.

Conclusion

Refugeeness is a fluid term, it means different things to different people and the way it is perceived directly relates to how home is perceived and has been experienced in the past. Arguably, if home is the place where the personal-identity continuum is preserved then refugeeness is the physical, social and imagined place where this continuum is disrupted.