

Adopted from Greece in the 1950s-1960s and Searching for Your Roots? Where to Start?

Από πού είμαι;

by Gonda Van Steen, King's College London (gondavs@gmail.com), 5 June 2021

1. *When did children from Greece start being adopted by families in America? Why did families put children up for adoption? How many children were adopted?*

1948-1960s: more than 3,000 children to the USA (conservative estimate), 600 to the Netherlands From “war orphans” to “illegitimate” children, from birth parents and institutions (βρεφοκομεία). Older children who had roots, but more demand for babies, up to two children, sibling groups.

Several different intermediaries: the AHEPA (Lamberson, Scopas), the International Social Service (ISS), PIKPA, private lawyers, etc. By the mid-1950s, fierce competition for children! Demand and supply, Greece meets the supply of young, white children, irregularities, low bar to have application for a child accepted (financial criteria prevail), very poor record-keeping, scandals (1959 and 1962); no Greek investigation, no full list—to this day!

2. *Were Greek adoptees embraced by the Greek communities in the US? What were the differences between children adopted by Greek families and those adopted by non-Greeks? Did non-Greek adoptive families try to establish a Greek cultural connection for their children?*

Greek children go to American families of any background, religion, or location, but typically white middle-class families. Vast geographical spread, but most of them go to cities (NY, Chicago) and to Texas.

Contact with Greek communities depends on the efforts made by the adoptive parents. In most cases, there was hardly any contact, and it is the choice of the adult adoptees to re-establish contact with their heritage themselves.

3. *Adoptions do not end when the papers are filled out. How does adoption continue well into someone's life? Are all adoptees interested in reconnecting with their Greek heritage?*

Many Greek adoptees are *still* left with questions and unaddressed feelings, are *still* searching for their roots and face huge obstacles (language, bureaucracy, disbelief, poor record-keeping on the part of the intermediaries, no proactive assistance from the Greek government).

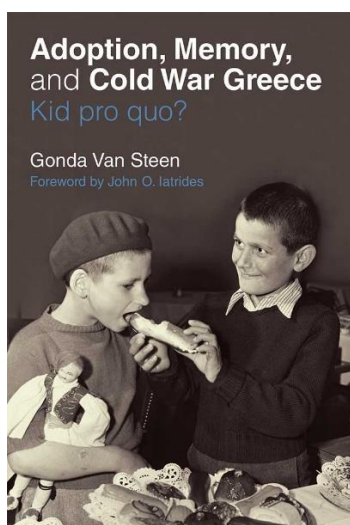
Many adoptees also hope to regain their first citizenship, i.e. their Greek citizenship: many hurdles, need for collective action on the part of the Greek government, the Greek consular services, and the AHEPA, need for comprehensive investigation and redress (as in Ireland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Spain, etc.)

Van Steen, Gonda (2019). *Adoption, Memory, and Cold War Greece: Kid pro quo?* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

https://www.press.umich.edu/11333937/adoption_memory_and_cold_war_greece

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Searching? Where to start?

Questions

- Are *you* the one searching? Are you ready to search? No pressure.
- What were you told by your adoptive family members? (family lore)
- What is documented about your adoption? (records)

Step 1: Apply for your “A-file”: Alien file or immigration file

Adoptees who were brought legally to the US can file a “Freedom of Information Act/Privacy Act Request” with Form G-639 for free online, via the website of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, www.uscis.gov: <https://www.uscis.gov/g-639>. Instructions (7 pages) on how to fill out and file the 4-page Form G-639 are available online as well. These FOIA/PA requests enter a queue, and the wait for answers may be up to five months. Applicants can follow the progress of their request online until the day that the CD-ROM arrives in the mail (or a large scan to your email address). The regular mailing address and email address are National Records Center (NRC), FOIA/PA Office, P.O. Box 648010, Lee’s Summit, MO 64064–8010. Email: uscis.foia@uscis.dhs.gov. Ask questions, give all your known names, attach a copy of your naturalization certificate if you have it. Ask for the *complete A-file*, i.e. do not accept a summary.

Step 2: Do a DNA test and upload the results on Ged-match and other platforms

Step 3: Use the waiting time that comes with steps 1 and 2 to prepare yourself mentally for what a search may entail. Read and read some more. Talk to people. Feel free to stop the procedures at any time if the process is too overwhelming and this is just not the right time.

For reading materials, see the attached list.

Resist the temptation to hire a private detective or anyone who asks for money up front.

Resist the temptation to go in with anyone who has very little knowledge of Greek or Greece.

Resist the temptation to post anyone’s personal data in any public forum. Confidentiality is key and the promise of confidentiality is also what will secure additional assistance from close Greek DNA relatives. Many of the adoptees were born out-of-wedlock and some of the stigma still exists. Don’t rock the boat with too much publicity. People who were adopted out by Greece no longer have any inheritance rights in Greece. Assure relatives of that fact if they ask. Don’t ever go there yourself in any conversation with newfound relatives.

Step 4: Collect what you have and try to find the answer to the following questions

- 1) Did I spend time at an orphanage before I was adopted? If yes, which one? The answer is important because some orphanages kept records and these records can be requested. The most likely orphanages of origin, so to speak, are the *vrefokomeia* of Patras, Athens, and Thessaloniki (Agios Stylianos). Additionally, a lot of adoptees came from the Baby Center Metera and some from facilities run by PIKPA. Any clue here is important.
- 2) Was I given up by a mother in a desperate situation (a widow, perhaps?) by way of a private arrangement, and no orphanage was involved? If yes, then the adoption decree will likely have the name of the mother. Does the decree also reveal the name of the Greek lawyer who handled the adoption?
- 3) Do you know which intermediaries handled the adoption? This information may again show in any of the paperwork you have: the AHEPA? The ISS? Metera? PIKPA? Each organization handled record-keeping very differently, so the answer here will tell you whether you can hope to access a file or not.
- 4) If you were adopted from Patras or Athens and the adoption was finalized in Greece, then there is a court record of your adoption that you can find at the GAK in Athens. If you were adopted from Thessaloniki or Irakleio, again there is a court record. If you were adopted through the ISS, your adoption was most likely finalized in the US and there is no Greek court decree, but you can contact the ISS for more information.
- 5) If you do not read Greek, ask for help at any stage. Even a few documents may reveal more than you think, and it is important that someone scrutinizes them for every little detail. Happy to help if you contact gondavs@gmail.com (confidential). You can also consult a lot of practical information in my book, *Adoption, Memory, and Cold War Greece: Kid pro quo?* (University of Michigan Press, 2019).
https://www.press.umich.edu/11333937/adoption_memory_and_cold_war_greece

Last piece of advice:

This is *your* search, *your* family, *your* life.

Stay in charge. Take it one step at the time.

Resolve this puzzle always at your own pace.

Suggestions for Further Reading on the Topic of Intercountry Adoptions from Greece in the post-WWII and Cold War Period (1948-1960s)

Please send additions and links to gonda.van_steen@kcl.ac.uk and gondays@gmail.com

Personal Adoption Narratives Combined with Historical Introductions and Conclusions

- Cardaras, Mary, editor (forthcoming). *Voices of the Lost Children of Greece*. Combines personal narratives of thirteen Greek-born adoptees with research.
- Theodoropoulou, Maria (Mary) (2006). *Μαρία 43668*. Athens: Nikas Books, Elliniki Paideia. English translation 2019, *Abandoned 43668... Maria*. Athens. Easily accessible in its revised form and translated into English 2019. Combines personal narrative with research. https://www.amazon.com/Abandoned-43668-Maria-Theodoropoulou-ebook/dp/B081YZQY22/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=theodoropoulou+maria&qid=1575794911&s=books&sr=1-1

Greek-to-American Adoption Narratives

- Dionou, C. Dionysios (2011). *Twentieth-Century Janissary: An Orphan's Search for Freedom, Family, and Heritage*. U.S.A.: Xlibris. https://www.amazon.com/Twentieth-Century-Janissary-C-Dionysios-Dionou/dp/1456839578/ref=sr_1_2?keywords=dionou%2C+dionysios+janissery&qid=1575795030&s=books&sr=1-2-spell
- Giangardella, Joanna S. (2011). *The Girl from the Tower: A Journey of Lies*. Lexington, KY: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform. Second edition, 2017. https://www.amazon.com/Girl-Tower-Journey-Lies-Second-ebook/dp/B06XSNJSNT/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=giangardella+girl+tower&qid=1575795082&s=books&sr=1-1
- Heckinger, Maria (2019). *Beyond the Third Door. Based on a True Story*. Vancouver, WA. https://www.amazon.com/Beyond-Third-Door-Based-Story/dp/1543973787/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=heckinger+third+door&qid=1575795111&s=books&sr=1-1
- Johnson, Deborah (2003). "Addendum by Deborah Johnson." In *Welcome Home! An International and Nontraditional Adoption Reader*, edited by L. Linzer Schwartz and F. W. Kaslow, 50-54. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Clinical Practice Press.
- Kelmis, Maria (2012). *Golden Strangers: An Adoption Memoir*. Bloomington, IN: Author House. https://www.amazon.com/Golden-Strangers-Adoption-Maria-Kelmis-ebook/dp/B07932XKQ9/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=maria+kelmis+golden+strangers&qid=1575796852&s=books&sr=1-1
- Moessinger, Naomi (2003). "From Couple to Family." In *Welcome Home! An International and Nontraditional Adoption Reader*, edited by L. Linzer Schwartz and F. W. Kaslow, 35-50. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Clinical Practice Press.
- Mossin, Andrew (2021). *A Son from the Mountains: A Memoir*. New York: Spuyten Duyvil. <http://www.spuytenduyvil.net/a-son-from-the-mntns.html>
- Mossin, Andrew (2019). "From *The Day After The Day After*." In *Ergon: Greek/American Arts and Letters*, edited by Y. Anagnostou. Online at <https://ergon.scienzine.com/article/memoir/day-after-the-day-after>

Greek-to-Dutch Adoption Narratives

- De Boer, Antoinette (2019). *De vondeling van Kreta. The Foundling from Crete*. Overveen, the Netherlands: n.p.
https://www.amazon.com/vondeling-van-Kreta-Dutch/dp/9463456554/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=de+boer+antoinette&qid=1575795345&s=books&sr=1-1
- Rijnsdorp, Sonia (2017). *Een kist met geheimen. A Box of Secrets*. Zoetermeer, the Netherlands: Lecturium.
- Rijnsdorp, Sonia (2018). *A Coffin Full of Secrets*. English translation in pdf distributed by the author. Contact s.rijnsdorp@icloud.com.
- Touwen, R. Bastiaan (2014). *Grieks bloed. Greek Blood*. The Netherlands: n.p.
- Van Dongen, Marina, editor (2013). *De adoptie monologen. The Adoption Monologues*. Schiedam, the Netherlands: Scriptum.
https://www.amazon.com/adoptie-monologen-Scriptum-psychologie-Dutch-ebook/dp/B00OQDHMK8/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=dongen+adoptie-monologen&qid=1575797127&s=books&sr=1-1

Research Studies

- Van Steen, Gonda (2021). “Of Foundlings and ‘Lostlings’: When the Scopas Scandal Rocked the Unstable Foundations of the First 1950s Intercountry Adoptions.” Forthcoming in *Annales de démographie historique*, special issue on the history of adoption, “Formes adoptives (XVe-XXe siècles),” 2021, no. 1. Proof version available on request to gondavs@gmail.com.
- Van Steen, Gonda (2019). *Adoption, Memory, and Cold War Greece: Kid pro quo?* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
https://www.press.umich.edu/11333937/adoption_memory_and_cold_war_greece
Greek translation in progress, expected September 2021 (Athens: Potamos Publishers).
For an illustrated presentation of the book, see Alexander Kitroeff, *The Pappas Post*, 5 May 2021, <https://www.pappaspost.com/greeces-forgotten-cold-war-orphans-and-americas-complicity/>.
For a review of the English original, by Zinovia Lialiouti, see <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/6679339/h-diplo-review-essay-285-van-steen-adoption-memory-and-cold-war>.
- Van Steen, Gonda (2018). “‘Are We There Yet?’ The Greek Adoptees’ Road of Return—An Essay.” In *Ergon: Greek/American Arts and Letters*, edited by Y. Anagnostou (7 July 2018). Online at <http://ergon.scienzine.com/article/essays/are-we-there-yet>.
- Van Steen, Gonda (2016). «Μητρώα και ψέματα: “Βρέθηκαν” στη Θεσσαλονίκη, “χάθηκαν” στο Τέξας». “Of Ledgers and Lies: ‘Found’ in Thessaloniki, ‘Lost’ in Texas.” *ArcheioTaxio* 18 (November 2016) 192-200 [translated into Greek by S. Kakouriotis]. Draft version in English available on request.
- Winslow, Rachel R. (2017). *The Best Possible Immigrants: International Adoption and the American Family*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (one chapter on adoptions from Greece).
https://www.amazon.com/Rachel-Rains-Winslow/e/B071CXPWX6?ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_fkmr0_1&qid=1575794961&sr=1-1-fkmr0

For Viewing

- Kertsner, Ronit, director (forthcoming). *The Greek Connection*.
- Papaioannou, Sofia, director (2019). *Τα χαμένα παιδιά της Ελλάδας του Ψυχρού Πολέμου. The Lost Children of Greece of the Cold War*. Broadcast of 18 April 2019 of *360 Moires, 360 Degrees*. Available online at https://www.alphatv.gr/show/360/ekpobes_360/?vtype=player&vid=37568&showId=823&year=2019
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hIxbgAYz_c&t=9s [with English subtitles].
- Van der Toorn, Andre, and Wendy Hesp, producers (2017). *Mijn naam was Kostas. My Name Was Kostas*. The Netherlands: Wasp Media and KRO/NCRV. Available online at <http://www.kro-ncrv.nl/mijnnaamwaskostas/seizoenen/seizoen-2017/mijn-naam-was-Kostas>.

Thank you!