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Obsah
Contents

Studie
Studies

Úvodník
Editorial

The first issue of Historia scholastica Journal presents 10 studies, most of them in some way thematizing the impact of the totalitarian regime on the field of education. A. Canales focuses on the change of educational policy of the Franco Regime in Spain in the 1960s, which was in contradiction with the still prevailing political and ideological principles of Franco's Dictatorship. E. Protner's study provides insight into the discontinuity of pre- and post-war Marxist pedagogy in Yugoslavia, using the example of slovenian pedagogue Jože Jurančič. How communist ideology was reflected in the functioning of education in Yugoslavia, specifically in Bosnia and Herzegovina, shows in her study S. Šušnjara.

Three other studies focus on education in the area of states in the territory of the former Soviet Union. I. Nelin examines the evolution of psychoanalytic pedagogical ideas in the Soviet Union, his study highlights the experiments in psychoanalytic education and their subsequent prohibition due to political shifts.

E. Bērziņš and I. Ķestere examines how Soviet narratives in the field of history of education were deconstructed in the Baltic States and how historians constructed a new view of the national history of these states.

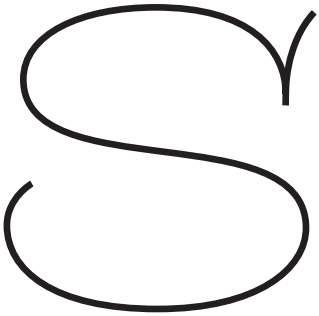
I. Ivanavičė and I. Stonkuvienė focuses on the mechanism of ideological assimilation of Lithuanian Roma through school and education in the Soviet Union; the study explores key dimensions of Roma education, including the construction of the New Soviet Man, the impact of forced sedentarisation, and the role of schooling in promoting linguistic assimilation, discipline, and social control. Belonging is an important phenomenon, the basis of which does not have to be only belonging to one ethnic group, as is the case in the study of Roma in Lithuania. F. Guerrini explores generational belonging in the generation of children born during the war. Her work focuses not only on specific research on belonging in the war generation, but also shows the theoretical perspectives of research on such a complex phenomenon as belonging.

Two studies in this issue relate to special education. J. Randák looks into the situation in special education in Czechoslovakia after the communists came to power in February 1948 and shows that the optimistic proclamations of the state representatives were often at odds with the real experience of teachers at special schools. K. Eliášková and M. Šmejkalová examine teaching of Czech language of visually impaired pupils at special schools from 1972 to 2010. The long period of research allowed the authors to examine not only the development of didactic approaches, but also the change in the ideological framework of education during this time.

While most studies deal with education in the second half of the 20th century, I. Garai investigates the issue of deprofessionalization of secondary school teachers in pre-war Hungary.

We believe that all of the submitted studies will contribute to the clarification of many unresolved research questions as well as stimulate interest in further research.

Jan Šimek



Studie
Studies

Exploring Negotiations of Belonging. Social Positionings of Children Born of War in Family and Society

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Abstract Over the past two decades, the experiences of children born of war have been studied across various historical and geographical contexts. For many of these children, the question of belonging appears to be both challenging and significant. However, this topic has often been analysed implicitly rather than explicitly, and without a robust theoretical framework. The aim of this paper is to address this research gap in three steps: First, it will explore how the issue of belonging has been addressed in studies of children born of World War II in Europe, focusing on both public and political debates as well as individual experiences. Second, it will present theoretical perspectives on belonging that facilitate a deeper understanding of this complex phenomenon. Finally, the analysis of biographical interviews with Austrian children born of war will illustrate the negotiation of belonging as an ongoing process of positioning in relation to orders of belonging.

Keywords children born of war, politics of belonging, post-war Austria, biographical interviews

"I was born here, grew up here, but don't fully belong here."
"I don't know where I'm from and where I belong, I don't know my identity."
"*When I lived in China, Chinese people didn't trust me because I'm Japanese. After coming to Japan, Japanese people don't trust me because I'm Chinese. Now I feel that I'm sandwiched in between.* [...] *I'm an in-between person."*

Three individuals – so called *children born of war* – describe how they see themselves and their place in the world.[1] They grew up and lived in very different contexts, having been born in the 1940s as the child of a German *Wehrmacht* soldier to a Greek mother, as the child of a former Japanese soldier and a Chinese mother in the 1950ies and as a child born of conflict-related sexual violence within the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda around the year 2000, respectively. Across these geographical and historical differences, they share a specific aspect regarding their parental origin: all of them were fathered by foreign or enemy soldiers.

We must assume that during and after all wars and armed conflicts all forms of social – including romantic and intimate – contacts between the local population and foreign or enemy soldiers occur. Since about 20 years the term children born of war is used to describe children resulting from such intimate contacts. Usually, they are categorized into four different groups: (1) children of local women and enemy soldiers, (2) children of local women and occupational forces, (3) children of child soldiers and (4) children fathered by members of UN peacekeeping forces (Mochmann, 2008). By coining the term children born of war a new international research was constituted by uniting studies on different historical and geopolitical situations. During the past ten to 15 years the research on children born of war has increased and gotten more diverse and empirically richer, spanning more than a century from WW I up to recent and present armed conflicts in different regions around the globe. Overall, there seems to be a consensus that children fathered by enemy or foreign soldiers and born to local mothers might face significant and intersecting challenges, adversities and discrimination on an individual as well as a structural level during their childhood but also later in life (e.g. Mochmann et al., 2009; Stelzl-Marx & Satjukow, 2015; Kleinau & Mochmann, 2016; Lee, 2017).

1 The statements are from Muth, 2008, p. 76, Denov and Piolanti, 2021, pp. 1142, and Kuramitsu, 2021, pp. 181–182.

The quotes in the beginning draw attention to a specific challenge linked to their parental origin: For neither of the three belonging somewhere or to a certain group comes naturally or can be taken for granted. Apart from indicating that the desire to belong seems to be a relevant issue for children born of war across time and space these statements show some of the different dimensions and meanings of belonging. For example, the relation of a sense of belonging to a place, the link between knowing "where I am from" and one's self-concept, the social position that is not only formed by acts of self-identification but also by being identified by others. In the case of the third interviewee, having Chinese and Japanese origins did not lead to belonging to both places but rather to neither of them as the persons in the surrounding tended to emphasize the *other* part of the interviewee's origin instead of the one that they shared, leading to the feeling of being *in-between*. A sense of belonging is a complex and fundamentally social phenomenon depending on social relationships and practices, conventions, policies and discourses. In research on children born of war, reference is made to this in various forms, but an in-depth discussion that draws on more recent theoretical debates on belonging is still largely lacking.

Taking this as a starting point my goal is to show how belonging is discussed in this field of research and propose theoretical considerations suitable to enable a more in-depth understanding of the complex phenomenon of belonging. Based on my ongoing research on children fathered by occupation soldiers and born to Austrian mothers I will address the question how belonging is negotiated by this group of children born of war. My paper joins those projects of historical educational research that seek to find out more on the life courses of children and young people from marginalized population groups and their conditions of growing up (Tenorth, 2010, p. 174), and strives to counteract the adult- and institution-centeredness of history of education and to contribute to the recovery of marginalized histories (Aldrich, 2003, pp. 134–135). I start by discussing how the topic of belonging has been addressed in research on children who were born of World War II in Europe concerning public and political debates as well as their experiences. So far, in most cases these dimensions are discussed separately

and there are few references to theoretical explorations of the question of belonging, although in recent years such debates have been advanced for example in social and political sciences, educational science, gender studies or social geography. Taking up these debates I will then propose some theoretical considerations on researching belonging. After briefly outlining my research project and some methodological considerations I draw on two interviews to show how a son and a daughter of occupation soldiers negotiate belonging in relation to their family and the place and community they grew up in. I conclude with some remarks on possibilities to further advance this research.

Reflecting the Question of Belonging Concerning Children Born of World War II: Political and Public Debates

During the Second World War (1939–1945) and the subsequent occupation of Austria and Germany (1945–1955), probably one to one and a half million children fathered by members of the German Wehrmacht or the Allied troops were born in different parts of Europe. Already during the war, debates arose about these children in various regions. Drawing on examples from several European countries I will show how the problematizations, political interests, arguments and attitudes towards these children lead to different proposals on how to deal with them.

In the *German Reich*,[2] the political leadership was soon aware of sexual contacts between *Wehrmacht* soldiers and local women in the occupied territories. According to National Socialist racial ideology they were viewed differently depending on the context. Whereas children of German men and Norwegian, Dutch or Danish women were deemed desirable since they were thought to contributed to the "improvement of the 'Aryan' race" and were included in the *Aktion Lebensborn* (Olsen, 2005), the situation was different in the areas to the east of Germany: In general the Slavic population was regarded as 'non-Aryan' and thus

2 In no way do I suggest that the occupation during the German Reich's aggressive invasion of foreign territories is comparable to the occupation of Austria and Germany by the Allies after 1945. But during both periods political debates on children fathered by members of the occupation emerged.

inferior but a "German public interest" (Röger, 2017, p. 28) was articulated regarding those children who were considered as suitable to be 'Germanized'. By bringing them to Germany the low birth rates were to be compensated (Mühlhäuser, 2010, pp. 309–333) and probably around 50.000 children were abducted and fostered out, adopted or raised in care homes in the German Reich (Heinemann, 2022, p. 8).

In Norway, the 10,000–12,000 children of German soldiers also were the subject of debate during and after the war. Several parties denied that they were genuine Norwegians and called for them (as well as their mothers) to be stripped of their citizenship and deported to Germany, Sweden or even Australia. The justifications ranged from the allegation of psychiatric disorders, the fear that they would later develop National Socialist attitudes and thus destabilize Norwegian society, to the question of their financial provision and possible need for welfare support. In fact, in 1945 a law was passed according to which women who had married a German and their children lost their Norwegian citizenship, which led to severe legal disadvantages. However, deportations on the planned scale did not occur (Borgersrud, 2005). In the post-war era in the Netherlands precarious situations arose for children of *Wehrmacht* soldiers. The Dutch authorities considered them to be of German nationality but according to German law they were to receive the citizenship of their mother. These children therefore remained stateless until 1948, when the Supreme Court of the Netherlands granted them the right to citizenship (Diederichs, 2005, pp. 158–159). In France, on the other hand, in the post war years the official policy was that children of French soldiers were considered French citizens. In Germany's French occupation zone endeavours of 'repatriation' were undertaken: German children with French fathers had to be registered and their mothers were urged to give them up for adoption to France. Around 17,000 children were registered and around 1,500 of them were adopted by French families (Gries, 2015, pp. 382–391).

The citizenship of children born to Austrian mothers and fathered by members of the Allied forces was not debated. In Austria and Germany, political and professional debates regarding the belonging of children born of war unfolded mainly in relation to children whose origins

were visible. Relationships between Austrian and German women and Black and People of Color did not align with ideas of respectable femininity or were seen as "forbidden mingling" (Saurer, 2005) in the wake of the National Socialist racial ideology. The rejection and devaluation to which the women were subjected often was projected onto their children. In both countries youth welfare offices recommended adoptions to the USA and used social and financial pressure to obtain the mothers' consent. Allegedly, this was meant to be in the best interests of the children (Rohrbach, 2021, p. 52). However, these transnational adoptions can also be interpreted as an effort to maintain the ideal of a homogeneous, white society. In contrast to Austria, in the 1950s an alternative position emerged in pedagogical discourses in Germany demanding mainstream society to change their attitude and see Black children as an equal part of German society. Their successful social integration should prove that Germany had moved beyond its National Socialist past (Kleinau & Schmid, 2017).

These selected examples show that political, legal and public discourses surrounding the belonging of children born of the World War II put forth different arguments in order to include or exclude them in the community. Depending on the context, they referred to (sometimes racist or biologistic) ideas of nation, culture or people and drew on legal, economic, demographic, humanitarian or democratic reasons, among others. These considerations were part of a broader debate concerning the 'proper' place, home and belonging of individuals and populations: "In broad areas of Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, political decisions were made at the end of the war – supported by Britain and the US – to transfer, expel and generally 'unmix' ethnic populations in hopes of ensuring postwar security and stability" (Fehrenbach, 2022, p. 185). Two things are striking in this regard: First, the examples discussed above show how children born of war became objects of political interests and more often than not their best interests and wellbeing played a marginal role in decisions about them. Second the whole idea of 'unmixing' is rendered absurd by the mere existence of children born of war – or vice versa they were assigned an impossible position within the framework of such a policy.

Experiences and Sense of Belonging of Children Born of World War II

In the last two decades experiences of children born of war have been investigated by means of interviews and questionnaires. Although the sense of (un-)belonging has seldomly explicitly been at the centre of the analysis I would argue that it is expressed when interviewees report experiences of exclusion, ostracism, marginalization, and of being treated differently. Children born of the Second World War faced the risk of significant and intersecting challenges and discrimination on an individual as well as a structural level, many of them negatively impacting their sense of belonging. Like other illegitimate children, in many countries they were viewed as a deviation from bourgeois gender and family norms and faced legal disadvantages. Often being regarded as *children of the enemy* (Lee, 2012; Korhel, 2023), they were threatened by stigmatization and exclusion. Especially if their origin was visible, for example because their fathers were Moroccan or African-American soldiers, they were exposed to othering and racism.

Growing up without a (biological) father was not uncommon in the post-war period and contrary to widespread assumptions it cannot be regarded as a risk factor per se (Schmid, 2023, pp. 210–211). However, children born of war repeatedly experienced situations in which they were treated differently or marginalized because of their status as illegitimate child. In several accounts schools in particular appear to be a context in which children were confronted with normative notions regarding families, for example when family relationships were publicly interrogated by the teacher. Not having a father could be the cause of ridicule by teachers and a starting point for teasing by classmates (Guerrini, 2022, pp. 68–69) due to the important role of teachers as socializing agents and relationship models (Yoon & Bauman, 2014, pp. 309–310). Several studies on children born of the Second World War reveal similar findings. Not only were the "preconditions for a successful educational career for occupation children, especially for girls, anything but favorable" (Kleinau, 2015, p. 169), in addition, they often had "a precarious and marginal position in school" (Ericsson & Ellingsen,

2005, p. 96). This could cause feelings of not being like the others and not fitting in (Guerrini, 2022, p. 112).

The question "to belong or not to belong?" (Ericsson & Ellingsen, 2005, p. 96) arose for many children born of war also in relation to their social environment or even in their own family. Experiences like not being allowed to enter in certain houses (ibid.) and to participate in the local club life (Guerrini, 2023, p. 160) or being asked to go back where they came from (Bland, 2021, p. 69) could lead to feeling "exotic" or "always somehow different" (Guerrini, 2023, p. 161). Especially derogatory names referring to the paternal origins such as Moeffenkinder (Netherlands: children of German prostitutes), enfants maudits (France: cursed children), or Amibalg and Russenbastard (Germany and Austria: American brat, Russian bastard) conveyed the message that *you are not like us* and *you don't (really) belong here*. They are expressions of racist depreciation and create otherness.

Some children born of war experienced that their belonging was questioned even within the family. This was often closely linked to racist and nationalist attitudes within local communities, especially if children were visibly different from the majority population. In Germany, for example, children of Black GIs grew up in residential care homes or foster families and were given up for adoption significantly more often than those fathered by *white* members of the Allied forces (Malanda, 2024, p. 46). While many children born of war also report good experiences in their environment and family and that received love and care from their mother or other parental caregivers there remained the risk that this could suddenly be disrupted: "The sword of Damocles of stigmatization always hovered over an ordinary everyday life" (Satjukow, 2015, p. 152). For children born of war, belonging to family, community and nation was often not as taken for granted as it was for their peers.

Children born of war differ from other children growing up without their father in another aspect that is essential for a sense of belonging. Family belonging is also formed by being embedded in family narratives and family history. In their case, the (biological) father was often concealed or very little information was available about him. This can

pose challenges regarding self-concept and identity: One's own life story cannot be thought of independently from the family history that connects the past with the future. Since children usually learn building their life story by mutual remembering and storytelling with their parents or primary caregivers and build up a biographical memory in the process (Fivush & Hessel, 2010, pp. 47–49), the question of identity and family belonging may remain precarious if people know nothing or too little about their family's history. In several studies belonging is constricted to a question of identity, for example naming "loneliness and lack of belonging [a] paramount theme in identity descriptions" (Mitreuter et al., 2022) and thus suggesting that a sense of belonging is something one does or does not possess. Such a view does not adequately consider the social dimension of both identity and belonging as well as their processual character, contextuality and possible changes over a person's lifetime.

Belonging as a Complex Phenomenon: Theoretical Perspectives

In order to examine belonging theoretical perspectives able to examine the relationship between individuals and social contexts are necessary. Nira Yuval-Davis has proposed an analytical framework for the study of belonging in which a distinction is made between (the sense of) belonging and politics of belonging. On an individual level, belonging is described as an "emotional attachment", a sense of "feeling 'at home' and […] 'safe'" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 197). Feeling at home refers not only to a specific place, but also to a symbolic space characterized by familiarity, security, safety and emotional connection (hooks, 2019, p. 213). Regarding children and young people, it has been noted that belonging is an existential personal as well as political matter (Johansson et al., 2024, pp. 4–5) and an important resource in navigating structural and institutional constraints and opportunities (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017, p. 221). From an early age on a sense of belonging arises in shared experiences that are actively co-created by children together with their peers but also with caring adults in family, community and educational institutions (Locchetta et al., 2025) thus emphasizing

the adults' responsibility in creating a surrounding for such practices. Often feelings of belonging remain unquestioned:

> "Belonging tends to be naturalized, and becomes articulated and politicized only when it is threatened in some way. The politics of belonging comprises specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways."
> (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 197)

At the very core of the politics of belonging is the (discursive) construction of socio-spatial boundaries, along which distinctions are made between *us* and *the others* and participation and exclusion are negotiated. This can take place with reference to various, more or less formal criteria such as citizenship, family ancestry, place of birth, but also culture, religion, loyalty to a state and support of dominant values (Yuval-Davis, 2006, pp. 204–212). Thus, belonging should be analysed both on the level of the individual as well as in its social dimension. Focusing on just one of the dimensions – as has often been the case in research on children of war – does not allow to capture experiences and sense of belonging in all their complexity. It risks either individualizing belonging and viewing it as independent of the social conditions of its emergence. Or, by looking exclusively at the level of politics and society, it risks viewing belonging merely as a product of social relations and dominant discourses and thus disregarding the agency of individuals (Antonsich, 2010, p. 653).

To focus on belonging is interesting precisely because of the close interweaving of self-relations and social relations, when asking "under what social, political and societal conditions […] individuals can understand […] themselves as belonging to a context" (Mecheril & Hoffarth, 2006, p. 247). This takes into account that not all children and young people have equal access to surroundings that allow to nurture feelings of belonging, especially when they differ from their peers in some way (Johansson et al., 2024; Locchetta et al., 2025). Belonging can be

used as a heuristic concept for investigating acts of (self-)positioning in social contexts: experiences of belonging can be reconstructed in biographical narratives and analysed as positionings in orders of belonging (Schwendowius, 2015, p. 105). Orders of belonging refer to "powerful contexts that productively influence individuals through a complex form of enabling and regulating, symbolic, cultural, political and biographical inclusion and exclusion" (Geier & Mecheril, 2021, p. 191) and are produced and negotiated in legal, media, political, scientific, cultural and economic discourses (ibid., p. 175). Researching belonging based on these considerations sharpens the focus for the analysis of power relations in concrete social spaces and for their significance with regard to the positioning and self-understandings of subjects (Schwendowius, 2015, pp. 109–110). Specifically, the analysis of interviews can show how belonging is constructed in which situation, which notions of normality and differentiation are updated, expanded or questioned and what consequences this has for the subjects.

Negotiations of Belonging in Biographical Narratives of Children Born of War in Western Austria

In the aftermath of World War II Austria was occupied by the allied forces until 1955 and divided in the American, the British, the French and the Soviet occupation zones. Due to the high number of Allied soldiers in Austria, there were many opportunities for contacts in everyday life, some of which led to romantic relationships or sexual encounters and the birth of children. Current estimates range from 20,000 to 30,000 children of Allied soldiers born in Austria from 1945 to 1956 (Stelzl-Marx, 2009; Stelzl-Marx & Satjukow, 2015). For a long time, there was little scientific (and public) attention on this topic and in Western Austria (Tyrol and Vorarlberg – the French occupation zone) there was almost no academic debate on children born of war when I started working on my research project in 2018. Due to this situation in a first step my project aimed at reconstructing the history of this population group whose childhoods, living conditions and life stories had not been scientifically researched in Western Austria. I started

by posing the question how their situation can be described, which experiences they made and what significance they attributed to their origins. For most of the interviewees the question of belonging played an important role (Guerrini, 2022; Guerrini, 2023).

In two phases (2019 and 2023/24), I conducted autobiographical narrative interviews (Schütze, 1983; Schütze, 1984) with 14 daughters and sons of French, Moroccan, Algerian and US-American soldiers.[3] This interview form allows a "comprehensive and intrinsically structured access to the interviewees' world of experience" (Flick, 2014, p. 227). It offers openness for unexpected topics and makes non-explicable, latent knowledge accessible for reconstruction (Rosenthal, 2008). Remembering and narrating serves to classify and interpret past experiences in a current situation. Past events that are considered significant are brought to mind and reproduced as stories. This takes place in the context of the present cultural framework and is shaped by knowledge and values acquired after the occurrence of the narrated events. Through storytelling, people construct and express their identity as well as their relation to the world (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2004), two core aspects of a sense of belonging. This is why storytelling goes beyond the mere reproduction of past experiences and is a constructive act on several levels. For the interpretation of the interviews a combination of a Grounded Theory approach (Strauss, 1994) and positioning analysis (Bamberg, 2004; Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2004; Jafke et al., 2022) enables to systematically analyse the different layers of a biographical narration and to reconstruct processes of positionings in orders of belonging. The focus of the following analysis lies on the aspect of the narrative negotiation of a sense belonging and

3 The interviewees were found through media reports, the organization *Coeurs sans Frontières – Herzen ohne Grenzen* (https://www.coeurssansfrontieres.com/) and through personal contacts. Various ethical questions arise in biographical research, particularly when it comes to potentially distressing experiences. In addition to the principles of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymization, a generally sensitive approach during data collection and analysis, which is based on the principle of avoiding harm, and critical self-reflection in all phases of the research process are important (Siouti, 2018) and were implemented.

the reconstruction of self-positionings as well as being positioned in relation to relevant dimensions of social order. The interviews with Peter Sanders and Agnes West[4] have been chosen from the sample as two very different examples for processes of exclusion and inclusion in family and community in order to show the complexity of processes of negotiating belonging.

Peter Sanders: "You Stay in the Last Row, So People Won't Think We Belong Together"

Peter Sanders was born in 1946 and grew up with his mother and stepfather in a village in rural Tyrol. Since his mother refused to talk about his (biological) father, only when he was a young adult Peter came to realize little by little that his father had been an American GI. When being asked to tell me about his life he begins the narration in the following way:

> "Yes, so (*pause*), as a child, when I was still very small, I (*gulps audibly*) (*pause*) simply noticed that something was not quite right."
>
> (Sanders, interview, 00:00–00:01)

Skipping the usual components of self-introduction that serve to descriptively present the biographical framework by clarifying and assessing the prerequisites of one's own life story (Schütze, 1984, p. 84) Peter Sanders initiates the biographical narrative by naming the central notion in relation to his childhood, followed by several episodes intending to illustrate his feeling that something was odd: Not being accompanied to the first day of primary school by his mother, recurrent visits from a youth welfare worker and his mother's warnings to be absolutely well-behaved, his attempt to run away from home as a four-year-old, but also inexplicably large Christmas presents like toys and English storybooks. According to the interviewee, he was

4 All names have been replaced by pseudonyms.

not in a precarious situation financially, "but more so emotionally" (00:02) recalling feelings of being alone and not wanting to be at home anymore. Already the lack of the usual self-introductory framing can indicate a precarious positioning of the self in a social place (Jafke et al., 2022, p. 135). This becomes visible in the biographical narrative when the interviewee speaks about the lack of shared everyday practices like socializing, playing, caring, and communicating (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017, p. 220) within his family and the wider social circle that would nurture belonging. The circumstances of Peter Sanders' childhood prevented the development of a stable sense of belonging related to a child's usual primary "objects of attachment" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199): one's home and primary care-givers.

Similar to other children born of war who do not know about their origins, Peter Sanders had the impression that something is strange, not quite right or "somehow obscure, blurred" (00:26), that experiences cannot be meaningfully interpreted and that the relationship with his mother is troubled and difficult to grasp. Then, at ten years old, there was one occasion – the wedding of his mother to his stepfather – when he was painfully assigned a social position in relation to his family:

> "Then they got married. I can only tell you about the wedding itself… (*long pause*) It still makes me feel sick. (*Pause*) […] When they went into the church they said to my aunt and me: 'You stay in the last row, so people won't think we belong together.' I have never forgotten that." (00:09–00:10)

During the couple's wedding, one of the celebrations that most formally show that "constructions of belonging have a performative dimension" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 203), the boy was actively excluded. Physically Peter Sanders was assigned a place far away from the couple, symbolically he was positioned outside of the family. A wedding does not only represent a personal promise of belonging together between a couple, it always takes place within power relations of society. In order to claim her legitimate position within bourgeois and catholic norms of femininity and family the mother had to render her illegitimate son

from her former relationship to a foreign soldier invisible during this public ceremony.

Biographically this seems to be a turning point for Peter Sanders. Recalling his subsequent years in a renowned boarding school, he develops a narrative that appears to be a story of emancipation from his familial circumstances based on his academic success. In the interview he talks about having to cut emotional bonds, getting rid of expectations of affection from his mother and learning to break free. This is supported by drawing on ideas of masculine sovereignty as a "discursive resource" (Antonsich, 2010, p. 645) in order to enable biographical inclusion in relation to expectations of a successful male life course. Statements like "I thought to myself either you help yourself or nobody else will" (00:12), "at some point I decided that I wouldn't let anyone hurt me anymore" (00:29), and "I don't need to develop much gratitude either because I wouldn't know what for" (00:47) support this self-positioning. Nevertheless, it remains fragile as feelings of pain and grief and the "longing to belong" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202) keep shining through the narration.

Agnes West: "I Grew Up in an Environment Where I Was Simply Accepted"

Agnes West contacted me by sending an e-mail introducing herself as "a Black occupation child" (West, e-mail) and asking to be interviewed for my project. Her narrative begins with a detailed introduction of her father, including his name, year of birth, rank and role in the US military whereas her mother is merely introduced as a "very young beautiful blonde woman" (West, interview, 00:02). Both quickly took a liking to each other and the young woman got pregnant being only 18 years old. Agnes West's grandfather didn't react well at first but then changed his mind:

> "[I was] told that my grandfather got insanely angry that my mother was having a child by a Black soldier and apparently didn't talk to my mother at all throughout the pregnancy. […] [After the birth] my mother went home with me and from that

> moment on I was most precious to my grandfather. He protected me, […] I was his one and only, [to him] there was no one else like me." (00:04–00:05)

The detailed phase of self-introduction is concluded in minute ten with the coda "that's just how I was born…" (00:10) and a long, chronological narrative extending to the present unfolds. In Agnes West's narrative we see that "belonging as a personal, intimate, private sentiment of place attachment ('sense of belonging') […] is built up and grows out of everyday practices" (Antonsich, 2010, p. 645). In a very much taken for granted way she positions herself not only as a part of her family, but also as the centre of attention and affection, especially from her grandfather. This invoked feeling of being at home and rootedness (ibid., p. 646) is not reduced to her family but also to the wider social circle of local children and adults as well as place, sometimes specified as her village and sometimes as the entire valley. During the whole interview Agnes West doesn't make a single reference to the fact that she is the child of an African-American GI and that she grew up as the only Black child in a homogeneous, white environment. When asked directly towards the end of the interview whether she remembers any experiences of racism Agnes West answers:

> "No. I basically grew up in an environment, in a valley, where I was simply accepted. Perhaps people talked about me in some family circles, but to me or to my family? […] I'm not aware of anything." (01:54)

Regarding the question of belonging this leads to several considerations: For one thing, social differences do not always play the role that we as researchers would expect. There is no reason to assume that post-war society in rural Tyrol was not conservative and racist. However, such orders of difference can be contradicted by other relevant criteria of belonging. Especially in small-scale social contexts: for example, the social position of the family in the community might prove of greater influence. Agnes Wests grandmother was the owner of the village inn

and her grandfather, described as a "good" and "well-respected" man, was the president of the local tourism association. On the other hand, the lack of narrated experiences of racism in this interview could be reflected as a limit to what can be thought and said – both in relation to how the interviewee remembers, interprets and reflects on her experiences, but also in relation to her positioning in the interview situation itself (Lucius-Hoene & Deppermann, 2004, pp. 177–180). While Agnes West contacted me to tell me about her "life as a Black occupation child" in the interview this narrative is pushed back in favour of a narrative about a transgenerational story of successful entrepreneurship and social upward mobility.

Conclusion

Biographical interviews prove to be a rich source for researching a person's sense of belonging. Although belonging may be a common challenge for children born of war, it cannot be assumed that the same thing is meant by different people, or in different historical and geographical contexts. Peter Sanders' story, for example, contains some elements of the experiences that are often constructed as typical of so-called occupation children: for example, feelings of being alone and not belonging and the refusal to communicate about his father. However, this does not lead to a narrative that remains in the mode of suffering – but neither can his story be read without further ado as a successful 'liberation' from his circumstances of origin. Rather, the struggle with different interpretations and the fragility of positionings become visible, which must not be dissolved in favour of one narrative figure or even a conclusion considered clear and unambiguous. What is not found in the interview is a problematization of growing up without a father. Instead, the family (and village) in which he grows up is constructed as strange and 'not normal' in a way that is difficult to grasp, as an environment to which he does not want to belong and he distances himself from it and from the attitudes of his mother and stepfather. The interview with Agnes West, on the other hand, makes it clear that the circumstances under which people can perceive themselves as belonging

are not always organized along socially relevant and powerful lines of differentiation.

Thus, belonging should not be examined as a state that someone has or has not achieved, but as an ongoing, dynamic process. This not only focuses on the fundamental contextuality of belonging, but also makes it possible to analyse changes and development over a person's lifetime. It is important to reconstruct contemporary and current social and academic discourses, legal frameworks and social practices, which appear in the form of orders of belonging and difference, for example, but also dominant narrative patterns, in order to interpret the experiences recounted. By analysing biographical interviews, it is possible to ask which ones are addressed by the interviewees, how they position themselves in relation to them, to what extent they adopt attributions and classifications or distance themselves from them and develop alternative interpretations of their situation and life story.

> "Only by means of biographical narratives can the question be clarified as to how the discursively produced subject positions are not only filled discursively, but also felt and lived. I.e.: Biographical narratives reveal the individual productions and representations of meaning in the context of discursive regimes." (Tuider, 2007, par. 26).

Conversely, knowledge of relevant discourses, social structures or legal frameworks can "provide clues to the larger overall context of narratives that reveal the references and disruptions of individual positioning" (ibid.). In my opinion, how a sense of belonging and politics of belonging are related should be reconstructed on a case-by-case basis. Advancing theoretical considerations on belonging in the field of research on children born of war could contribute to a more precise understanding of the connection between their individual experiences and the social conditions and to opening up the reconstruction of their positioning as so-called 'occupation children' to an intersectional perspective and considering its interdependence with other social positionings.

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