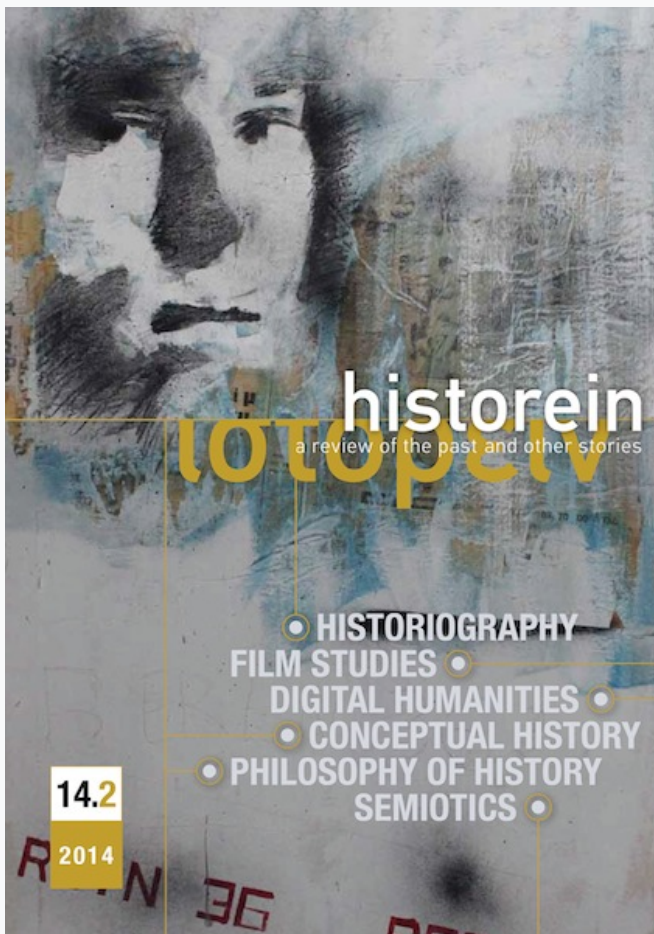


Historein

Vol 14, No 2 (2014)

Historein 14/2 (2014)



Review of Kateřina Králová, Konstantinos Tsivos et al., *Vyschly Nám Slzy... Řečtí uprchlíci v Československu* [We have no tears left to cry: Greek refugees in Czechoslovakia]

Georgia Sarikoudi

doi: [10.12681/historein.280](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.280)

Copyright © 2015, Georgia Sarikoudi



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Sarikoudi, G. (2014). Review of Kateřina Králová, Konstantinos Tsivos et al., *Vyschly Nám Slzy. Řečtí uprchlíci v Československu* [We have no tears left to cry: Greek refugees in Czechoslovakia]. *Historein*, 14(2), 151–154.
<https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.280>

**Kateřina Králová,
Konstantinos Tsivos et al.**

*Vyschly Nám Slzy...
Řečtí uprchlíci v Československu*

**[We have no tears left to cry:
Greek refugees in Czechoslovakia]**

Prague: Dokořán. 2012. 333 pp.

Georgia Sarikoudi

PhD in social anthropology

This book, the title of which is a quotation from oral testimony that may be translated as “We have no tears left to cry”, examines the memories of the Greek community in Czechoslovakia from the second half of the twentieth century to the present. In twelve chapters the authors, researchers and students of the Institute of International Studies of Charles University in Prague focus on the survival strategies that refugees from Greece had to adopt in order to escape the Greek Civil War, ranging from the memories of the war to the exodus itself, to everyday life in a new country and their political memories, up to the reflection on the present crisis. Their research is based on written sources as well as on 60 testimonies of civil war refugees collected from all over the Czech Republic.

The problem of immigration and the construction of ethnic identities is a new subject for researchers in eastern Europe. Before 1989, the socialist regimes promoted the idea that the state is a family, all of whose members are equal, and where ethnic, social or any other difference should not play an important role.¹ Thus, Czechoslovak social scientists (especially ethnographers) were preoccupied with the rural space and urban working class. After the end of the Cold War and the subsequent fall of communism in 1989, workers from neighbouring coun-

tries (such as Poland) and immigrants and refugees from Asian countries began arriving in the Czech Republic.² Consequently, minority groups and the construction of national identities became prosperous areas of research for social scientists. Most of the research concerns the Roma, Ukrainian and Vietnamese³ communities in the Czech Republic,⁴ with only a few essays, mostly historical, published on the Greek community.⁵ Recently, the president of the Greek community published a book that is based mainly on oral testimonies. There was no academic study, however, based on both interviews and archival material. This book fills that gap.

Kateřina Králová and Konstantinos Tsivos have already published extensively on modern Greek history, but this is the first book where they have worked together. At the beginning of the volume, they provide us with the historical and political context of Greece during the 1940s, which resulted in the flight of almost 50,000 people to eastern European countries. The civil war is still a sensitive matter in Greece and every new publication is closely watched. Králová and Tsivos, however, are acquainted with the relevant literature on this topic and manage to provide a brief but objective description of the events.

As is indicated by the title, the book refers to the hardship faced by the refugees. In the first half, the authors present the story of the refugees in chronological order (civil war, exodus, settlement in Czechoslovakia), while the second addresses different aspects of their life in the host country, such as children’s life in the orphanages, the integration of the refugees to the new society and the configuration of their political identity.

According to the authors, the second generation of refugees, defined as those who came

to Czechoslovakia as children, tends to idealise life in the country of origin before the Second World War and the civil war. Even though life was difficult in rural Greece at that time, the narrators have mostly happy memories of childhood. Wartime hardships made them re-evaluate their previous life and regard it as happy and carefree. Their narrations describe the fear and the violence that Greeks felt during the 1940s. Terrifying events have been inscribed in their memories. People who lived through those events can recall them in great detail, even 60 years later. For this reason, many children reflect on their departure from Greece and the big adventure into the unknown with a certain joy. For them, entering a Czechoslovak children's home was certainly a milestone in their lives. Those children, deprived of their family, developed a special strong and lasting bond, which makes them regard themselves as friends or even a "family". Their narratives express their appreciation for Czech society for its educational system and the social care that was provided to them. As the chances for return got smaller, Greeks tried to adapt to the new way of life, to integrate into Czech society but also to maintain their national identity; the strategies they seemed to follow involved creating clubs and organising events, such as sports activities and music festivals, based on their ethnic affiliation. Four important factors that influenced the degree of social integration of the refugees may be identified: mixed marriages, the preservation of national culture and language, the legal framework for citizenship and self-identify.

The group of people who came to Czechoslovakia at the end of the civil war was not very homogenous. Among them, a quarter were Slavomacedonians. The problems Slavomacedonians faced and continue to have with the Greek state resulted in a complicated symbiosis between Greeks and Slavomacedonians in the

Czech Republic, as depicted in the chapter written by Jan Procházka.

Vladimír Kadlec focuses on how the refugees formed their political identity within or in contrast to the Czech environment. Králová reflects on the image and the crisis within the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), especially the results of the split in the party and its effect on the life and the political aspects of Greek refugees in Czechoslovakia.

KKE leaders sought to assure refugees that their stay in the host country was temporary and that they would soon return to their home country. None of the refugees could ever have believed that they would remain in the host country for about three decades. As Tsivos describes, from the very first moment, Greeks prepared for their repatriation. After the fall of the junta in 1974, the refugees started to repatriate. The Greek reality, however, was far beyond their imagination and they found that the only thing left from their Greek past was their memories. All repatriates faced difficulties in recognising the place they used to call "home". After an initial period of happiness, repatriates realised that there were sharp contrasts between their reminiscences and reality. This new situation drove some of them to return to Czechoslovakia or to emigrate to places like Australia or Canada.

The book concludes with a chapter by Janis Kořeček, who is half Greek and lives in the Czech Republic. He is both the researcher and the topic of his research. His article provides the internal perspective of the third generation of Greek refugees in the former Czechoslovakia, which underlines clearly that Greek identity has not vanished, even for the children and grandchildren of the refugees.

From the texts mentioned above, one can conclude that the first generation does not want

or cannot let go of the past and therefore remains focused on the principles that brought them to Czechoslovakia in the first place. The second generation tries to balance the Greek and Czech perceptions of life. The third generation, however, as Kořeček admits, has encountered a problem in identifying itself fully with any of these two nations. Nevertheless, only time will tell if this is more a general trend or rather their adolescence shaping their conflicting identity.

The book provides a brief but diachronic image of the life of Greek refugees in the former Czechoslovakia. Some questions such as trauma and memory could have been raised frequently, deeply and more associated with in a theoretical framework of the civil war and its consequences. However, this does not diminish the value of this book, which recently received the Miroslav Ivanov award for one of the best nonfiction publications in the last three years. It is a great shame that, due to the language, the international reader has very limited access to this book. A translation into Greek would be of great importance since until recently there was a gap in Greek historiography on research dealing with daily life during the civil war and especially of the refugees in eastern European countries.⁶ This book is by all means an important contribution to Greek modern history.

NOTES

- 1 Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 64–66.
- 2 Iva Chudilová, “Cizinci v České Republice,” *Naše společnost* 1/1–2 (2003): 13–18.
- 3 The Vietnamese are a rather special case. The majority in Czechoslovakia had settled there during communism and managed to stay after 1990.
- 4 See, for example, Zdeněk Uherek, “Cizinské komunity a městský prostor v České Republice” [Foreign communities and urban space in the Czech Republic], *Sociologický časopis* 39/2 (2003): 193–219 and Zdeněk Uherek, Zuzana Korecká and Tereza Pojarová et al., eds., *Cizinecké komunity z antropologické perspektivy: vybrané případy významných imigračních skupin v České republice* [Foreign communities from an anthropological perspective: selective cases of major immigrant groups in the Czech Republic] (Prague: Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 2008). For the Roma, in particular, there is Řičan Pavel, “The Lost Identity of the Czech Roma,” in *Ethnic Studies and the Urbanised Space in Social Anthropological Reflections*, ed. Zdeněk Uherek, 27–33 (Prague: Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 1998), and Tatjana Šišková, “Rómská menšina v Československu” [Romani minority in Czechoslovakia], *Sociologický obzor* 2/2 (1993): 58–68.
- 5 See Pavel Hradečný, *Řecká komunita v Československu: Její vznik a počáteční vývoj (1948–1954)* [The Greek community in Czechoslovakia: foundation and the first steps of development, 1948–1954] (Prague: Institute of Contemporary History at the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 2003); Anthula Botu and Milan Konečný, *Řečtí uprchlíci. Kronika řeckého lidu v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku 1948–1989* [Greek refugees: chronicle of Greek people in Czech, Moravia and Silesia, 1948–1989] (Prague: Řecká obec Praha, 2005); Tassula Zissaki-Healey, *Ο ελληνισμός στην Τσεχία* [Greeks in the Czech Republic] (Athens: Aristos/GSEE, 2009); and Konstantinos Tsivos, *Řecká emigrace v Československu (1948–1968): Od jednoho rozštěpení ke druhému* [Greek immigrants in Czechoslovakia, 1948–1968: From the first to the second split] (Prague: Dokořán, 2012).
- 6 In this category, see, for instance: Eftihia Voutira, Vassilis Dalkavoukis and Nikos Marrantzidis, eds., *Το όπλο παραπόδα. Οι πολιτικοί πρόσφυγες του ελληνικού εμφυλίου πολέμου*

στην Ανατολική Ευρώπη [Order arms: political refugees of the Greek civil war in eastern Europe] (Thessaloniki: University of Macedonia, 2005). Katerina Tseku, *Προσωρινώς διαμένοντες... Έλληνες Πολιτικοί Πρόσφυγες στη Λαϊκή Δημοκρατία της Βουλγαρίας (1948–1982)* [Temporary residents: Greek political refugees in the People's Republic of Bulgaria, 1948–1982] (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2010); Loring M. Danforth and Riki van Boeschoten, *Children of the Greek Civil War: Refugees and the Politics of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Riki van Boeschoten, *Ανάποδα Χρόνια. Συλλογική Μνήμη και Ιστορία στο Ζιάκα Γρεβενών (1900–1950)* [Hapless years: memory and history in Ziakas, Grevena, 1900–1950] (Athens: Plethron, 1997); Riki van Boeschoten, *Μνήμες και λήθη του ελληνικού εμφυλίου πολέμου* [Remembering and forgetting the Greek civil war] (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2008).

Alexandros Nafpliotis

Britain and the Greek Colonels: Accommodating the Junta in the Cold War

London & New York: IB Tauris, 2013. 307 pp.

Yannis Skalidakis

Panteion University

Historical research in and academic interest on the period of the military dictatorship in Greece (1967–1974) has advanced in recent years to include university courses, seminars and dissertations on many of its aspects. This previously under-researched period has evolved thus into a growing field of historical study and some important works have already seen the light.¹

This fruitful process has resulted in a renewed public discussion on controversial topics, such as the causes of the colonels' coup d'état and the nature of their regime, the social and economic history of the period, resistance against and consent towards the regime, the impact of the 1973 student revolt and the 1974 Cyprus incidents that marked the end of this troubled period. Nevertheless, 40 years after the transition to a democratic system, known as the *metapolitefsi*, many aspects of the junta period have not been clarified thoroughly. As a result, public discussion is still dominated by stereotypical approaches, leaving it easy prey for political misuse. The foreign policy of the dictatorship and the role of foreign powers in the imposition, support or guidance of the colonels or in confronting them and defending democracy are among these unclear aspects.

In this context, Alexandros Nafpliotis' study concerning the relations between Britain and the Greek dictatorship represents a valuable