

Remembering the Former Eastern Bloc:
Who Owns the Legacy – the Case of Těchonín
*Spomin na nekdanji vzhodni blok:
kdo je lastnik zapuščine – primer Těchonín*

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Abstract

This article explores the recent history and heritage significance of Těchonín, a site former barracks turned into a convalescent home between 1950 and 1962. In this period, the facility hosted 600 refugees of the Greek civil war (1946–49) who were sheltered in Czechoslovakia. The article aims at exploring what long-lasting legacy the minorities have established and what formal recognition ought to be attributed to them in commemorative monuments. The analysis of the issue is based on first-hand accounts from a refugee as well as on other private photographic archives of the refugee families in Těchonín.

Keywords: legacy of minorities, monuments, Greek civil war refugees, Czechoslovakia, photographs

Izvleček

Članek je posvečen polpretekli zgodovini in pomenu dediščine Těchonína, mesta nekdanje vojašnice, med letoma 1950 in 1962 spremenjene v okrevališče. V tem obdobju je objekt gostil 600 beguncev iz grške državljanske vojne (1946–1949), ki so bili na Češkoslovaškem dobili zatočišče. Članek raziskuje, kakšno dolgotrajno zapuščino so ustvarile manjšine in kakšno formalno priznanje bi jim morali pripisati v javnih spomenikih. Analiza teh vprašanj temelji na prvoosebne pričevanju begunca ter na gradivu iz drugih zasebnih fotografskih arhivov begunskih družin v Těchonínu.

Ključne besede: dediščina manjšin, spomeniki, begunci grške državljanske vojne, Češkoslovaška, fotografije

Introduction

What do the tombs of Greek refugees (photo 1) in a Czech cemetery opposite a military barracks in the North Moravia region of Silesia, in the village of Těchonín in the Czech Republic, tell us?

Apart from showing us the (ultimate) passing away from life to death for refugees, these tombs announce, through the declared absence that the annihilated body engenders, a presence that preceded it. And when we speak of the dead body of a refugee, we are also speaking of a 'displaced' body. These are the remains of a passage,

perhaps, the passing vestiges that the refugees in Těchonín have left us. As a final trace, these tomb crosses open up a breach in the personal and collective experience of refugees in Eastern Europe, which lies between their previous existence and their definitive disappearance, inviting us to link the past with the present. In their book entitled *Dissonant Heritage*, Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996, 189–190) ask 'what durable heritage the minorities are creating, and what recognition should be granted them in formal monuments'. In this paper, I investigate long-lasting legacy that the rather unknown minority of Greeks in Czechoslovakia has established and the forms



Figure 1: Athina M. in front of E.M.'s tomb in Těchonín, around 1958. (source: Personal archive of Savas)

of formal recognition that ought to be attributed to it in commemorative monuments.

Between 1950 and 1962, the military barracks in question, located in the village of Těchonín, were converted into a place to live and care for refugees from the Greek civil war (1946–1949) who were seriously injured, disabled (blind, paraplegic, etc.) and/or unable to work. During this period, they housed around 600 of the almost 12,000 refugees who came to Czechoslovakia. The latter were part of the 55,000 refugees scattered across Eastern Europe following the Greek civil war and were accepted as such by the People's Democracies for a period of almost thirty years (see table 1).

The Greek civil war that unfolded in 1946–1949 between two opponents, the Communist Party of Greece (in Greek Kommounis-

tiko Komma Elladas, KKE) and its military branch, the Greek Democratic Army, (in Greek Dimocratikos Stratos Elladas, DSE) on the one side and on the other the national army of the Greek state, assisted initially by the British and then the American army, as the two political opponents claim to establish two different political visions; one from a socialist perspective, as the communists of that period understood socialism end, on the other hand a conservative/liberal, or the remaining of Greece in the western pole of influence. Greek civil war, is not only part of a national (Greek) history, but of a European one, as it is the first episode of the Cold War to be fought in Europe, involving Western powers with those of the Eastern Bloc both geographically and politically.

Most of the military operations of the civil war were conducted in the northern part of the country and forced both DSE fighters and the civilian population to flee the country through neighbouring countries, i.e., Albania, Bulgaria, and the former Yugoslavia. With the term refugees, the Greek and foreign-language literature describes the DSE fighters and civilians, i.e., women, men, elderly, and children, both Greek and Slavic speaking population who fled Greece during the war. Even before the end of the civil war, the KKE had come to an understanding with the fraternal communist parties of the so-called East bloc asking them to host the refugees. Thus, during the war and when the war was over, in August 1949, the refugee population was distributed among the countries of the former eastern bloc, a small part remained in the former Yugoslavia, mostly Slavic-speaking refugees, and a smaller part in Albania, unlike to Bulgaria which hosted almost 3 thousand people.¹

¹ The literature, from a historical point of view, on the Greek Civil War is extremely rich. However, the issue of the refugees of the civil war and their stay in the countries of eastern Europe has been studied by anthropologists, historians and sociologists. Although the majority of the literature is mostly in Greek, there are nevertheless English-language sources, indicatively for the civil war, e.g.: Carabott and Sfikas (2017); Panourgia (2009); Baerentzen, Iatrides, and Smith (1987); Danforth and Van Boeschoten (2012).

Table 1: Population of refugee numbers by country

Country and population in 1950 -		Children					Adults		
		0-7		8-17		Total	18-55		+55
HUNGARY	7.253	472	6,6 %	2.465	33,9%	2907	4.316	59,5%	?
BULGARIA	3.021	86	2,9%	586	19,4%	672	2.349	77,1%	?
ROUMANIA	9.100	225	2,4%	4.959	54,5%	5184	3.916	43,1%	?
POLAND	11.458	274	2,1%	2.875	24,8%	3149	8.409	73,1	?
GDR	1.128	193	17,1%	935	82,9%	1128	-		-
CZECHOSLOV.	11.941	846	7,1%	3.436	28,8%	4282	7.659	64,1	?
USSR	11.980	-	-	-	33,9%	-	11.980		
TOTAL	55.881	2 096		15.256			38.629		

Source: Central Committee of the KKE 2010, 329

Refugees from the civil war, proved to be Greeks by origin,² were allowed to return to Greece in 1982; some of them had already returned in 1975 after the fall of the military dictatorship which lasted 7 years, 1967–1974 (Anastasakis and Lagos 2021). Despite the repatriation of most of them, another part of them decided to settle permanently in the host countries.

In ex-Eastern Europe, the former refugee population is no longer associated with refugee status; on the other hand, in some countries, this population has been granted national minority status by the state, as is the case in Hungary and the Czech Republic (Sarikoudi 2014, 237; Yupsanis 2019, 14). This allows them to claim a ‘lasting’ Greek presence in the country.

I argue that although refugees of the Greek civil war have remained in host countries for more than 30 years their life in former Eastern Europe was characterized by a condition of *to*

cross (*passer* in French); I suggest that *to cross* oscillates between move away, which becomes *absence* – most of the refugees were repatriated – and *presence*, for those who definitely decided to stay in the ex-host countries, but altered presences, because those refugees who remained are no longer recognized as such but designated under another status (Greeks from...) ³. I use the verb ‘to cross’, or ‘crossing’, in the spatial sense of the term, (to cross the borders, such as lands, walls, seas, etc.) in the case of refugees from the civil war, to move from northern Greece to neighbouring countries, then to cross one Eastern country to another, but also *to cross*, in the opposite direction, from the host country to the country of origin. I also use *to cross* in the political and social sense (Van Gennep 1981; Dubet 2018); from banishment living to Greece, because refugees were considered enemies of the nation by the Greek state, to be hosted as refugee by Eastern countries; I understand *to cross* as a movement towards different social attributes and legal status; from stateless and undocumented – because the refugees from Greece had been

² The law on repatriation (Joint Decision no. 106841/29.12.1982 of the Ministers of the Interior and of Public Order 1982) had a double effect: on the one hand, it allowed the return to Greece of a large part of the refugees as Greek citizens, and, on the other hand, the same law placed outside the national body, and consequently outside the nation-state, another part of refugee—the ‘non-Greeks of origin’ –, in this case the Slavic speaking, or Macedonian refugees, who were Greek citizens but, as they belonged to a linguistic minority that spoke other languages, they were not considered to be Greeks by origin.

³ In the former host countries, the refugees who remained after 1982 set up Greek associations. Such associations can be found in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, etc.



Figure 2: The tobacco factory, in Hungarian Dohánygyár, where some of the refugees were received when they arrived in Budapest (photo: Kokkinou, 2021)

stripped of their nationality - to nationals, foreigners or minorities.

To cross then conjugates the social and political space of refugees in time, that of the past and that of the present, where, in particular, *to cross*, which has since passed, has left few traces and claims to be recognized.

It is this pasted *crossing*, which leaves few traces that is also indicated by the commemorative plaques on the former living quarters of the refugees, installed by those refugees who remained still in the countries of reception. What lasting legacy does the minority of Greek refugees in eastern Europe, and more particularly in Czechoslovakia, have the right to claim in this condition of *crossing* sited between presence and absence?

These plaques, which are not 'relict physical survival from the past' (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996,1), affirm the crossing of the Greek in Hungary. How can we speak of a lasting legacy,

and especially what legacy is that of the crossing of Greek refugees in Eastern Europe in general, and in the specific case of Těchonín in particular? From this arises the central research question of the present paper: What are the trajectories of memorialisation, or even heritageisation, of this movement of the Greek minority in today's Czech Republic? And, consequently, what could be the forms of formal recognition that ought to be attributed to it in commemorative monuments?

State of the Art on the Issue

Anthropological work on refugees from the Greek Civil War in Northern Macedonia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria (Monova 2002; Fokasz 2013; Sarikoudi 2014; Kokkinou 2019) respectively, and historical work (Lambatos 2001; Daskalov 2008; Tsekou 2010; Tsivos 2019; Semczyszyn 2016) on refugees in Tash-

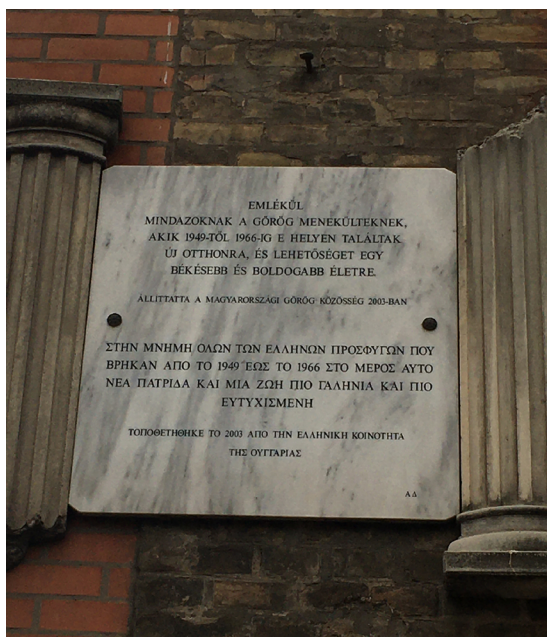


Figure 3: A commemorative plaque placed by the refugees on the front wall of Dohánygyár which states (in Greek): 'In memory of all the Greek refugees who found from 1949 to 1966 in this place a new homeland and a peaceful and happier life'; placed in 2003 by the Greek community in Hungary (photo: Kokkinou, 2021)

kent, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Poland often multi-sited – combining ethnographic fieldwork and archival sources located in Greece and post-socialist Europe have one thing in common: they examine the lives of refugees and their descendants *such as it is (tel quel)*. Using life histories and archival sources, they analyse, on the one hand, the memories and experiences of the war and, on the other, the collective life of the different generations of refugees during the period of exile, bringing to light common/contiguous issues relating to nationality, citizenship and national and local belonging, in particular, in the case of Slave-speaking population; the violence they have suffered and then to forms of political, even communist instruction, and finally to the imaginary of return. While these various studies make it possible to draw links and analogies between the lives of refugees in the different host countries, they remain compartmentalized into case studies, often focusing on the refugee population.

Methodology

In order to identify the different trajectories of memorialisation, or even heritageisation process (Harvey 2001; Harrison 2013) of Greeks in Czechoslovakian, I use ethnographic data which were collected during the Covid-19 pandemic. Although I was living in Prague during this period, travel restrictions did not allow fieldwork in the site of Těchonín, while the interview with the interlocutor was conducted online using the photo elicitation method.

The only interlocutor in this ethnographic research is Savas, born in 1952 and aged 69 in 2021 when the interview was conducted. Savas is a second-generation refugee, born in the Czech Republic from refugee parents and who, being a child of the period in question, bears the memory of his life there, from 1954 to 1962, when his family left Těchonín. According to him, it's impossible to find any other interlocutors about Těchonín since the other tenants were at the period already adults and the most of them have passed away.

That being said, and from a disciplinary point of view, this ethnographic research is characterized by *incompleteness*; there is no saturation of information, and this is explained by the fact that the interlocutor in question is a *witness* and may be the only one that I could find. To what extent does the testimony of a single person describe a social reality? 'Testimony', notes Annette Wieviorka 'especially when it is part of a mass movement, expresses, as much as individual experience, the discourse or discourses that society holds, at the moment when the witness is telling his story, on the events that the witness has lived through' (Wieviorka 1998, 13). Savas' desire to speak out, to make the history of Těchonín known, even knowable, reflects what the refugees' commemorated plaques in tobacco factory, Dohánygyár, located on Budapest have done: to leave a trace that attests to their presence in the country.

The Presence of Greek Refugees in Eastern Europe: Multiple Legacies at Stake

The case of Těchonín, is a representative example of the issue of multiple inheritance. However, what remains of the period when the refugees were received in the military barracks, are their photographs *in situ*, in their private collections, Savas collection, which represent part of their lives. Another, central source is the testimony of Savas.

Can the memory of the use of the building, which no longer bears any trace of its former function, photographs of life *in situ*, and the graves of its former 'tenants', build a 'lasting heritage' (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996) about the reception of refugees? Is this reception, embodied in places of coexistence and habitation dotted around Eastern Europe, as in the case of the Těchonín, a legacy to be preserved, and if so, for whom?

Images stimulate the evocation of memory alongside the mental images that subjects call upon in their narratives. Using photographs, the actors in the case of Těchonín, 'do not only elaborate other narratives', as Maurice Bloch (1995,

64) suggests, the photographs also allow us both, interlocutors and researchers, to escape from our own representations of the period in question but also to understand, through the narratives of the refugees in their photographs, the socialist period in which these images were taken. For the people involved, they are also a way of preserving their memory before they disappear.

The narrative(s) on the reception of Greek refugees in Eastern Europe is, therefore, on the verge of writing another narrative that becomes a multiple heritage issue, because it contains the memory of the foreigners and defeated of the Greek civil war during the socialist period in the countries of Eastern Europe. In these two pasts, the narratives that form a link between Eastern and Western Europe, passing through the local to the national, encourage us to revisit the socialist past (and its 'vestiges') from the point of view of refugees.

The Arrival of Refugees in Eastern Europe: a Three-stage Installation

After the defeat of the DSE in 1949, a forced exodus of refugees from Greece took place. The agreements concluded earlier between KKE and East European Communist Parties resulted in the dispersal of refugees throughout the so-called Eastern bloc: from Bulgaria to the distant city of Tashkent in Uzbekistan.

The adult refugee population, composed of men and women (partisans and civilians) and elderly people, were initially provided with temporary accommodation in places such as camps: in Berkovitsa in Bulgaria (Kokkinou 2019, 37), in Mikulov, Lešany and Svatobořice in the Czech Republic (Sarikoudi 2014, 99), or at factories such as Dohánygyár in Budapest, (Fokasz 2013), while children who arrived at the host countries before the end of the war, particularly in 1948, were accommodated in places specifically prepared for them, a kind of boarding school, or in Greek, *pedikos stathmos* (Danforth and Van Boeschoten 2012).

The return of the refugees to Greece was not as immediate as had been estimated, and the set-

tlement of the refugees, although intended to be temporary for them, quickly became necessary for the host countries. So, as soon as 1950, a second redistribution of refugees, ordered according to labour needs, was put in place, this time within the country, sending them to different towns and villages with, in parallel, the process of reuniting families, whose members had been scattered across different countries. This process lasted almost 10 years, and it also led to a further displacement of refugees within the bloc.

In the Czech Republic, healthy and able-bodied refugees were scattered throughout the Moravia region; in Krnov and Jeseník (Sarikoudi 2014, 100). Some of them also found themselves in the Silesia region, where the village of Těchonín was also located, living in forcibly emptied houses belonging to Czechs of German origin who had been expelled from Czechoslovak territory following the end of the Second World War.

However, as Sarikoudi (2014, 100–101) notes,

it soon became clear [to the authorities] that these regions were unable to offer work to all the refugees who were sent there. Many industries had closed before the war, and even those that were open were remote, which, combined with the poor transport network, meant that Greeks could not be employed there. The Czechoslovak CP, (*Komunistická strana Československa, KSČ*), therefore decided to promote these new workers in the industrial sector, particularly in the textile industry. From the spring of 1950, the refugees began to leave their original homes and were sent to villages such as Zláte Hory, Rejvíz, Jindřichov, Janovník, Žulová and Buková, in the Jeseník prefecture. Heavy industry workers also travelled to neighboring regions such as Šumperk and Dvůr Králové.

The Case of the reception Centre in Těchonín

The military barracks in Těchonín were used by the Czechoslovak Red Cross and re-



Figure 4: Savas' family: his parents and his two half-brothers, he and his sister in the barracks, n.d. around 1957 (source: Savas' personal archive)

named *Domov ČSČK* (in the Czech language *Dům Červeného kříže - Centrum péče Československého červeného kříže*), Red Cross House - Care Centre of the Czechoslovak Red Cross as a convalescent home for refugees from 1950–1951 until 1962, when the barracks returned to their original use, and refugees unfit for work moved on to other towns. Among the tenants of *Domov ČSČK* was the family of Savas, who lived there between the ages of two and seven (born in 1952), and today bears witness to this place. In his unpublished memories dedicated to this period of his life in Těchonín, entitled 'Těchonín, Memories of', Savas (n.d.) notes that:

I wanted to write a few words about Těchonín (Tiechonín) because very little is known about it and I have found almost nothing written about this place, which for



Figure 5: Civilians from barracks, picking flax in the cooperative, n.d. around 1958 (source: Savas' personal archive)

several years took in sick and injured political refugees and their families.⁴

Těchonín is not unique; such places also existed in other countries, such as the town of Bankia in Bulgaria (Kokkinou 2019, 122). What is the interlocutor claiming through his text on Těchonín other than to produce a trace of a residue of the refugees' crossing through the Eastern bloc, that is none other than memories and photographs?

If for Savas leaving a 'remnant' in Těchonín is synonymous with producing part of the history of refugees in socialist countries, for us the debris of this passage allows us to retrace, through testimony and photographs, part of the life of refugees in the countries of Eastern Europe and a glimpse of their reception in so-called socialist Europe.

On Site: Snapshots of Community Life⁵

In Těchonín, the refugees were housed in the soldiers' dormitories, most of the them were there alone, while those who were there with their families had their own flats. This was the case of Savas' family, who lived with his parents and sister in an equipped flat, the family of the

4 Unpublished article, written in Czech, sent to me by the contact person.

5 The photographs and the account of the collective life of refugees on the spot are taken from Savas's.



Figure 6: Workers at the textile mill, n.d. around 1954 (source: Savas' personal archive)

person in charge of *Domov* ČSČK, another refugee family, and so on.

Apart from the Czech staff in charge, some refugees also worked in the barracks: Savas' father as a translator, while at the same time being responsible for reuniting the families of the refugees;⁶ his mother in the kitchen, like another refugee; or even outside the barracks: in cooperatives (photo 5), in forestry work and field work, hoeing beetroot and cabbage, harvesting flax, cereals, chamomile, etc.

Lastly, some women worked in the village textile factory (Figure 6). Life in the barracks was punctuated by meals, medical visits, and communal life; Savas recounts that some of the refugees played musical instruments (Figure 7), another had created his own garden, and some were busy repairing old cars that were abandoned next to the barracks outpost. He ends his text 'Těchonín, Memories of' by writing that:

I would like to mention here that the Greeks were very disciplined throughout their stay in the barracks and that they got on very well with the Czech inhabitants of the village, even in terms of friendship and cooperation, and I don't remember seeing the slightest conflict.

6 According to Savas, Těchonín was 'a gathering point for children in Czechoslovakia who had parents in other socialist countries to whom they went to join them'.

From Testimonial to Archive: or Additions and Gaps

Although most refugees from the civil war were of rural origin, they did not form a homogeneous group, either ethnically – among the refugees there were Slavic speaking refugees, who identified themselves as Macedonians and who, although Greek citizens, constituted a linguistic minority with its own identity – or politically; not all the refugees were communists, and among those who were, we find ideological differences, both then and now, to which I shall return (Kokkinou 2019).

It was during the exile the first crisis within Greek Communist Party - KKE broke out, also in relation to the living conditions of the refugees there and the reasons for its defeat. Known as the 'Tashkent events', which took place in August-September 1955, in the wake of de-Stalinization, the party crisis arose in the same year as the 20th Congress of the Soviet Union Communist Party (CPSU), in the city of the of Tashkent. Here 12.000 refugees, mainly supporters of the DSE, were taken in, half of them members of KKE. This crisis was characterized by violent incidents culminating in bloody clashes among communists, sparked by the dismissal of the party's former general secretary, N. Zahariadis, on the one hand, and the election of K. Koligianis in his place on the other, which divided KKE members into supporters of one or other of the party's general secretaries (Kokkinou 2019, 213). Following the dismissal of the former secretary, the new leadership proceeded to expel party members who were supporters of Zahariadis and to intensify ideological control of communist refugees in all host countries.

In this context of political and ideological upheaval within KKE, the position of the Communist refugees in the face of the Soviet army's invasion of Budapest in November 1956 provoked intense political conflicts which, however, were not openly expressed (Fokas 2016). What is more, the archives we have do not mention any involvement of Communist refugees in the events in Budapest, still less on the side of the

‘counter-revolutionaries’. However, as the historian K. Tsivos, mentions, a rumour spread that the refugees supported the Soviet intervention, a rumour – unfounded – that was also spread by the radio station Free Europe (Tsivos 2022, 72). Among the incidents against refugees, mentioned in the KKE archives, are threats to employees and residents of a *pedikos stathmos* in Ballaton Kenese by Hungarian demonstrators, and the death of a 17-year-old refugee in the Stalin-Varos region (Tsivos 2022, 72–73). As a result of this situation, the historian continues, the refugees asked to leave the country, a proposal that was adopted both by the head of KKE in Hungary and by the Hungarian Communist Party, which asked for refugees to be sent to other socialist countries. In December 1956, 800 of them arrived in Těchonín. However, the behaviour of these refugees was completely different from that of the tenants of the barracks. In his report, the director of Těchonín (Tsivos 2022, 72) noted that:

With the Greeks from Hungary, we were confronted with phenomena of extreme nationalism, Western mores and attitudes, particularly among young people, hostile attitudes towards the Soviet Union and its army, while, according to some complaints, certain political refugees should not have come here because they sided with the counter-revolution at the time of the events [in Budapest].

Savas, who recalls the arrival of refugees from Hungary at Těchonín, does not comment on the context of their departure or the divergence of positions within KKE at the time. However, in his interview about Těchonín and its importance for the lives of refugees in Czechoslovakia, he notes that:

for me it is important and it was important this system, this socialist system showed me that at the time, at the beginning of popular democracy, [that] it could help people, that is to say those who were in a difficult situation [...].



Figure 7: Těchonín's musicians tenants, n.d. around 1957 (source: Savas' personal archive)

Often, but not always, refugees' accounts of their time in the host countries, especially those who remained loyal to KKE even after the end of exile, play down the tensions that arose within the refugee population and/or between KKE executives on the spot and the refugees. They also often avoid commenting on the unfavourable conditions in which some refugees found themselves because of their ideological differences, although in some cases this was an open secret. Their accounts presented the refugee communities as a coherent whole, without antagonisms and closely linked to the Party. This practice of embellishing refugee communities with regard to outsiders, i.e. those who are not our communist comrades, can be explained, on one hand, by the polemics created about the history of the civil war and its memory in Greek society, and particularly in Greek historiography, and on the other hand, by the widespread anti-communism in Eastern Europe on the other (Blaive 2020), which have produced within refugee communi-

ties a form of 'protective' narration of their history and their past.

Back to Těchonín or the Paradox of Images?

The 'Hungarian Greeks' did not stay in Těchonín for very long; soon after their arrival, in March of the following year, they were sent to industrial towns near the German-Polish border (Tsivos 2022, 74). In this way, the barracks, which had (for a short time) also been transformed into a place of shelter, returned to their original use as military barracks.

We have not found photographic record of the *crossing* of the 'Greeks from Hungary' to Těchonín, and paradoxical as it may seem, among the photographs of Savas, there are no photographs showing sick people convalescing in the barracks. Savas personal photographic archive from Těchonín do, in fact, show us *a life around* this place of care, to such an extent that, looking at them, one wonders whether they can be associated with the place where they were taken, since none of the clues, apart from the background showing buildings which, however, bear no sign of a health care establishment, or of the Red Cross, provide any indication of a specific place, located either in a town or in a city (and therefore in a country). Is it possible, moreover, that these photographs could have been taken not in a convalescent home but in other places, located in the towns or villages where the refugees lived and who, on one occasion or another, found themselves together? Didi Huberman (2003, 49–49) writes about the four photographs of Auschwitz: 'The images are nothing but torn shreds, bits of film. They are therefore inadequate: what we see [...] is still little compared to what we know.'

Savas' photographs of refugee life in Těchonín represent a piece of refugee life in exile; Looking at these photographs, we realize that we do not know who took the photos, who the people in the photos are – with a few exceptions – or on what occasion they were taken. Yet, despite these gaps, these photographs make us

aware of certain aspects of refugee life beyond Těchonín.

The first thing that the Savas photographs on refugees reveal is the place of the family in life in exile. Their family photographs immortalize the repair of family ties severed by the exodus, a primary preoccupation of refugees in exile. In addition to their use as souvenirs of this reunion, which can be found today in the photo boxes of its members, the family photos served another purpose: they were both the message and the herald of this reunion, which their dispatch to the countries of the Eastern Bloc and to Greece heralded. Family portraits – well-dressed and carefully presented, prepared to take the photo – were a widespread communication practice among refugees scattered across different host countries and those who remained in Greece. They are photographs that migrate, migrant-photographs, in the form of postcards of families that circulate among refugees. Among these photographs we find unplanned snapshots, taken at random, but also just the opposite, photographs taken carefully, by people who have taken the time and care to prepare themselves, *with a view to being seen*. In both cases, these photographs convey the message of a reunion (occasional or permanent) between members of the same family in one country, or the fact that the refugees pictured were living well where they were, thanks to their appearance – well-dressed in the host country.

Savas' photographs on Těchonín also show what would come to characterize the lives of refugees in exile: their proletarianization. Although the refugees initially settled in rural areas, most of them being of rural origin, the introduction of heavy industrialization by the countries of Eastern Europe soon transformed this population from farmers into workers.

Finally, the life of the refugees in the countries of Eastern Europe included socialization among themselves, part of which was the creation of musical groups and choirs created by the refugees, which were a way of linking them together. Involving people of all ages, older and

younger, these groups encouraged the transmission of language and national sounds from older to younger generations. The participation of these groups in festivals held in other towns and then in other countries – a strong incentive to take part – created encounters and friendships between refugees living in other countries, and links with ‘our own’ people who, like them, were refugees elsewhere

A sort of prelude about the social life of refugees on the host countries also gives, musician’s photography (Figure 7). Savas remembers during his interview:

I saw that they were coming and I wished they would, and I expected it, there were too many young people coming, young children with suitcases, they were coming to see their parents who lived there (in Těchonín), but they were also coming for another reason, there was, let’s say, not a festival, but choirs from different towns would gather there, because this continued after the ‘30s, when the refugees started to organize themselves here, i.e. in every big town, there was a dance and singing choir and they existed (everywhere) in the Czech Republic, [...] there was one in Jeseník, in Ostrava, in Krnov, [...] they used to get together in Jeseník to hold a festival, they used to come a lot in the summer, all afternoon, [I’d see] expeditions with suitcases, young children, let’s say 18 to 30 years old, [they] used to come there, and I always listened to the rehearsals in the summer, from morning to night [...]. I would listen to the accordion, the mandolins [...] they would give a performance or a program to those who were there, but the important thing was to establish a sort of link with the other Greeks.

The most important element that Savas Těchonín’s photographs highlight is the fact that the refugees from Greece made up a ‘collective being’, in the sense that A. Piette notes: ‘What is a collective being, if it is not in a situation the liaison of human beings? We would

say that it is support, associated with a set of rules and points of reference’ (Piette 2010, 361). Forged by common experience of war and displacement, albeit varied according to age, and place within the war: partisans, civilians, adults, and children, the sub-categories of this ‘collective being’, such as children, able-bodied adults and disabled people, lived together in the new frameworks of life in exile assigned to them by their host socialist countries. This form of living collectively, among their own people, alongside their life with the natives has enabled refugees, during exile, to build their lives, and gradually to adapt to the host societies.

By Way of Epilogue

What do the photographs of refugees tell us about *the crossing* of refugees through Eastern Europe in the past, and what can they reveal to us today? According to Sanjay Subrahmanyam (2014, 14–15),

to better comprehend how a global history is created, both currently and in the past, we must highlight a fact that may seem apparent: history is an egocentric narrative. The concept of the ‘self’ in history progresses from one’s family, clan, and ethnic group, to their city, homeland, or region, and ultimately to the nation-state, beginning in the eighteenth century and continuing onwards. Despite this egoistic tendency in historical narratives, it is imperative to acknowledge the existence of others?

In line with this thought, the experience of the crossing ‘Czechoslovak Greeks of Těchonín’ recounts the history of post-war Greece, as well as of Communist Czechoslovakia. The reception of refugees from Greece in Czechoslovakia, as elsewhere throughout Eastern Europe, reflects the polarity of the post-World War II world, on the one hand, and on the other, a conception of the reception of refugees collectively, in terms of a group, unlike the post-1989 period where this reception policy is becoming more of a case-by-case examination. Today, in a unified Europe



Photo 8: The director of the Těchonín and partners of the Red Cross, around 1960 (source: Savas' personal archive)



Photo 9: Savas's sister with a Czech nurse in Těchonín, around 1958 (source: Savas' personal archive)

During interviews with Savas, I enquired about his fascination with the Těchonín case. Aside from its history as a convalescent haven that saved 600 refugees, Savas emphasized the significance of Těchonín as the foundation for his family's existence: 'Without Těchonín, we wouldn't be here today.'

Savas's recollection of Těchonín illuminates a familial history rooted in refuge, not only for himself, but also for others. This history also underpins a sense of welcome and gratitude in Eastern countries. Consequently, the family's historical memory intertwines with a collective history of refugees from the Greek Civil War, spanning beyond Czechoslovakia (Figures 8 & 9).

As Halbwachs observes (1997, 63), this is a shared connection:

It is insufficient to piece together the image of a past event in order to form a memory. The reconstruction must rely on communal data or ideas held by both us and others, as these continually exchange from one person to another and vice versa. This type of sharing is only achievable if we are all part of the same society.

While the history of Savas is collective, it may not necessarily be deemed as a lasting heritage produced by its subjects. The testimony of Savas is the sole source available to us of the period in question. Nonetheless, the photographs of the location expand upon his testimony. Images of refugees represent more than solely an individual, and their tangibility permits us to understand and visualize the collective hardships endured, that have been manifested in places of refuge. These captured images of life reveal a historical narrative that spans generations – those featured in the photograph, the one who holds it and the one who will inherit it.

During the interview, Savas emphasized the importance of documenting the history of Těchonín, stressing the need for wider recognition beyond the former refugees in Czechoslovakia, many of whom are not acquainted with it. He ended the interview by expressing his desire for proving the existence of Těchonín's by help of research, stating: 'I am currently 68–69 years old and unsure of my longevity. I am likely one of the last individuals with such a connection [with the Techonin site] and therefore hope evidence of its existence will be proven.'

The written trace is essential to keeping the history of refugees in Těchonín alive. Who should claim ownership of the history stemming from the refugees' traces, and via which criteria do countries within the former Eastern bloc regard these refugee traces as heritage worth preserving? Savas (n.d.) in 'Těchonín, Memories of' concludes by highlighting that:

a monument was erected, with the assistance of Těchonín's municipality, near the village cemetery, where 104 Greeks were laid to rest, back in 1979. The monument comprises a large stone sourced from a nearby stream, on which a marble plaque has been affixed. The plaque bears the inscription: 'With this monument, we honour the memory of deceased Greek citizens who resided in the Czech Republic from 1949. May their memory endure'.

The monument in Těchonín commemorates a chapter in the history of the transit, the crossing of refugees to Eastern Europe, prompting queries on the selection of this site for unwell refugees. It speaks of an 'antagonistic' memorialisation, since it is situated between those who want to remember their time in the so-called communist countries and those who want to forget the so-called communist past. In this sense, the presence of the refugees materialises the question posed by P. Lagrou is it 'possible for Europe to become an area of shared memory' (Lagrou 2011, 281–288). The refugee monuments erected by and for refugees demand the voices of refugees to be comprehended, including their testimonies and photographs. Although not comprehensive, these traces allow insight into the history of refugees in Eastern Europe, shedding light on this part of the region's past. These traces allow us to understand the passage of refugees in Eastern Europe while highlighting what past the present wants to remember.

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Archives

Savas, Personal archive of photographs.

Summary

Following the Greek civil war (1946–49), around 55,000 people were dispersed to Eastern Europe, which accepted them as refugees. This population, composed of men and women, old people and children, Greek-speakers and Slav-speakers, Communists and non-Communists, was prevented from returning to Greece for over thirty years. Although most of the refugees returned to Greece once the Greek state had given them permission to do so, another part of them decided to stay in their former host countries for good. The obligatory stay of refugees in the former Eastern Bloc countries is today dotted with traces of their presence, as evidenced by commemorative plaques and monuments attesting to their passage to the socialist countries. Based on the

example of Těchonín, a village in Silesia in the Czech Republic where military barracks were transformed into a convalescent home for sick and severely disabled refugees in the period 1950–1962, this article aims to discuss the relationship between minority, heritage and memory by attempting to answer what lasting legacy the minority of Greek refugees in Eastern Europe, and more particularly in Czechoslovakia, is entitled to claim in this condition of former welcome? What are the trajectories of memorialisation, or even heritageisation, of this movement of the Greek minority and what forms of formal recognition should be attributed to it in commemorative monuments, are some of the questions that this article poses and attempts to provide some food for thought. Based on an ethnographic research carried out under exceptional conditions, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, and using the photo elicitation method, we present the testimony of a former refugee on the case of Těchonín, trying to understand how individual memory leads to collective heritage.

Povzetek

Po grški državljanski vojni (1946–1949) se je okoli 55.000 Grkov porazgubilo po vzhodni Evropi, ki jih je sprejela kot begunce. Temu prebivalstvu, moškim in ženskam, starejšim in otrokom, grško govorečim in govorcem slovanskih jezikov, komunistom in nekomunistom, je bila več kot trideset let preprečena vrnitev v Grčijo. Čeprav se je večina beguncev vrnila v Grčijo, ko jim je grška država to končno dovolila, se je del teh oseb odločilo za vedno ostati v nekdanjih državah gostiteljicah. Prisilno bivanje beguncev v državah nekdanjega vzhodnega bloka je danes zabeleženo v sledovih njihove prisotnosti, o čemer pričajo spominske plošče in spomeniki, ki pripovedujejo o njihovem prehodu v socialistične države. V pričujočem članku ob primeru šlezijske vasi Těchonín na Češkem, kjer so v obdobju 1950–1962 nekdanje vojašnice spremenili v okrevališča za bolne in hudo invalidne begunce, razmišljam o razmerju med manjšino, dediščino in spominom ter poskušam odgovoriti na vprašanje, kakšno trajno zapuščino ima manjšina grških beguncev v vzhodni Evropi, zlasti na Češkoslovaškem, pravico zahtevati glede na preteklo bivanje v tej državi. Kakšne so poti memorializacije ali celo dediščinjenja tega premika grške manjšine in kakšne oblike uradnega priznanja bi mu bilo treba posvetiti v spomenikih? To so nekatera od

vprašanj, ki jih preizprašuje ta članek in poskuša ponuditi nekaj gradiva za razmišljanje. Na podlagi etnografske raziskave, izvedene v izjemnih razmerah, v času pandemije covid-19, in z uporabo metode fotoelicitacije predstavljam pričevanje nekdanjega begunca o primeru Těchonín ter poskušam razumeti, kako individualni spomin vodi do kolektivne dediščine.