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RESEARCH NOTES

Children Born of War

A European Research Network Exploring the Life Histories of a Hidden Population

Kimberley Anderson and Sophie Roupetz

Abstract: Through the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program, the research and training network Children Born of War (CHIBOW) seeks to explore the lives of children born to local mothers and fathered by enemy soldiers, occupying forces, and locally stationed and peacekeeping forces during conflicts of the past one hundred years. Born both through mutually consenting "love relationships" and from rape, children born of war are a hidden population, relatively understudied and seldom spoken about in public spheres. Fifteen early career researchers at eleven academic institutes across Europe will address this topic from a multidisciplinary perspective. This training network will act as a platform to share the life stories of people affected by war in the most profound ways and to alleviate some of the silence surrounding their experiences.

Keywords: children, gender-based violence, rape, soldiers, war

Since late 2015, a multidisciplinary network of early stage researchers (ESR), their supervisors, and associated partners has been conducting research within eleven academic institutes across Europe. Coordinated by Professor Sabine Lee of the University of Birmingham, Children Born of War (CHIBOW) is a network funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program, under the Marie Skłodowska Curie grant agreement,¹ and will run until 2019.

The focus of this network is to recognize children born to local mothers and fathered by enemy soldiers, occupying forces, locally stationed forces or peacekeeping forces² during conflicts of the past one hundred years, and to enhance the understanding of their experiences. Many of these children were born within mutually consenting “love relationships,” while other children born of war (CBOW) were conceived as a result of sexual violence.³ As a historically understudied phenomenon, conflict-related sexual violence has increasingly begun to feature within wars in the present day. While many CBOW at the center of this research network are now in the later stages of life, their experiences of discrimination, ostracization, and stigmatization continue to affect their daily lives.⁴ This research network seeks to gather their personal histories, tell the world their stories, and renounce the taboo that still lingers. The CHIBOW network furthermore aims to enrich the national history of individual regions and contribute to an international narrative that will benefit CBOW today and in the future. It also seeks to explore the development, (re)integration into society, and the memories and reflections of the lives of CBOW to date. For many nations in Central and East Europe, the topic has seldom before been discussed, and so we seek to present it to the international readership of *Aspasia*.

Theoretical Tools, Alternative Sources, and Methodology

Oral history interviews will be the central method of data collection across the CHIBOW project, allowing research participants to tell their story in their own words, unprompted by researchers. Historians will subsequently analyze the collected data and compare it with both local and foreign archival sources in a process that permits an assessment of the life stories of CBOW to be placed within their local and wider historical context. In addition, since the CHIBOW network attempts to combine data from multiple disciplines, psychological research methods like

semistructured interviewing and questionnaires will be used. The interdisciplinary nature of this network gives a unique perspective to CBOW across varying conflicts and geographical locations.

Despite the political and psychosocial difficulties that CBOW face globally, there is little consensus about recognizing and incorporating children born of war into the existing classification of vulnerable children in and after conflict.⁵ To facilitate a systematic comparative analysis, the research field of Children Born of War was established in 2006 as a way of unifying the various research activities, information, and knowledge on these children cross-nationally. This network aims to systematically expand the collaboration of researchers in this field, to provide a better understanding for future development. In order to reach the widest possible audience, incorporating nonacademic interests, expected results from CHIBOW will be in dissemination in multiple mediums across the world.

Summary of Projects

In Czech borderlands after World War II, many Czech-German children faced challenges as a result of being children born of war. For centuries, Czechs and Germans have lived in the region side by side, but because of the Czechoslovak postwar policy against Germans and alleged collaborators, Czechs who had fraternized with Germans during the war were punished. Children born of such relationships were exposed to the Czech nationalists' endeavor to "cleanse" Czechoslovakia from everything German in the early postwar years. Many of them were deprived of Czechoslovak citizenship, hindered from access to social care, and subjected to arbitrary use of power that was accompanied by social rejection. Although in 1948—after the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia took power in the country—political practices changed

rapidly in the context of the official policy of proletarian internationalism, it took years until a gradual change in the anti-German public climate, and thus the social experience of Czech-German children, emerged.

The state's failure to protect mixed families, anti-German policies, and the anti-German public climate had a great impact on the everyday lives of Czech-German children. Although officially they were supposed to be treated in the same way as Czech children, in practice many of them were stigmatized, discriminated against, bullied, and in some cases even physically abused because of their origin. In order to overcome such traumatic experiences and to live without anxiety and hate, they often tried to rationalize or repress their memories. With help of archival sources at the national, regional, and local levels, ESR Michal Korhel will conduct an in-depth analysis of the Czech governmental policy aimed at managing children born of mixed Czech-German relationships. Qualitative content analysis of oral history material and sources will complement this work to provide a unique perspective of the lives of these CBOW.

In neighboring Poland, with a specific focus on the region of Upper Silesia, the work of ESR Lisa Haberkern is rooted in a seemingly similar case in terms of the national belonging of its people. Since the region was a part of multinational empires until 1918, the question of national belonging of its inhabitants became problematic in the interwar, World War II, and postwar periods. As inhabitants of a region with a history of shifting borders and sovereignties, Upper Silesians developed a flexible attitude toward their national belonging. This allowed them to be Upper Silesians, people from “here” or autochthons by self-definition. At the same time, in relation to a new state or government, it did not prevent them from declaring themselves Polish or German nationals, if needed. Up until today—based on preliminary interviews carried out by Haberkern—a self-definition as “Upper Silesian,” along with a positive self-stigmatization, is

prominent among a cohort of Upper Silesians born in the 1930s. In the aftermath of World War II, the Polish administration tried to undo National Socialist nationality policies with the so-called verification and rehabilitation. These processes allowed a share of the population to reacquire Polish citizenship. Upper Silesians whose national identity seemed questionable to the authorities or even to suspicious fellow citizens faced imprisonment during the time needed to clarify their status. This group, as well as their families, will be interviewed for a multigenerational study, which is believed to be the key to understanding how familiar remembrance of the early postwar period is or is not brought into accordance with the Polish and German master narrative. Within both, the Upper Silesian experience is seldom reflected upon. Haberkern's project aims to find answers to the question of how incongruity and discontinuity generated under the described circumstances are negotiated in the memories of Upper Silesian families in Poland and Germany. This approach introduces the possibility of comparing how the three different political systems influenced familiar communication and memories.

Continuing the investigation within Poland, ESR Jakub Gałęziowski aims to narrow the focus to the exploration of life histories of children fathered by German and Soviet occupiers born to local Polish mothers. This work hopes to enrich the knowledge and understanding of various historical identities, since not much has been known about this group in Eastern Europe until now; they grew up enveloped in public and private silence. As a result, much secrecy has surrounded their origins and the topic has been a taboo. By combining archival work and oral history interviews, Gałęziowski's preliminary results so far appear to confirm the absence of the topic from society, public discourse, academic research, and literature. Indeed, in the Polish language there is no name for this group of World War II victims, so the term "CBOW" cannot be used. Initial results also seem to confirm the role of silence when there is no space for sharing

particularly difficult experiences, such as conflict-related sexual violence or indeed mixed ethnic relationships. This silence consequently determines the research strategy used by Gałęziowski, as often crucial stories are hidden between the lines.

In the adjacent Baltic countries, with a focus on Lithuania, ESR Christian Pipal explores the construction of postconflict citizenship of children fathered by Soviet and Wehrmacht soldiers and born to local mothers. This will be in connection to policy choices and the national (re)education of children of the perceived enemies, in a distinct environment where the concepts of the enemy and the ally are often understood differently by different parts of the society, and over different time periods. This project explores the holistic understanding of citizenship and political identity in Lithuania through archival work and narrative biographical interviews. Individual-state and individual-community interaction patterns will be contrasted against the legalistic and language-focused analysis of citizenship that dominates not only the entirety of policy discussions in the Baltics but also the academic debate around the identity and citizenship of the Russian-speaking minority in the Baltic countries.⁶ The framework thus creates the possibility to analyze the sense of identity of CBOW, within a state and community.

The final project within the countries formerly subjugated by communist regimes considers how the life stories of CBOW born to Third Reich soldiers compared to those born to Soviet soldiers in Latvia during World War II. ESR Oskars Gruziņš will consider how relations between Latvian women and soldiers were formed and how these origin stories have impacted the lives of CBOW to date. Based on qualitative interviews and archival materials, this project will consider how these children were treated within society, how the occupying Soviet regime reacted to them, and how these factors may or may not have impacted the identities and life stories of CBOW in Latvia.

Similarly, little is known about CBOW born in the aftermath of World War II during the occupation period in Germany and Austria, where the victorious Allied powers asserted their authority. Germany and Austria were divided into four occupation zones for administrative purposes—the American, British, French, and Soviet zones—and the following three projects will further investigate children born of soldiers to local mothers during that time (1945–1955).

ESR Lukas Schretter will focus on the children fathered by British soldiers born to Austrian mothers and how these children were affected by their biological origins. While most of these children were born to single mothers and grew up in Austria, some were born out of marriages between British soldiers and Austrian women and grew up in the United Kingdom. Approaching the topic from the perspective of political history, Schretter will analyze official documents preserved in archives in Austria and the United Kingdom. This will be combined with interview narratives to provide additional information on facets of the history of these children that otherwise, for lack of sources, would remain unknown, and give insight into personal experiences and individual biographies.

Some two hundred thousand children born after World War II are estimated to have been fathered by a soldier of the Allied occupying forces and born to a local mother in Germany. ESR Saskia Mitreuter aims to shed light on the question of identity that these CBOW face and to examine their life stories to ask whether there are typical patterns of narrative identity. As children who were born out of wedlock and in some cases considered children of the enemy, they have not only faced challenges within their families but have also often been of a lower socioeconomic status and exposed to discrimination and racism. Approximately half of the sample thus perceives itself as being rather passively extradited, whereas one-fifth describes more active strategies. First results indicate that the extent of narratives featuring “belonging”

and “autonomy” is generally small, but self-representations and strategies change and evolve over the life span, with a focus on positive resolution in late adulthood. The results underpin the importance of considering children born of war as a vulnerable group in conflict and postconflict settings.

Of these two hundred thousand CBOW in Germany, approximately eight thousand were born of sexual violence committed against local women by occupying soldiers. Children conceived in this way are described by the World Health Organization as being at risk of being neglected, stigmatized, ostracized, or abandoned.⁷ At times, these children have served as living reminders of the rape, which can challenge mother-child attachment and parenting.⁸ By conducting autobiographical narrative interviews, ESR Sophie Roupetz aims to gain understanding of the psychosocial impact of growing up as CBOW—specifically of sexual violence—in Germany and Austria, with a special focus on identity construction, representations of mother-child attachment, stigmatization, and discrimination, as well as the impact on other relationships. Initial mixed-method results show that this particularly vulnerable group differs with respect to typical adult attachment, compared to a cohort-matched sample from the German general population. Decades later, these CBOW display more insecure attachment representations in current relationships than their counterparts.

Two other postconflict settings in the aftermath of World War II have been incorporated into CHIBOW. The first is in French Indochina, where the French occupation was ended by Japan. During the so-called Indochina War (1946–1954), children born to French soldiers and Indochinese women were transported to Europe. The Fondation de l’Oeuvre de l’Enfance Française d’Indochine (FOEFI) in particular repatriated several thousand abandoned mixed-race children to France until 1947, housing them in orphanages and children’s homes and giving them

a French education. ESR Eva Käuper is conducting archival work across France and narrative interviews with CBOW and citizens involved in the repatriation, to analyze the historical circumstances and integration process, as well as the different life courses of these children, by reflecting on questions of identity.

Following soon after the Indochina War, the Vietnam War (1955–1975) erupted and saw the births of many children fathered by US soldiers and born to Vietnamese mothers. Using archival sources and oral history interviews, ESR Nastassia Sersté will investigate the life courses of mixed-race children—commonly called “Amerasians”—who were adopted by French families during the war and soon after. This includes many who came through the US military and humanitarian Operation Babylift in 1975. Because of the historical past of French colonialism in Vietnam, the position of France on the world scale in the context of the Vietnam War, and international relations with Vietnam and the United States, understanding the situation of mixed-race children is complex. First results after exploring national archives in France, the United States, and Vietnam highlight the rejection of this issue by the US government, in contrast to France, which put in place processes to ensure the integration of mixed-race children of French servicemen and Vietnamese women. Yet, the multinational environment of these CBOW is evident today, in both those who were repatriated to Europe as children and those who emigrated in the later years after growing up in Vietnam. The life course of many Amerasians was profoundly impacted, often leading to identity crisis.

Similar cases of poor identity formation have been observed more recently, during the war that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s and its postconflict context. Many children were fathered by enemy soldiers, peacekeeping forces stationed in the region, and foreign aid workers, all born to local mothers. From a psychosocial perspective, ESR Amra Delić

will explore the relationship between measurable indicators of mental health of these CBOW and their lived experiences. Preliminary results highlight the challenge of gaining access to these children, and the expanding definition of ‘children born of war’.

The CHIBOW network also features areas outside of Europe, in regions where children born of war from various historical contexts remain relatively understudied. ESR Kanako Kuramitsu examines life experiences of children born of Japanese fathers and Chinese mothers who had consensual relationships during and after the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), with a focus on those who migrated to Japan after the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations in 1972. Despite the fact that these individuals had never set foot in their father’s country—Japan—until they reached their thirties or forties, they refer to their migration to Japan as a “return to their ancestral land.” Their migration was not only driven by their desire to search for their biological father but also by their need to escape the poverty and fear they experienced under Mao. In the long, cumbersome process of collecting evidence on their origin to acquire Japanese citizenship for their migration, they learned in great detail about their father and their parents’ relationship.

While a historically rooted phenomenon, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) continues to appear in more recent conflicts and is the focus of three further projects within CHIBOW. For instance, since the insurgence of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in 1987, northern Uganda has faced a two-decade-long civil war between government forces and the LRA. The LRA targeted children, who were ritually terrorized, sexually exploited and abused, and forced to kill and watch the beating, maiming, rape, and killing of friends and relatives.⁹ ESR Eleanor Seymour seeks to specifically understand the roots of SGBV and the myriad factors such as slave trade, colonialism, intersociety wars, and sexual violence as part of missionary

work that influence the children born as a result of this in Ugandan society. In addition to this work, ESR Boniface Ojok will support the investigation in northern Uganda.

Many CBOW who either were rescued or escaped from LRA camps during the war are now undergoing a process of integration into Acholi communities. Since the Juba Peace Negotiation between the LRA and the Ugandan government from 2006 to 2008, multiple stakeholders have embarked on a process of postconflict reconstruction, including peace building, reconciliation, and development. The purpose of Ojok's research is to explore the circumstances of reintegration of these children with particular reference to schooling, education, training, and socialization processes.

Lastly, within the current migration of millions of people affected by conflict worldwide, many mothers and their CBOW who flee their countries face further challenges like traumatic stress reactions, separation from support networks, financial uncertainty, and social instability. Yet, the complexity of their needs has so far prevented the development of effective care practices within clinical settings. ESR Kimberley Anderson will assess refugee mothers and their children now residing in the Netherlands on aspects of psychological well-being, child functioning, stigma, resilience, and emotional availability. The first results highlight the fragile nature of reliving recent experiences of SGBV and the degree to which memories are yet to be processed. Ultimately, this is a finding in itself and reflects the silence around CBOW in other geographical locations.

Discussion

This vision of the CHIBOW network is to enhance the understanding of the challenges experienced by children born in volatile societies. Subsequently, this body of research provides a

basis to inform the normative debates and, ultimately, policies on the reintegration of children born of war into postconflict societies. By combining historical, social, psychiatric, political, and public health research with the discourse surrounding currently enacted humanitarian interventions, insights gained from this network will surpass existing knowledge and help improve current integration efforts. The CHIBOW network is committed to promoting scientific excellence by utilizing the specific research expertise and infrastructure of coordinating partners and combining this with the individual expertise of all research participants in order to advance the reach of this topic. Preliminary results confirm the silence on this topic, and the reluctance to discuss personal experiences for fear of further detrimental societal repercussions.

Like all research on vulnerable populations or topics considered taboo, ESRs within the CHIBOW network face methodological challenges that ultimately dictate their research strategies. For instance, historians are often prevented from accessing diverse archives, and seeking and obtaining permission to view sources, many of which are not yet available to the public, takes valuable time. Psychologists and psychiatrists face difficulties in locating and obtaining permission to speak with mothers and CBOW. Therefore, the amount of data we are able to retrieve from recently war-affected people is limited and must be interpreted with caution.

Through the process of identifying and recruiting potential study participants in several studies within CHIBOW, it has become apparent that there are children who share specific living conditions and experiences with CBOW in the traditional, narrower sense, that is, children born out of relationships involving local parents from different ethnic backgrounds. However, there are also children whose mothers have been victims of international human trafficking within conflict, postconflict, and nonconflict zones. Thus, the wider vulnerabilities of children born and

raised in sociopolitical contexts should also be addressed in the research on children born of war.¹⁰ Further, the projects presented in this article, of course, do not fully encompass all possible activities relevant to the research field of CBOW. However, they act as catalysts to bring more attention to the sensitive topic.

A common desire among many CBOW in the later stages of life is to know their roots and so to find their biological father or mother. Even today, with genetic testing, the internet, and social networks, it is a long and tiring quest, but one that is very important and sensitive for CBOW. Many individuals have come together to form support groups, and are well connected and active within their social networks to share their experiences. Many hope to uncover their biological roots but also to seek assurance from those who can understand them. Despite diverse methodological challenges, the CHIBOW network wishes to act as a platform for children born of war across the globe, to help them connect with others and relinquish feelings of loneliness, and to draw attention to this issue beyond academia.

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Kimberley Anderson is a PhD student of the clinical facility Psychotraumacentrum Zuid Nederland, Reinier van Arkel Group, the Netherlands. She is currently working with refugee and

asylum-seeker mothers in the Netherlands who have children born of sexual violence. Her research focuses on present-day conflicts across the world and the added burden of migration and asylum. With the results of her work within CHIBOW, Anderson hopes to improve the standard of care for these women and children by addressing their complex dyadic needs. She holds a Master of Science in Child & Adolescent Mental Health from University College London. E-mail:k.anderson@reiniervanarkel.nl

Sophie Roupetz is a PhD student in the Department of Medical Psychology and Medical Sociology at the University of Leipzig, Germany. Her project considers the psychological impact of growing up as an occupation child born of rape after World War II, in Germany and Austria. She hopes the results from her study will better support and integrate CBOW worldwide into postconflict societies. She is also involved in a project on child marriage among Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and supports an NGO in northern Uganda helping those affected by violence. She holds a Master of Science in Psychology from the University of Vienna and is a trained Clinical and Health Psychologist. E-mail:Sophie.Roupetz@medizin.uni-leipzig.de

Notes

¹ Grant number H2020-EU.1.2.1. Project reference: 642571. See www.chibow.org.

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