

UDC 323.282(=163.3:495.6),,1948(049.3)
314.151.3(=163.3:495.6),,1948/98(049.3)

Brown, Keith. 2012. *Macedonia's Child-Grandfathers: The Transnational Politics of Memory, Exile and Return, 1948-1998*/Keith Brown, Skopje: Foundation Open Society-Macedonia, ISBN 978-608-218-155-4

The book *Macedonia's Child-Grandfathers: The Transnational Politics of Memory, Exile and Return*, written by Keith Brown was published in 2012 by the Foundation Open Society-Macedonia. The study was carried out on the basis of research done in the comparative project "The policy of memory and experiences of refugees in Southeast Europe", realized by the Centre for Macedonian Research and Documentation in Thessaloniki, Greece. This work summarizes the construction of identities, the process of shaping communities and the policy of memory in the period of the Civil war in Greece, as well as in the post-war period in which one can truly see the characteristics of the development of the aforementioned fields of research. The book is comprised of many chapters in which Brown reveals the facts and conclusions to which he has come after his research on different aspects of the life of the refugee children from Northern Greece. I will try to briefly summarize this work.

The author begins with a short introduction in which he emphasizes the two gatherings of refugee children. The First world congress of refugee children was held in 1988 in Skopje and the Second was held ten years later, in 1998, also in Skopje. Around 28.000 children left their homes in Northern Greece at the time of the Civil war. They went to Yugoslavia and other countries in Eastern Europe. For many who have been through that process, 1948, the year when they left their homeland, plays a key role in their lives. The key point of the two congresses was visiting the family homes in Northern Greece, which was prevented in two cases by the Greek border personnel.

The meeting in 1998 was a type of constructing a collective identity, as well as a commemoration. The members of the community are fighting for their rights even today. This community, which identifies itself as *refugee children* is a "product" of the interests of many countries and individuals, as well as of the structure of the international policy. It is exactly the conditions and the contexts which have led to the shaping of this community which are the main subject of this book. As a source of information Brown has made many conversations, ranging from 1992 to 2000 with many members or potential members of the community. Because of the age of the children and thus the inability to fully adopt the worldview of the communities in which they have been born, some of them saw exile as a blessing, considering the fact that in the new countries they had opportunities for education and work. This research is focusing on the relationship between politics, culture and identity.

In the next chapter the author is taking into account information from different researchers, beginning with George Bisharat and Julie Patty, which have done research on the Palestinian case; Pamela Ballinger, which has worked on the case of the Italian refu-

gees from Istra; the Cuban refugee children at the beginning of the 1960s. Brown compares the cases to conclude that the Macedonian refugee case has its own trajectory.

In addition he explains the historical background of the creation of the community of the refugee children. The focus is on the relations between Macedonia and the Civil war in Greece, as well as on the relations between Yugoslavia, the countries in the region and the Soviet Union. These interstate relations have shaped the community and its history. It is important to note that the Greek government manipulated the public opinion by presenting the fleeing children as an act of the communists, which allegedly tried to take the kids away from their families and then “poison” them with communist ideas. This lie was denied by the fact that more than 8.000 children lived with their parents. Another misconception is the number of 28.000 refugee children; that number is not constant because many of them have returned to their homes after the war and some of them even identified themselves as Greeks.

Brown continues with defining one of the most important moments of the “fleeing” – crossing the border. Another important factor as well is that almost all of the narratives begin with identifying the former village or town of the narrator. Today the places have Greek names. The refugee children were often accompanied by young women from their villages which were called “mothers”. The statements of the informants are matching with the documented historical events of that time. The story about Gjorgji Donevski, who is an author of the monograph for the Bapchor village, is one of the many stories of refugee children. He starts with his personal experiences as a refugee child in Yugoslavia. Later on he speaks about leaving the village, the educational process, about knowing the Greek language, his family, the establishment of a commission which would help families reunite and finally about his reunion with the family in Skopje, 30 years after the tragic event.

Politics played a big part in the life of this community. Because of the political discrepancy between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, Tito was aware that the USSR was trying to create a bad opinion about Yugoslavia within the refugee children community. Because of that he approved the returning of 2.500 members of this group from Eastern Europe to Yugoslavia, offering them apartments, jobs and insurance at the same time.

The author comes to a conclusion that endogamy is often a case with Aegean people. With this kind of an approach for choosing a life partner, they would be able to keep their identity in the next generations; the members of the community are especially proud of their origin. Sometimes it was considered necessary that the partner comes from a respected family. Another conclusion is that the refugee children were quite often excluded from the networks that could one day lead to the connection with their possible partner. Brown continues with the Aegean people from the Kostur region and the Lerin region, known for *pechalbarstvo* (working abroad), which started going to the USA, Canada and Australia after World War II. During the many individual emigrant stories, we can see that endogamy was practiced even abroad. One of the crucial dimensions of the overseas emigrants is the meaning they give to the orthodox church. The church in Australia plays a key role in the social functioning of the community.

Among the Aegean Macedonians there is much criticism towards Tito. This is a result of the propaganda of the Informbiro, as well as of an agreement for military help between Yugoslavia and the USA. At the same time, Tito’s regime “won” a prize for the participation in the Civil war in Greece, which one of the informants of Brown estimated to

be up to 6 million dollars. This has formed an opinion that Yugoslavia has “profited” off of the tragedy of Aegean people.

Later on in the book the author pays more attention to the activism of the refugee children and the way it was formed. 1970s were a period when the situation of this community in the Republic of Macedonia remained problematic. That did not stand in the way of creating certain initiatives for the acknowledgement of the Aegean heritage. During the 1980s the activity was growing; in that same period, many organizations of united Macedonians were formed in Canada and Australia. In 1988, “The First Gathering of Refugee Children from the Aegean Part of Macedonia” was held in Skopje. The communist authorities were trying to control the flow of the meeting and wanted to minimize the effect it had. After the gathering, in the “Zhenaborec” park, a new monument was built, resembling a “mother” with three kids “on the run”. This event helped in the further developing of new associations, like The Association of Refugee Children from Aegean Macedonia (later in the text marked as ARCAM). The main goal of this organization was the protection of human rights and of property rights of Macedonians from Aegean Macedonia.

After Macedonia’s independence, there was a rise in the conflict with Greece with the creation of the new Macedonian Constitution (adopted on November 17, 1991), where it is stated that the Republic of Macedonia will take care of the Macedonians who live outside its borders. The new flag and the mere name of the country were also reasons for the conflict. In the first few years of independence, the actions of the “Aegean lobby” were similar to the actions of the opposition and the calls of ARCAM to international organizations went unnoticed.

In this work, the author also turns his attention to the origin of the Aegean people. He highlights that the ones living in Bitola most often come from the Lerin region; the ones living in Shtip come from the Voden region and the ones living in Skopje – from the Kostur region.

For ARCAM and the Association of Macedonians in Poland, the most important question is the one about the permission of going back to their homeland. The names of the cities and villages in passports are also a reason for conflict between the Aegean Macedonians and Greece. The Aegean Macedonians want the old, Slovene names in their passports, whereas the Greek officials are not giving permission to enter the country in that case. In the middle of the 1990s, organizations from Strumica, Radovish and Shtip, together with the ARCAM and the Forum of Human Rights in Skopje signed an agreement for cooperation. They started publishing the magazine “Nezaborav”.

In 1998, “The Second Gathering of Refugee Children from the Aegean Part of Macedonia” was held. Kiro Gligorov, Macedonia’s president at the time opened the gathering, in which anthropologists also attended. One of them was the filmmaker Jill Daniels, whose film “Next Year In Lerin” was made the following year and contained footage from the gathering. Bigger provocations towards Greece were avoided during the whole meeting. After it ended, a declaration was signed, stating that the refugee children from Northern Greece have been wrongfully deprived of their heritage, property and citizenship. The author states that the association in Bitola was more radical than ARCAM. The different approaches towards the problem serve as a reminder that exile and loss are perceived differently.

The government change in Macedonia had a great impact in the policy of the associations. With VMRO taking power, the relations with Greece and Albania regarding the

Macedonian question were sped up. However, no concrete steps were made towards improving the situation of the Aegean lobby. It is believed that the highest number of people with Aegean origin is 200.000. A part of them started new lives, somewhat forgetting about the past, but some of them are highlighting exactly that past of which they are proud of.

The author concludes that the reason for solidarity among the members of this group is the injustice they have all witnessed. The first generation of this community is already in their late 50s or 60s. Some state that Greece is waiting for this generation to die, hoping that their question will die with them.

The book *Macedonia's Child-Grandfathers: The Transnational Politics of Memory, Exile and Return* is a big contribution to the literature related to the Civil war in Greece and to the community of refugee children, which is a product of the war. Brown addresses the most important aspects of life of the refugee children and through that does a retrospective of a long lasting period of great importance for Balkan history. The author himself states that the question of this group is not entirely treated as it should be, alluding to the questions of all the refugees all over the world at the same time. This work is supported by a large number of information and research and is a true basis for starting any research about the community of the refugee children from Northern Greece.

Andrej Tatarchevski (Macedonia)
Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology,
“Ss. Cyril and Methodius” University of Skopje
e-mail:and dejtatar@gmail.com