

Research Workshop: Children born of war and processes of state and nation building

May 22nd 2024, Universität Innsbruck, Austria

In recent years, research on children of war in different geo-political and historical contexts has produced rich and empirically saturated descriptions of the experiences of children born to local mothers and enemy soldiers, occupation soldiers, members of rebel groups as well as of UN peacekeeping forces. They show that many were and are confronted with similar challenges: for example, various forms of exclusion, a difficult communication regarding one's own origins as the child of an enemy or foreign soldier often characterized by ignorance, silence or lies, or questions of identity and belonging. Regardless of these similarities across geographical distances and historical periods these studies are faced with the challenge to specify the relation of the individual situations and the social structures with the risk of remaining “ahistorical” if they don't sufficiently consider the changing historical circumstances (Kössler, 2019).

In this research workshop are interested in discussing ways to contextualize the experiences of children born of war in processes of state and nation building. Often, children grow up during conflicts or in times of post-war transition when such processes of nation building and forming of national identities are especially prevalent. For example, national or nationalistic, ethnic, religious and racist discourses, ideologies, policies and practices provide notions of who are the desired members of the collective, how such collectives may be joined and what happens to those considered as „*the others*“. As Nira Yuval-Davis pointed out, these are deeply gendered processes in many ways (Yuval-Davis 1997 and 2011) and we must assume that they impact the experiences of children born of war and their mothers and care-givers. Several studies point out that it might be especially challenging for children born of war to develop a *sense of belonging* (e.g. Mitreuter et al. 2022) and point out the necessity to discuss this in relation to politics of belonging (e.g. Guerrini 2023). Other studies have shown that specific narratives of the nation and national identity might render the experiences of children born of war invisible (e.g. Steward 2020, Denov et al. 2020). At the same time, recent research has also highlighted how specific groups of children born of conflict-related sexual violence become political agents of change whose activism contributes to nation building positively, and in the context of reconciliation (e.g. Takševa, 2023; 2019).

We invite presentations discussing the questions regarding the relation between nation building and the experiences of children born of war, for example:

- Which discourses, ideologies, policies and practices are relevant in the specific historical and geo-political context?
- What roles are women and children assigned to in discourses on the nation or national identity and how can the experiences of children born of war related to such discourses?
- (How) are children born of war addressed in processes of nation building, what social positions are they and their mothers assigned and how is inclusion and exclusion negotiated?
- What methodological and theoretical questions arise when trying to situate experiences of children born of war in processes of nation building? And which methodological and theoretical approaches are considered helpful?

- What are some of the conceptual tensions animating discussions of children born of war as a global population category, and groups of children specific to a geographic context?

Details and organization

The workshop will take place at Universität Innsbruck on May 22nd 2024. We plan short, informal presentations followed by collegial conversation and dialogue. If you are interested in presenting your research during this workshop please contact Flavia Guerrini (flavia.guerrini@uibk.ac.at) with a (preliminary) title and short description of your work (100-200 words) preferably until April 19th.

For a participation without presentation the registration is possible until May 15th 2024 (preferably as soon as possible since the places limited).

Participation in the workshop and the joint lunch are free of charge. Unfortunately, travel costs and accommodation can not be covered. If you need information on cost saving travel options contact Flavia Guerrini.

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Saint Mary's University is in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the L'nu.

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