

**DAY 3: TASOULLA HADJIYANNI: THE MAKING OF A REFUGEE:
CHILDREN ADOPTING REFUGEE IDENTITY IN CYPRUS
(2002) Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers**

“Day by day I wander
But behind me my footsteps are erased,
I have lost my roots.”
(Niki Katsaouni, 1991, from poem “The Return” p. 2

1. Identity

“Fleeing political or ethnic persecution, refugees are forced to abandon the places they value in search of safety for themselves and their families. Through their dislocation, refugees lose many facets of what once constituted their identity—their way of life, status, wealth, power, places, people, and in some cases, language and culture.” p. 1

Taking on the *title* of “refugee” is hardly comparable to one’s rich homeland identity. Due to the millions of people in refugee situations globally, the term “refugee” has become a sociological and legal category tied to humanitarian work and international immigration policies. It is unfortunate, Hadjiyanni argues, that refugees are perceived and portrayed as masses of people lumped together in statistics and identified only by their original homeland, age, gender, and ethnicity. For many, the title “refugee” becomes a separate identity from their homeland identity (which for some feels lost) and carried for years following displacement. Hadjiyanni argues also that this identity-tag has expectations that she views problematic in their “colonial attitudes”: the refugee experience comes to an “end” (or repatriation) at some point following assimilation, adjustment, acculturation, and adaptation. She says:

“Expecting refugees to have resettled and ‘gotten over’ their refugee experience within ten years of dislocation is what I would call the ‘quick-fix’ approach, by which a problem is thought to be taken care of quickly and attention is directed to other, perceived as more pressing issues. The ‘quick-fix’ approach is also reminiscent of colonial thinking since it undervalues the trauma of the refugee experience and the deep scars left behind... and robs refugees of their humanity ... without acknowledging that the healing process may never end.” p. 6.

Hadjiyanni also argues that this idea of an “end” has severe limitations in understanding the long-term situation of displaced populations.

“Repatriation, for example, has been reframed: Instead of being the ‘end’ of the refugee cycle, it signals the beginning ‘of a new cycle for returnees’, as a new notion of ‘home’ is explored and created...As the duration of refugeehood can influence the definition of home, with refugees feeling more at home in the country of refuge...forced repatriation can also mean another cycle of refugeehood.” p. 7

Another limitation she shares is that assuming an “end” to the refugee experience does not consider the children of refugees and generations born after displacement, which is one focus of her research in the Cyprus context.

Hadjiyanni argues for a shift in what has been labeled as a refugee identity, from an imposed label or title to one that acknowledges *who* displaced people are and what they are *made of* (she calls this shift “identity paradigm”). “This shift...transforms refugeeeness from a ‘separate’ identity into an ‘integral’ [integrated] identity” in and of itself p. 9. Here her thinking is that “refugee is something that one *practices* rather than only what one *is* after experiencing forced displacement.” This shift is tied to possibilities toward a deeper understanding of what the refugee experience entails as well as a means “to reinstall ... humanity... by recognizing individual differences in the construction and adoption of refugee identity.” She continues her argument around identity, not as a fixed characteristic (fixed in policy), but an ongoing practice where a person can move between different identities:

As one aspect of their identity, refugees can choose to nurture and nourish the notion of *refugee* as well as build their life around it. *Refugee* can thus become for some people an indispensable aspect of their identity that presides over their thoughts and decisions. On the other hand, others can choose to downplay their refugee experience and instead focus on other facets of their identity to build their self-image and to denote [indicate] their experience and meaning of life. p. 9

***Re reading & Taking Notes**

Let’s stop here for a few moments for your notes.

Globally, nearly 50 million children have either been forcibly displaced by conflict or have migrated across borders. Ten million of

these children are refugees. The average time spent in a refugee camp is 17 years. These facts are critical to educators worldwide as we consider education in camps, resettlement and repatriation situations. With such large movements of children and their families across borders, access to quality education is challenging. Classrooms across the world have a large diversity of students, in respect to culture, religion, language, and special needs. Identities are diverse.

How does the Teacher respect where a child is at, in terms of identity development?

How does the Teacher acknowledge the trauma of students, and at the same time, create a space of normalcy?

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS
MAKING CONNECTIONS
POSING QUESTIONS

2. Identity Grounded in the Past

Hadjiyanni interviewed children born after the dislocation of their parents, Cypress refugees. These children have never seen the homeland their families were forced to abandon in the mid 1970s. The children, many now young adults, are not “children of war” who witnessed war crimes and forced displacement. They are not refugees by the UN definition.

However, many of the young people she interviewed did adopt the title of *refugee*, “differentiating themselves from nonrefugees, and feeling compassion for others who had experienced

refugeehood.” Many had adopted the “refugee consciousness” of their parents, particularly from their mothers. Children hear the stories of “home,” from parents and grandparents, see the photos and objects from that home. “They empathize with the lost dreams and property of their family members.” Thus over time, there is a transferring and positioning (from the family and community spheres) of refugee identity, its loss and struggles, to children. A young man Hadjiyanni’s interviewed described her study as inquiry into: “what it means to be the child of internally displaced refugees [in Cyprus]; what it means to live in a divided country; what it means to have a *home*; and what it means to have *no home*” p. 223.

In contrast many children of the refugee families felt that their home is the place where they were born, in the unoccupied region of Cyprus, not the family homeland. They preferred to think about home as the place of their childhood, and where they currently live. One such young adult remarked:

“It [occupied place] is our roots, the houses of our ancestors, the *esties* [homes] of our ancestors. I see them [the occupied places] as a place my ancestors lived and nothing more. I consider them a holy place but I wouldn’t leave my house here in the free areas to move to live permanently in the occupied areas. We want to return, we want to claim our rights, and we have rights as citizens. We want to live freely in all of Cyprus, not in half of Cyprus. We want to move freely throughout Cyprus.” p. 222

For all the children of the displaced families of a divided Cyprus, the question, “Where are you from?” must be difficult to answer.

***Re reading & Taking Notes**

Lets stop here for a few moments for your notes

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS
MAKING CONNECTIONS
POSING QUESTIONS

How can the Teacher help students critically question “home” as both historical and future-driven?”

3. Refugee Consciousness

Hadjiyanni defines refugee consciousness:

Refugee consciousness is a shared, transferred, purposeful, and nurtured identity of a dynamic nature that, being grounded in the experience of force, in the past, and in loss looks toward the future.” p. 219

Given the multiple losses and the uprooting of life and home, one can understand why some displaced people choose not to assimilate and instead retain their refugee identities for years after the trauma of dislocation. The separate identity forms around home, “as a site of resistance and continuity...as families resist losing their individuality to the mainstream” p. 217.

But, many nonrefugees, with preconceived notions of what is a “normal” response to loss, see refugee consciousness as a failure to move on with life, as being stuck in past places and identities,

particularly for descendants of refugees. This perspective implies an “identity crisis” among refugees and descendants who retain a separate refugee identity. Also, refugees and their descendants who participate in demonstrations for the right to repatriate, go home, “are often perceived as terrorists or foreigners...or might not be trusted by the host community [nonrefugees]” p.3.

This divide between retention of a separate identity or “moving on” appears also inside generations of families. Some of the children, now adults, are ready to move on. After hundreds of interviews with families who differ on this matter, Hadjiyanni herself, a refugee from Cyprus, concludes that refugee consciousness is about being human, blending the past, present and future. “If memory is an instrumental aspect of our humanity, it is then only human to build refugee consciousness on the memories of an experience.” While many may disagree with her position, she returns to memory and home as paths, sometimes “rocky,” to “mending” the future. She concludes:

Memories, then, can take us back to our past; they can give us the past we never had; they can give us the past on which to build our identity and future; they can give us a ‘home.’ If home is where the heart is and the refugees’ heart was ripped out when they were forcibly wrenched from their homes, the void and the emptiness left behind where the heart used to be is now filled with memories. Thus, the memories become the heart—the heart of a refugee. The act of remembering can help the past survive and even if it is only in the heart, ‘home’ will still be there. The ‘home’ of refugees, then is within them. p. 218

***Re reading & Taking Notes**

Lets stop here for a few moments for your notes

What questions might you pose to Hadjiyanni regarding her position? Of home? Of refugee identity and consciousness?

What connections, similarities or differences do you see between Hadjiyanni’s position and other authors’ positions we’ve studied, such as Freire or Zimbylas?

What connections or disconnections do you see from your own experience as Teacher?

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS
MAKING CONNECTIONS
POSING QUESTIONS

4. Tasoulla Hadjiyanni

She writes in the Preface of her book:

“... on August 14, 1974, as Turkey was invading Cyprus, my family and I fled our home and village in Kondea. At the tender age of ten, I learned the meaning of the word “refugee,” losing my innocence while still a child. I cried until we reached the city of Larnaca because in my mind ‘We couldn’t leave our house alone.’ At that time, no one could imagine that 22 years later, all of us 200,000 Greek-Cypriot refugees, would still not have seen our houses again. ...Being a country that only gained independence just over 30 years ago, Cyprus, not unlike other developing nations, is still not able to make political decisions on its own, protect its people, and defend its territory.” p. xii

Also in the preface of her book, based on her PhD research, she speaks about the issue of her own bias as an insider, a refugee herself from Cyprus. She adds the following:

“However, as much as there is a potential for [research] bias, I strongly believe that research such as this cannot reach the same depth if done by an outside. Getting people to open their hearts to a person they have never met before, to accept a researcher in their home, and to share some of the darkest times in their lives—these are very difficult for an outside. Moreover, as translations always lose some of the effect of the original language, this research was enhanced in that the primary researcher was a native speaker. ...I grounded myself in the meaning of the word *home* as my father Zacharias and mother Katerina taught me.”

****Re reading & Taking Notes***

Lets stop here for a few moments for your notes.

Do you consider research, such as Hadjiyanni’s study, to be important to education at both the local and global levels? Important to Relief Agencies? To host communities? Why or why not?

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