

Gonda Van Steen. *Adoptions, Memory and Cold War Greece—Kid pro quo?* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020), 350pp.

Van Coufoudakis

The Dutch born author is Director of the Center for Modern Greek Studies at King's College in London and holds the Koraeas Chair in that institution. Prior to assuming her current position, Professor Van Steen served in the Modern Greek Studies program at the University of Florida. She was educated in the classics in Belgium and at Princeton. Van Steen has been a frequent contributor at AHI's Hellenism conferences.

This book should be of interest to Greek Americans, especially AHEPA members. It addresses one of the least known and highly controversial programs involving the adoption of more than 3,000 Greek children in the aftermath of WWII and the Greek Civil War. These adoptions took place primarily in the 1950s through the early 60s. A significant number of Greek children were also adopted in the Netherlands under similar programs. These adoptions were characterized by legal irregularities and unusual procedures. In addition to the various organizations involved in these adoptions, the book sheds light in the involvement of AHEPA and key AHEPA members in this controversial program. These adoptions became a precedent for the wave of foreign adoptions we have witnessed in recent years in the US involving children from Eastern Europe, Russia, the Central Asian Republics and Asia in general.

This is an emotionally difficult book to read as it includes testimonials from several adoptees and their children. It confirms the serious impact of war and civil war on the lives of innocent children. The book documents the operations of post-war adoption networks, a movement shaped by cold war ideological considerations in Greece and in the US. It also documents the transgressions and transactions involved in these adoptions. Many of these adoptions were poorly handled, let alone supervised, to the detriment of the children involved. Several of these children were adopted by Greek American families. The book documents how some of these children and their descendants are now seeking

information about their past and the specifics of their ethnic identity. Telling testimonials by numerous adoptees and their children enhance this important text. The book provides a serious account of the social and political conditions prevailing in civil war and post-civil war Greece.

Adoptions originated from an e-mail inquiry the author received from the son of one of these adoptees who wanted to know about the conditions and the social environment in post war Greece that led to his mother's adoption in the US. His mother and her sister were the children of Elias Argyriades who was arrested in Greece for being a member of the Communist Party. He was executed in 1952 along with Nikos Beloyannis after a controversial trial. It should be noted that the executions of Communists in Greece during and in the aftermath of the Civil War became an international political issue that affected the discussions on the Greek Civil War both in the UN Security Council but also in the General Assembly. The United States, engaged in Greece at the time under the Truman Doctrine, found it difficult to defend these Greek actions in the UN. It repeatedly called on the Greek government to moderate these policies, but it appeared unable or unwilling to stop these executions despite the influence it exerted on Greek politics at the time.

This book is a serious in-depth exploration of a dark page of recent Greek history and society. It also sheds light on Greek attitudes on adoptions, "illegitimate" children and orphans, and why Greek babies were in demand in our country at that time by parents looking to adopt babies from overseas. However emotionally difficult Van Steen's account may be, it is real. The consequences of these poorly managed adoptions are still being felt to this day.

Even though this book is challenging and ground breaking, it also raises a number of serious questions. One is the author's highly ideological analysis of civil war and post-civil war Greece which undermines the credibility of this valuable volume. The social and political problems confronting Greece at that time were real but were not unique. Other countries that went through civil wars, for example Spain, faced similar problems. In the United States, during the Communist phobia of the 50's and 60's, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), the investigations conducted by Senator Joe McCarthy and others are well documented for the impact they had on American civil liberties, let alone on individual lives. I can go on and on. The book provides clear evidence that ideological considerations, corruption and poorly supervised procedures affected the adoptions of the Greek children. However, the author does not answer one basic question. Given the social, cultural, political and economic conditions of post war and post-civil war Greece, what would have happened to these children given how unprepared the country was psychologically, financially, and organizationally to provide care for them? Some of the testimonials of adoptees included in the book are sad. However, aren't there any success stories in these adoptions? There is no doubt that some adoptive parents are better

equipped than others to address issues of adoption, ethnic identity, etc. Unfortunately, despite years of experience with international and domestic adoptions, problems continue to this day with poorly supervised adoptions and corrupt practices. As a result, adoptees and adoptive families still pay a heavy price both psychologically and financially.

Van Steen has utilized memory studies, cultural anthropology, modern Greek history and politics in an engaging manner. Privacy reasons must have created special difficulties in collecting accurate data. This is also a new area for Van Steen's research. She must be congratulated for venturing into such a sensitive topic, a topic that most students of modern Greek history and society have not seriously examined. The *Adoptions, Memory and Cold War Greece—Kid pro quo?* is ground breaking. There is no other book in English that provides such an in-depth account of this difficult chapter in post-war Greek history. Despite some of my concerns about this book, I recommend it.

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