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# “Collateral damage” of occupation? Social and political responses to nonmarital children of Allied soldiers and Austrian women after the Second World War

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Thousands of so-called *occupation children* were born to Allied soldiers and Austrian women in sexual relations after the end of the Second World War. Their experiences correspond to the experiences of *occupation children* in Germany and, more general, to the experiences of Children Born of War, i.e., children born after sexual contact between local women and foreign/enemy soldiers in conflict and post-conflict situations, regardless of the time of birth and the geopolitical context. Now, more than 75 years after the end of the war, we have studied the changes in the social and political handling of *occupation children* in Austria over the past decades, using official sources such as newspaper reports, and including biographical interviews conducted with British *occupation children* in the 2010s. Three phases were identified into which the handling of *occupation children* can be divided: The post-war years, in which these children were perceived as an (economic) burden; the phase of *occupation children* growing up and becoming adults, in which they were hardly addressed in public; and the period since the 1990s, in which they have experienced increased media, family, and public interest, which can be attributed to their efforts to make their life stories heard, to the academic research into their living and socialization conditions, and to the formation of networks. The study complements other research on *occupation children* in Germany and Austria, highlighting the significant differences in the discourse on U.S. American, British, Soviet, and French *occupation children*, especially between *white* and *Black occupation children*, and addressing the differences in Austria compared to Germany. The article argues that challenges and opportunities in the integration of these children have been tied to changes in social values and morals as well as to collective processes of coming to terms with the war and post-war period.

## KEYWORDS

*occupation children*, Children Born of War, World War II, post-war period, Austria

## Introduction

Brigitte Rupp is one of thousands of so-called *occupation children* in Austria, i.e., children conceived in sexual relations between members of the Allied forces and Austrian women after the Second World War. Her mother worked as a server for the British troops in the Palais Goess-Sarau in Graz in the summer of 1945.<sup>1</sup> There she met a British officer, and they began a relationship, despite the fraternization ban that prohibited any kind of private contact between British servicemen and so-called ex-enemy aliens.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after Rupp had been born in June 1946, her British father left his stationing in Graz and was transferred to Vienna, from where he returned to Great Britain in 1949. Most nonmarital children of Allied soldiers and Austrian women, including Brigitte R., grew up without their fathers, who had left their places of stationing before or after the children were born. Some Allied soldiers never learned about the children they had fathered while stationed in Austria.

The interest in her parents' relationship and the desire to get to know her British father accompanied Rupp for decades: That "has always come in waves. In between, of course, real life happens."<sup>3</sup> At the age of almost fifty, she wrote a letter to her father without knowing his address, in which she confronted him with having evaded responsibility for his nonmarital child in Austria. The letter contained the following lines: "Have you ever

thought about what will happen to me—your daughter? Have you thought about whether my mother—this beautiful, naïve young woman, will survive the years after 1948 with me? Did you worry whether I would at least get a good stepfather? [...] We [*occupation children*] are not just the obligatory flotsam and jetsam of a war, but children who have a longing to be able to give their father a face and a history, we are fathers and mothers with the sad certainty that we were not worth a dime to our fathers".<sup>4</sup> Rupp then turned to the Austrian daily newspaper *Der Standard* to publish the letter, which appeared titled "Give us a face and a story," amid commemorative events marking the 50th anniversary of the end of the war in Europe.

Around the same time, since the end of the 20th century, Austrian and German scholars have been increasingly researching the history of *occupation children*. In their studies, they use this term to refer to nonmarital children of Allied soldiers and women from the occupation zones. It does not include children from Allied–Austrian and Allied–German marriages, which the authorities allowed from 1946 in the British zone (Knowles, 2019; Schretter, 2022a) and in the US zone (Shukert and Smith Scibetta, 1988, pp. 123–182; Schmidlechner, 1998); in the French zone, the military authorities made it difficult for Allied and German or Austrian women to marry (Hudemann, 2006; Satjukow and Gries, 2015, pp. 113–115), and Austrian–Soviet and German–Soviet marriages were permitted de jure from 1953 onward, but remained the exception (Stelzl-Marx, 2005, p. 423, Satjukow, 2008, pp. 285–291). Maltschnig (2015, p. 236) explained this not only semantic distinction using the example of the offspring of US soldiers and Austrian women, emphasizing "that a purely legal definition can only inadequately describe the phenomenon. Having a 'local' mother and an occupying soldier as parents did not automatically produce experiences of discrimination; rather, it was the circumstances of growing up that counted." Most studies on *occupation children* since the 1990s have focused on their childhood experiences in Germany and Austria, and the varying degrees of discrimination they suffered due to their status as nonmarital children and the nationality and ethnicity of their fathers. While British (Satjukow, 2015a; Schmidlechner, 2015), French (Huber, 1997, pp. 186–189, 2015; Gries, 2015), Soviet (Stelzl-Marx, 2009, 2015a,b; Satjukow, 2015b, 2016), and US (Bauer, 1998b; Lee, 2011) *occupation children* recall carefree and sheltered childhood years, others recall their specific social status, while neglect and abuse marked the childhood of others. In general, children of Black<sup>5</sup> GIs (Bauer, 2001; Fehrenbach, 2001, 2005; Lemke Muniz de Faria, 2002, 2003, 2005; Hakenesch, 2016,

1 In this article, unless otherwise stated, the terms mother and father refer to the children's biological parents. Many *occupation children* had, temporarily or permanently, social parents that were invested in their upbringing and education, such as stepparents or foster parents, or they were given to adoptive parents.

2 The gendered term fraternization is a misnomer, as it clearly had a heterosexual connotation and referred mainly to relationships of soldiers with women from the occupation zones. The strict regulations of the British (Stieber, 2005; Smith, 2009, pp. 327–333) and the US American (Bauer, 1998b; Goedde, 1999, 2003; Höhn, 2002) military government differed from those of the French military leadership, which did not perceive fraternization as a threat to the occupation effort (Eisterer, 1993; Huber, 1997; Glöckner, 2018). Like the French, the Soviet military government also did not impose an official fraternization ban on its soldiers. Sexual intercourse between army personnel and non-Soviet women was frowned upon, but the Soviet administration tolerated low-key love affairs. At the same time, guilty verdicts were handed down for female spies who allegedly used "pillow talk" with Soviet soldiers on behalf of Western intelligence services to gain secret information or to persuade Soviet army members to desert (Satjukow, 2008; Stelzl-Marx, 2012).

3 Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on Consequences of War (hereinafter: BIK), interview with Brigitte Rupp, conducted by B. Stelzl-Marx, 28 January 2013, transcript, p. 4. All interviews cited in this article are part of the collection of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on the Consequences of War, Graz–Vienna–Raabs. To increase readability, this paper includes interview quotes from polished versions of the full-verbatim transcripts.

4 "Gebt uns ein Gesicht und eine Geschichte," by B. Rupp, in *Der Standard*, 26 April 1995, p. 27.

5 In this paper, the capitalization considers the discussions regarding appropriate usage of the terms Black and white and emphasizes that these terms are not only a description of the ostensible color of the skin, but also as social constructs and categories.

2022; Malanda, 2016, 2021; Rohrbach and Wahl, 2019; Bauer and Rohrbach, 2021) and French soldiers from the Maghreb (Lechhab, 2007, 2009) were more discriminated against and marginalized than *white* children, due to racial prejudice. On the basis of psychological findings, especially in relation to *occupation children* in Germany, challenging living conditions in childhood represented risk factors also for mental and physical health in adulthood (Kaiser et al., 2015a,b; Kaiser and Glaesmer, 2016; Glaesmer et al., 2017; Mitreuter et al., 2019; Mitreuter, 2022). For example, psychologists found that *occupation children* in Germany had a more insecure attachment style in adulthood than the general population (Kaiser et al., 2016). Although research on *occupation children* has so far been conducted principally in the fields of history and cultural studies, as well as in psychology, the history of education has also examined the pedagogical discourse on these children in the post-war period and how the children dealt with the conditions of their upbringing (Guerrini, 2019; Kleinau, 2015a,b, 2016, 2021a,b; Kleinau and Mochmann, 2016; Kleinau and Schmid, 2016a,b, 2017, 2019, 2020; Schmid and Kleinau, 2018) and, recently, how the existing research literature analyses and interprets “fatherlessness” of *occupation children* (Schmid, 2022).<sup>6</sup> More generally, according to existing research, the lived experiences of *occupation children* were found to be similar to those of other children conceived by foreign/enemy soldiers and local women during and after the Second World War (Mochmann et al., 2009). Researchers counted *occupation children* as Children Born of War (CBOW), i.e., children born after sexual contact between “local” women and “foreign” soldiers in conflict and post-conflict situations, regardless of the time of birth and the geopolitical context, whose common features are their perceived association with the enemy and the resulting exposure to risk in various spheres of their lives, as well as violation of their rights in post-conflict societies (Lee, 2017; Mochmann, 2017).

The following article adds to the growing body of research on *occupation children*, firstly, by exploring the specific status accorded to them in the two post-war decades. Secondly, drawing on press reports and the experiences of Brigitte Rupp and other *occupation children*, the article looks at developments from the 1960s, when *occupation children* became adults, to the 1990s, when they increasingly came in the focus of public attention. The article, thirdly, analyzes the handling of *occupation children* since the 2000s. This includes the attention paid to the topic by academia and the media, as well as the establishment of networks. According to Brigitte Rupp, *occupation children* were long perceived as “collateral damage”<sup>7</sup> of the Allied occupation, which is why she says she felt “rejection

and disdain,” at least “subliminally”.<sup>8</sup> This article on the social and political handling of *occupation children* includes the story of Rupp and other firsthand accounts that give a nuanced glimpse into the interiority of their experiences.

## Research methodology

The starting point for this article was an interview with Brigitte Rupp conducted in Austria in 2013. A second interview with Rupp was conducted in 2016. We link the research on the social and political handling of *occupation children* in Austria since the end of the Second World War through the analysis of official documents, such as meetings of the Austrian and Federal Councils, as well as newspapers, to Rupp’s story.

In addition to interviews with Rupp, the article draws on interviews with 16 British *occupation children* conducted from 2013 and analyzed from 2015 to 2018 as part of a research project within the International Training Network Children Born of War—Past Present Future ([www.chibow.org](http://www.chibow.org)). Interview participants were recruited through a media campaign initiated by the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research on Consequences of War and through word-of-mouth. Most interviews were conducted at the participants’ homes. While some *occupation children* are known to the public by name and Rupp consented to the use of her full name, to ensure confidentiality, the names of all other interviewees were anonymized in this article. The use of only interviews with British *occupation children* is a limitation of this study. To address the experiences of the Soviet, US, and French *occupation children*, we rely on the available studies, which are extensive for the first two groups and less exhaustive for the latter.

## Economic considerations and moral attitudes

After the end of the Second World War, Austria, like Germany, was divided into four zones under the control of the United States of America, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. The Allies granted Austria full independence in 1955, after it committed itself to perpetual neutrality, and the last occupation soldiers left that same year. The exact number of children born between 1945 and 1955 through sexual contact between Allied soldiers and Austrian women is unclear. The relationships from which they were born covered the whole spectrum from long-term consensual partnerships to sexualized violence (Satjukow and Stelzl-Marx, 2015, p. 11).

<sup>6</sup> The latest publication on the topic in the field of educational sciences, written by Flavia Guerrini (University of Innsbruck), entitled “Vom Feind ein Kind. Nachkommen alliierter Soldaten erzählen” (Mandelbaum Verlag) was not yet available at the time of completion of this article and is expected to appear in late 2022.

<sup>7</sup> BIK, interview with Brigitte Rupp, conducted by L. Schretter, 21 June 2016, transcript, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> BIK, interview with Brigitte Rupp, conducted by L. Schretter, 21 June 2016, transcript, p. 13.

During Allied occupation of Austria between 1945 and 1955 and beyond, it was primarily economic considerations that brought *occupation children* the special attention of the Austrian authorities. These children, like all nonmarital children, had the same citizenship as their mothers and were wards of the district youth welfare agencies, which assessed the children's housing and care. Only on application, and if it was in the best interests of the child, was an individual guardian to be appointed instead of the youth welfare agency. Single mothers had to deal with welfare officers until their children were of age, and the child welfare agencies also collected alimony from their wards' fathers, as far as they were known, and, if necessary, tried to enforce payments through the courts (Berzkovics, 2006, p. 42–44, for West Germany, see Buske, 2004).<sup>9</sup> In the case of *occupation children*, however, there was no possibility of holding the fathers financially responsible. Since members of the Allied forces were not subject to Austrian jurisdiction, welfare agencies had to contribute financial assistance if fathers did not pay voluntary alimony and mothers, or maternal grandparents were not able to provide for their children. The Allied powers did not assume any responsibility for the children conceived by occupation soldiers in Austrian and Germany; an exception was France, where alimony claims could not be brought against soldiers during the occupation period; however, according to French law the children received the citizenship of the fathers following an acknowledgment of paternity and were, thus, considered French (Satjukow and Gries, 2015, p. 122f). At least 1,500 French *occupation children*, *Les Enfants d'État*, were "repatriated" from Germany alone to France, while most grew up in Germany and Austria (Gries, 2015; Huber, 2015).

While living conditions in the post-war period were generally characterized by scarcity and they were perceived as "children of the enemy," many *occupation children* report having grown up in particularly precarious economic circumstances. The degree to which their mothers managed to make ends meet in post-war society depended, among other things, on whether they could rely on the support of those close to them, especially their families. "My mother always told me that she faced disadvantages. She did not get any alimony. I was a child who was under guardianship of the youth welfare agency, and she struggled to survive,"<sup>10</sup> one British *occupation child* recalls. A vanishingly small

proportion of the mothers received voluntary alimony payments from the fathers of their children. Rupp, for example, later learned that her mother's attempts to contact the British officer to obtain alimony were unsuccessful; in fact, none of the interviewed British *occupation children* recall having received financial support from their fathers during their childhood years.

The livelihood of the mothers of *occupation children* and the budgetary burden imposed on the Austrian authorities was the subject of political debates and media coverage. For the province of Salzburg, which was under US administration, for example, it was reported in 1953 that "even small communities had to pay for 35 or more children of occupation personnel."<sup>11</sup> Two years later, in a debate of the Austrian National Council, concerning the province of Salzburg, "the public duty of care for those *occupation children* whose foreign fathers had hitherto paid voluntary alimony which will now for the most part cease to exist" was considered a "crisis-aggravating moment," and "mothers will have limited ability to care for the children, who number in the thousands."<sup>12</sup> When the later Austrian Federal President Theodor Körner, at the time mayor of Vienna and member of the National Council for the Social Democratic Party, publicly advocated financial investment in *occupation children* in 1948, this was an exception in the post-war discourse. He stated that all nonmarital children of Allied soldiers in Vienna would "one day become good Viennese people, they will all speak Viennese and think Viennese. I simply mean to say that a city must spend a lot of money if it wants to be socially progressive."<sup>13</sup> Although the Austrian authorities tried to relieve their budgets by negotiating with the Allied forces over the payment of alimony, demanding that the number of *occupation children* be determined, and making children an economic and human rights issue, these efforts were largely unsuccessful (Rohrbach, 2021, p. 40–42; Schretter, 2022b). Instead, some of these children were placed with adoptive parents in European countries, South America, or the US (Rohrbach, 2021, p. 42).

In western Germany, attempts to oblige members of the Allied powers to pay alimony also had insignificant effect. It was not until 1952 that the "General Treaty" stipulated that German courts could sue members of the Allied armed forces for alimony payments, but only if the defendants were in Germany. This limited the number of claims that had a chance of success from the outset. In addition, this provision only came into force in 1955, when the Allied Statute of Occupation ended, and only applied to children born after that year. *Occupation children*,

9 Unlike in West Germany, mothers in the Soviet occupation zone and in the German Democratic Republic were entitled to parental custody themselves; this was only allowed to be suspended in exceptional cases by the appointment of a guardian. There was also no provision for fathers to pay alimony for their nonmarital children. (Satjukow and Gries, 2015, p. 184–187).

10 BIK, interview with Robert S., conducted by L. Schretter, 31 January 2018, transcript, p. 11.

11 Die Besatzungskinder, in: Neue Zeit, 14 November 1953, 2.

12 72<sup>nd</sup> Session of the National Council of the Republic of Austria, Stenographic Minutes, 30 June 1955, F. Stüber, p. 3323.

13 74<sup>th</sup> Session of the National Council of the Republic of Austria, Stenographic Minutes, 21 January 1948, T. Körner, p. 2136.

therefore, did not benefit from this rule (Tibelius, 2016a, p. 237f; Tibelius, 2016b, p. 105–109). In Austria, at a Federal Council meeting in 1960, the wish was expressed that many more countries would sign and ratify an international convention on the mutual recognition of alimony claims, as Austria has done, and the speaker referred to the “various members of the occupation, whether they were French or Russian or whatever nationality, that also left behind children out of wedlock. Federal Council! I do not want to single out any nation, because I am convinced that Austrian soldiers and German soldiers abroad also left behind children (Laughter). The victims were always the mothers, who then had to continue to provide for the livelihood of the children, for whom there were then no fathers. I think this is a quite natural phenomenon. I think there has hardly been a war where one side or the other has not left something behind in this or that state (Resounding laughter).”<sup>14</sup>

In addition to financial expenses, which the Austrian authorities saw as a burden, the problem of *occupation children* was linked to moral attitudes. In Austria, as in Germany, relationships between local women and military personnel were a highly emotional point of discussion. Women who had maintained relationships with Allied soldiers were the target of hostility and sometimes even physical assault. They ran the risk of sweeping criticism and were called “prostitutes,” “chocolate girls,” “French whores,” *Russenflitscherl*, and *Amifrüchtchen* (John, 1996; Biddiscombe, 2004). Austrian women who did sex work for Allied soldiers were particularly condemned, and psychiatry in post-war Austria dealt with *Soldatenbräuten* “whom acquaintance with soldiers of foreign occupying powers has led down the path of prostitution and who have not understood how to find their way back to normal social order” (Hoff and Ringel, 1952, p. 140).

Behind verbal and physical attacks was an image of women that associated female sexuality with shamelessness and obscenity. While premarital sex and nonmarital children were considered shameful anyway, relationships between Austrian women and Allied soldiers were interpreted as a loss of the “hereditary property rights” of former *Wehrmacht* soldiers to “their women” (Bauer, 1998a, p. 48). Mattl (1987, p. 363) sums up gender relations in post-war Austria as follows: “The war was not over in 1945. It continued in the hinterland. No longer as a war between armies, nor as a war between classes, but as a war between the genders.” Especially in the first post-war years, Allied–Austrian relationships were viewed ambivalently and criticized as an act of disloyalty, but financial support for the mothers of *occupation children* was also later questioned, as their mothers represented a group that the authorities treated with suspicion. This became evident in April 1952, when a conference organized by politics dealt with so-called *occupation brides*. A reference to the situation in Germany intended to

illustrate the extent of the “problem;” there were apparently about 40,000 children in western Germany alone, “who cannot be maintained by their mothers and whose fathers, being outside the German laws, refuse to fulfill any alimentation obligations.”<sup>15</sup> The conference and subsequent reactions used financial expenses for *occupation children* as an argument to take strict action against Austrian women who offered sexual services to Allied soldiers. The women, referred to as “menaces,” were to be denounced and arrested.<sup>16</sup> In the US zone, sex work indeed reached exceptional dimensions, with female “camp followers” from across Austria pouring into the neighborhoods of US military quarters; however, women who had given birth to *occupation children* were equated with women who did sex work, had Allied soldiers as clients, and were condemned outright without any prior examination of the emotional depth of their relationships with Allied soldiers (Bauer, 2021, p. 95f).

Apart from reports, which pointed to the alleged misconduct of the mothers and to the financial aspect of the “problem,” there was no broad public debate in Austria, unlike in western Germany, about these children and their integration into society. By contrast, existing research suggests that *occupation children* in western Germany received enormous attention. They set in motion “essential sociopsychological and political negotiation processes” during the first two decades after the war and became “veritable media for their families, for their immediate communities in their everyday lives, and for the two developing post-war societies,” thereby “enabling unimagined cultural transfers” and becoming “catalysts of a new liberality and a renewed openness to the world” (Satjukow and Gries, 2015, p. 14).

Economic considerations and national moral feelings of resentment toward private relationships with Allied soldiers had an impact on the handling of all *occupation children* in Austria. Yet, children of Black soldiers in Austria, as in western Germany, were treated differently from *white occupation children*. In western Germany, there was a broad debate about around 5,000 Black children (Lemke Muniz de Faria, 2002, 2003, 2005), which was also reflected in the educational discourse (Campt and Grosse, 1994; Kleinau and Schmid, 2020; Kleinau, 2021a,b). The 1952 film *Toxi*, one of the very few commercial films to deal explicitly with the problem of “race” in post-fascist Germany, sought to generate “understanding” for Black *occupation children* and depicted international adoption to the

14 160<sup>th</sup> Session of the Federal Council of the Republic of Austria, Stenographic Minutes, 13 May 1960, A. Obermayr, p. 3761.

15 Besatzungsbräute, in: Neue Zeit, 25 May 1952, p. 2.

16 Das Private und das Öffentliche, by W. Benndorf, in Neue Zeit, 18 May 1952, p. 2. See also the following coverage of the conference: Salzburger Kampf gegen die “Fräuleins,” in: Neue Zeit, 22 April 1952, p. 4; Keine gesetzlichen Handhaben gegen Ami- “Bräute,” in: Neue Zeit, 23 April 1952, p. 2; Kampfansage an die “Fräuleins,” in: Neue Zeit, 24 April 1952, p. 5; Privates, Öffentliches, Besatzungsbräute, in: Neue Zeit, 7 June 1952, p. 3.

US as a solution for these children. The film was one of the “popular discourse milestones” (Condit-Shreshta, 2021, p. 20), and the name *Toxi* became widely used in German media when referring to the social circumstances of Black children (Fehrenbach, 2005, p. 136f, Brauerhoch, 2015). In contrast, the fate of the ~350–400 Black *occupation children* in Austria was decided exclusively by the welfare offices in the US zone, as well as by the provincial governments (Rohrbach, 2021, p. 45).

Apart from the question in the first post-war years of the extent to which the fathers of *occupation children* could be held financially responsible, few media reports assumed that the integration of children of Black GIs into Austrian post-war society would require significant effort. These media reports critically commented that these children had to fear racist discrimination and suffer “with their mothers from the consequences of cheap blanket judgements that mold them from the outset into people of inferior character.”<sup>17</sup> Media reports themselves also contained racist clichés and discriminatory terminology. The extent to which press reports deploring the ostracism of children of Black GIs encouraged precisely this behavior is illustrated in an article about the “coffee-brown Lizzi from Linz.”<sup>18</sup> Especially when they reached school age and, thus, stepped out of the family into the public sphere, special consideration was to be given to the children of Black GIs. Society would now face “a racial problem with a strong social slant.”<sup>19</sup> Recent research into children of Black GIs revealed that, until 1955, in Austria, as in Germany, international adoptions of both *white* and Black *occupation children* had been handled with the support of international aid programs and private initiatives, through referrals from Austrian and foreign nongovernmental organizations, and because of requests from foreign couples directly to youth welfare offices. Through adoption, welfare agencies relieved themselves of the cost of supporting these children and their mothers. The legal adoption market ended in the US administered parts of Vienna and in the province of Upper Austria, but not for Black children in the US administered province of Salzburg, a policy, as Rohrbach (2021, p. 38) points out, “that was both racist and directed against members of the lower classes. The mothers of the Black GI children often came from rural backgrounds, from working-class families, and/or from economically and socially disadvantaged segments of society.” Unlike *white occupation children*, these children were particularly stereotyped as different and “foreign.” Still, in 1965, the conscription of Black *occupation children* into the Austrian army was even worth a newspaper story.<sup>20</sup>

17 Sie wären viel lieber weiß, in: Kleine Zeitung. Supplement, 16 April 1950, p. 13.

18 Besatzungskinder—ein Weltproblem, by G. Srnckic, in: Arbeiter-Zeitung, 3 November 1955, p. 5.

19 Neger-Gettos sind keine Lösung, in: Die bunte Kleine, 30 April 1960, p. 1.

## Coming of age and adulthood

After completing their education, *occupation children* started their own families, went into gainful employment and were busy in the household and raising children. As we see from the interviews with *white* British *occupation children*, their social environment did not address their origins as nonmarital children of Allied soldiers, whether out of ignorance or out of a lack of interest or consideration. Brigitte Rupp’s mother, who provided all the information she knew about the British officer, was an exception, while silence about the mothers’ relations with Allied soldiers persisted in most other families of the British *occupation children* interviewed. “It was always like a kind of wall. I could not find out anything,”<sup>21</sup> a British *occupation child* in Austria reported on the family’s silence about her father. “It was always just bits and pieces. I had to find out a lot of things myself,”<sup>22</sup> said another about the fragmentary knowledge of his birth as the child of a British soldier and an Austrian woman.

A taboo prevailed in their social and family environment, but the adult *occupation children* were, unlike in the post-war years, no longer seen as a financial burden for the public. In 1970, member of the National Council Hans Kerstnig pointed out, quite to the contrary, that the financial burden for *occupation children* themselves due to the lack of alimony payments from their birth fathers.<sup>23</sup> In the media, the adult *occupation children* were mentioned in reports that were not about the origin of their fathers, but which referred to the latter briefly, as in the case of Jack Unterweger, who was the focus of public interest from the late 1980s onward and whose origins as the son of a GI were discussed in passing. A report published in connection with the book launch of his autobiography said, “Someone who is born as an *occupation child*, raised by foster parents and in homes, grows up with criminal offenses and is sentenced to life in prison as a 24-year-old, what can a person like that do with his life? Jack Unterweger (convicted of murder and robbery) gives an answer to this question—a lot.”<sup>24</sup> The biography of the best-known Austrian serial killer of the Second Republic began with his birth as the nonmarital son of an Austrian woman and a GI. Following a decision of the welfare agency, he grew up for 6 years in the care of his grandfather.<sup>25</sup>

20 Farbige Schützen, in: Kleine Zeitung, 14 December 1965, p. 2.

21 BIK, interview with Leonore O., conducted by L. Gruber, 19 February 2013, transcript, p. 5.

22 BIK, interview with Josef N., conducted by L. Schretter, 28 November 2017, transcript, p. 15.

23 16<sup>th</sup> Session of the National Council of the Republic of Austria, Stenographic Minutes, H. Kerstnig, 29 and 30 October 1970, p. 947.

24 Lebenssinn, in: Neue Zeit, 8 November 1988, p. 31.

25 Spuren in die Kindheit, by B. Melichar, in: Kleine Zeitung, 11 April 1994, p. 9.

As far as press reports can be surveyed, only few *occupation children* in Austria received extensive and prolonged media attention in early adulthood, but not because of their origins as the offspring of Allied soldiers. Best-known in Austria was Helmut Köglberger. Raised by his grandmother and aunt in Upper Austria as the son of a Black GI and an Austrian woman, he began a career as a professional soccer player in 1962. Starting in 1965, Köglberger played on the Austrian national soccer team and wore the captain's armband (Wahl et al., 2016, p. 159). In his retirement, Köglberger, who had repeatedly been the target of racist sentiments in the media and on the soccer field during his active career, received recognition for his athletic achievements. In an interview, he reported not knowing his father's name or picture.<sup>26</sup> When Köglberger passed away in 2018, obituaries were equally devoted to his career as a soccer player, his involvement with a soccer academy in Kenya, and his biography as a son of an Allied soldier.<sup>27</sup> As acceptance of *occupation children* grew in the years leading up to his death, Köglberger collaborated closely with researchers and contributed to network-building: "Köglberger was the most visible among them, and a role model for many of our other interviewees. He was the one who had made it."<sup>28</sup>

More generally, although politics and society did not broadly discuss *occupation children* more than two decades after the end of the war, against the backdrop of global political developments, an interested Austrian public knew of CBOW who were born in other regions. Mention was made of the "American occupation children" in South Korea [...] who would be called names such as "Trigge" (polluted), "Yank", or "Eyenokko" ("round-eyed").<sup>29</sup> The Austrian *Arbeiter-Zeitung* had already given an article from November 1955 the title, "Occupation Children—A Global Problem," explaining that, "Wherever foreign soldiers—as allies or as conquerors—establish relations with the population of a country, illegitimate children are born. It was so in the time of the Roman legions, and it is not likely to change for a long time."<sup>30</sup> However, as can be seen from the below example from an Austrian newspaper, the focus may have remained on Germany rather than Austria when comparing the experiences of *occupation children* with CBOW internationally. Referring to children of US fathers and Vietnamese mothers born during the Vietnam War, who in the following decades were marginalized

likewise in Vietnam and in the US and denied a national identity (Thomas, 2021), an Austrian daily newspaper reported in 1967 that "no real 'occupation child problem' existed there yet—as it did, for example, in the early postwar years in Germany. Most Vietnamese families are even crazy about children—illegitimate children are not a disgrace."<sup>31</sup>

From the 1990s, at the earliest, *occupation children* as an exceptional group among the post-war generation became of interest to the Austrian public at large. Since the mid-1980s, an increasingly critical approach to Austria's Nazi past may have also changed perspectives on the Austrian post-war period, on the role of the Allied troops stationed in Austria until 1955 as both *liberators* from Nazi terror and *occupiers*, and thus, on *occupation children*.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, tolerance toward nonmarital children grew, who increasingly became the rule rather than the exception. Until the 1970s, it had been common in Austria to distinguish between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" children, and disparaging terms such as "Bastard" or "Bankert" (the child conceived on the maidservant's bunk, not in the marital bed of the head of the house) have been considered contemptuous and inappropriate since the last quarter of the 20th century (Kytir and Münz, 1986). As society opened toward nonmarital children, "patchwork" families, and single parents, the self-confidence of *occupation children* may also have strengthened. Interviewed British *occupation children* reported having asked unpleasant questions about their "roots" within their families. Now, they sought to obtain information openly, rather than secretly, about the relationship between their biological parents and the identities of their unknown fathers. The legal situation reflected society's openness to nonmarital children; in Austria, the 1989 Child and Family Law Amendment Act meant the end of legal official guardianship. From then on, custody of a nonmarital child was, with few exceptions, the sole responsibility of the mother.

26 Auf der Suche nach dem Schatten. Interview mit Helmut Köglberger, by U. Kastler, in: Salzburger Nachrichten. Magazin, 9 May 2015, p. 4.

27 Besatzungskind, Teamkapitän, Mensch, by P. Bauer, in Der Standard, 24 September 2018, Besatzungskinder: Überlebenskünstler und Gezeichnete, by A. Grancy, in Die Presse, 28 September 2018.

28 Es ist steil bergauf gegangen, by P. Rohrbach, in ballesterer, 21 August 2018.

29 "Rundaugen" haben es schwer, by E. Adams, in: Kleine Zeitung, 7 August 1941, p. 32.

30 Besatzungskinder—ein Weltproblem, by G. Srncik: in: Arbeiter-Zeitung, 3 November 1955, p. 5.

31 US-Besatzungskinder nun in Vietnam, by D. Southerland, in: Neue Zeit, 23 August 1967, p. 10.

32 The abandonment of the so-called victim thesis, a widespread pattern of argumentation after the war that caused the collective memory to suppress complicity in the crimes of the Nazis, and according to which the state of Austria had been the first victim of Nazi aggression policy followed the Waldheim Affair in 1986. Kurt Waldheim (1918–2007) was Austria's Foreign Minister from 1968 to 1970, Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1972 to 1981, and Federal President of Austria from 1986 to 1992. After Waldheim ran for the office of Austrian president for the second time in 1986, conflicting and hesitant information about his role as an officer in the *Wehrmacht* during the Second World War triggered national and international criticism. As president-elect, the US placed him on the "watch list", a list of people who are not citizens of the US and whose entry is undesirable. In Austria, the "Waldheim Affair" led to a more intensive examination of the involvement of Austrians in Nazi crimes and how Austria dealt with the Nazi era.

When Brigitte Rupp wrote and published her letter to her father in 1995, she hoped for reactions from politics, academia, and other *occupation children*. The motivation for the letter was “a political awareness of how much history is concealed, covered up, falsely conveyed,” as well as an attempt to counter the cliché of *occupation brides*. Added to this was anger at her father and the desire to find and get to know him. “It was everything all together.”<sup>33</sup>

Rupp had already taken the first steps of establishing contact with her father as a teenager when she called him in Great Britain, but he denied his paternity in this telephone call. When she was in her mid-twenties, she tried unsuccessfully to contact him. Research through the British Army and the National Archives also came to nothing. In retrospect, Rupp believes that she always started looking again when there were caesuras in her own biography, such as the divorce from her first husband. Upon publishing the letter in 1995, she hoped-for reactions failed to materialize, despite a now generally more critical approach to Austria’s war and post-war memory. Rupp remembers receiving hardly any answers from other *occupation children* or from representatives of politics and academia. Internationally, the letter was also met with little interest. Rupp approached British newspapers, such as the Guardian, the Independent, and the Daily Harold, to publish the letter and assist in the search for the father, but to no avail. Only in 2011, when a feature on *occupation children* aired on a popular Austrian TV news magazine, she started to search again and was able, with the support of a historical archive, to find out that her father had died in 2007, and she managed to establish contact with her half-siblings in New Zealand and Great Britain.<sup>34</sup>

Rupp was one of the first *occupation children* in Austria to appear to the public. The publication of the letter to her unknown father in 1995 can be seen as a form of empowerment, i.e., an expression of “the capacity of individuals, groups, and/or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives” (Adams, 2008, p. 17). Years later, after her retirement, Rupp, together with researchers, organized a public reading of autobiographical texts by *occupation children* under the title “Enough Silence” and, thus, initiated networking.<sup>35</sup>

33 BIK, Brigitte Rupp, interview on 21 June 2016, conducted by L. Schretter, transcript, p. 15.

34 Nach 30 Jahren. Grazerin forschte Schwester aus, in: Heute.at, 13 January 2013, n.p.

35 The lecture “Genug geschwiegen. Österreichische Besatzungskinder schreiben über ihre Geschichte” (Enough silence. Austrian children of the occupation write about their history) took place in co-organization and with the participation of Brigitte Rupp on 2 July 2014 in the Graz City Hall.

Challenges and opportunities in the integration of CBOW depend on personal developments and changing needs depending on the phase of life but are also intricately linked to changing values and morals in society, as well as to processes of collective coming to terms with past war, conflict, and post-conflict situations. In Austria, nonmarital birth was no longer seen as a “flaw” at the end of the 20th century. In addition, especially those generations who had not lived through the war and post-war period re-evaluated the years 1945 to 1955 from a critical distance. Public interest in *occupation children* continues unabated; when newspaper articles, radio reports, and press releases appeared more frequently in the recent past, these were partly based on academic studies and conferences that examined the topic from the perspectives of contemporary history, psychology, and cultural studies. TV documentaries and accompanying reporting, as well as feature films such as *Kleine Große Stimme*, which deals with the offspring of Black GIs in the style of a 1950s *Heimat* film and was first broadcast in 2015, focus on the discrimination and ostracism suffered by *occupation children*.<sup>36</sup>

## Toward a sense of belonging

More than 75 years after the end of the war, *occupation children* in Austria articulate themselves in public forums. Three factors determined the process from taboo to recognition: the efforts of *occupation children* to make their life stories heard, the academic study of their living and socialization conditions, and the establishment of networks. Media coverage has been both the motor and the result of the initiatives of individual *occupation children*, researchers, and networks.

*Occupation children* report growing up believing that there were no descendants of Allied soldiers other than themselves; of the 17 British *occupation children* interviewed, almost half reported not knowing any others until adulthood. Richard S. recalls, “I never heard or never learned that any other child also had a British occupation soldier as a father. That was unique to me.”<sup>37</sup> Maria S. also did not know that “there were so many. I thought to myself, I am completely alone in having had this happen to me.”<sup>38</sup> Maria S.’s statement illustrates the feeling of having been alone with this “fate.” The situation was different in places where there had been a greater number of Allied soldiers for a lengthy period, and the birth of an *occupation child* was, therefore, not an exception. Hermann B. reported that, at school, “we were always a bit excluded. We did not really notice that as

36 Kleine Grosse Stimme, by Murnberger, W., Script: Henning R., Mona Film, and Tivoli Film (ORF, ARD). Vienna, 2015.

37 BIK, Richard S., interview on 31 January 2018, conducted by L. Schretter, transcript, p. 3.

38 BIK, Maria S., interview on 29 November 2016, conducted by L. Schretter, transcript, p. 20.



children. It was not so bad because I was not the only one with a father from over there.”<sup>39</sup>

These interviews also suggest that *occupation children* only began to engage more intensively with their memories of childhood and youth in advanced adulthood; the looming limits of their lifetimes encouraged them to confront the problematic parts of their biography in a new way, and to participate in research studies. This is also true for *occupation children* fathered by Soviet (Stelzl-Marx, 2015b) and French soldiers (Huber, 2015, p. 374–378) and GIs (Bauer, 2015), as well as for CBOW who were born in other contexts during and after the Second World War. As an example, consider the children conceived by German soldiers in Denmark. Due to the silence about their origins, both in private and in public life, many of these children grew up with identity problems and vague feelings of guilt, which affected their psychological well-being. In adulthood, the feeling of having certainty about one’s origins after years of secrecy became stronger, which eventually led to the founding of the *Danske KrigsBørns Forening*, the Danish War Child Association, in 1996 (Øland, 2005). The British *occupation child* Leonore O. sees the reflection on childhood like the search for a father as rooted in her advanced age: “Now everyone has finished their job or retired. Now you have time again. It is like this: when you get older, you regress. Now we are all in a regression phase.”<sup>40</sup> In addition, both mothers and fathers of the *occupation children* are at a very advanced age or have already died. There are no more opportunities to clarify the open questions of one’s own biography in conversations with the parents or older relatives. Since there are no state institutions for the specific concerns of the *occupation children* on an institutional level either in Austria or in Germany, the only option usually left is to seek support on one’s own initiative or by means of networks.

Autobiographical texts published by *occupation children* in the recent past (Lechhab, 2005; Dupuis, 2015; Schwarzkopf and Mader, 2016) are signs of the ongoing popularization of *occupation children’s* biographies and emblematic of the popularity of the topic. So far, texts have been self-published, published by small publishing houses, or included in anthologies (Baur-Timmerbrink, 2015; Behlau, 2015; Satjukow and Stelzl-Marx, 2015, p. 411–493). Like *Kriegskinder* (war children),<sup>41</sup> the

39 BIK, Hermann B., interview on 30 January 2018, conducted by L. Schretter, transcript, p. 3.

40 BIK, Leonore O., interview on 18 November 2016, conducted by L. Schretter, transcript, p. 21.

41 The term *Kriegskinder* (war children), sometimes also *Trümmerkinder* (rubble children) in connection with the Second World War, refers in Austria and Germany to all persons who experienced the war and its consequences as children, and includes, depending on the definition, the birth cohorts from the late 1920s to 1945 or beyond. (Seegers and Reulecke, 2009). *Kriegsenkel* (war grandchildren) refers to their children. Sabine Bode refers to the cohorts born between 1946 and 1960 as *Nachkriegskinder* (post-war children) (Bode, 2004, 2006, 2009, 2011). In contrast to the term *Kriegskinder*, the term *Besatzungskinder*

self-reflective and publicized examination of life stories indicates not only a “new” interest in this aspect of contemporary history, but also a need to reflect on their childhood. “I could not ask anyone, not my ‘parents’, aunt, grandma. Everyone was silent. So, I did not ask any more either. For me, nevertheless, the question remained as a driving force: did my life arise from the love between my mother and my father or was it only blows against my mother that gave me life? Or how were things really?” (Habura, 2015, p. 473), wrote the son of a British soldier in Germany about his struggle with the open questions about the relationship between his parents.

Research and the media have a vital role to play in raising public awareness about *occupation children*. At the same time, research studies have given reason to deal with aspects of family histories that had been kept secret. As a case in point, Helen W. reports that she felt motivated by an article in an Austrian news magazine to deal with the experiences of her childhood and youth and, with support from researchers, to devote herself to the search for her British father.<sup>42</sup>

After a study on the academic handling of “mixed-race” children in Germany after 1945 (Campt and Grosse, 1994), at the turn of the millennium, Bauer (1998b) was the first in Austria to deal with the narratives of US *occupation children* in her study “Welcome Ami Go Home.” In 2004, against the backdrop of the upcoming 60th anniversary of the end of the war, Austrian historian Renate Huber arranged contact between the Austrian national public service broadcaster and a French *occupation child* who traveled to Morocco to meet family members on her father’s side; “what she had longed for so long, namely, an entirely reconciled view of her own history” (Huber, 2015, p. 376). The five-part documentary *Die Alliierten in Österreich* [The Allies in Austria] followed, which also referred to *occupation children*, produced in 2005. Their childhood experiences continued to be of scholarly and public interest, regardless of whether, in retrospect, they described the conditions in which they grew up as sheltered, precarious, or “normal.” “When one understands that one’s own life story is not infrequently given another reading from a systemic perspective, this brings relief. This process also has to do with making things visible. Discourses shift, are adapted to changing circumstances, allow for new interpretations” (Huber, 2015, p. 378).

Researchers and the public alike produce and reproduce the discourse on *occupation children*. In contrast to the

(*occupation children*) has come to refer to people who were fathered by Allied soldiers and women from the occupation zones after the war. At the same time, the term *Wehrmachtskinder* (Wehrmacht children) has become established for those children born during the war in European territories occupied by German troops who had a “local” woman as their mother and a member of the occupying forces as their father (Drolshagen, 2005; Kleinau and Mochmann, 2015).

42 BIK, Helen W., interview on 12 May 2018, conducted by L. Schretter. Post-interview minutes.

contemporary discourse in the post-war years, studies since the 1990s have addressed the consequences of discrimination and stigmatization of *occupation children*, as well as their search for their fathers; studies on children of Black GIs notably dealt with the academic and public handling of these children in the post-war period. Of relevance for the discourse in Austria was a conference in 2012, at which not only was the state of research on *occupation children* in Germany and Austria at that time presented, but *occupation children* themselves also had their say at the conference and in the subsequent publication (Satjukow and Stelzl-Marx, 2015).<sup>43</sup> It is also worth mentioning a questionnaire study on the psychosocial conditions, experiences of prejudice, and identity development with over 100 participants in Austria, which represented the first empirical studies on the psychosocial consequences of growing up as an *occupation child* and for which participation was called for *via* the media (on the research model and the predecessor study in Germany see Glaesmer et al., 2012). Particularly relevant to the Austrian discourse of the recent past was the exhibition *SchwarzÖsterreich. Die Kinder afroamerikanischer Besatzungssoldaten* (Black Austria: The Children of African American Occupation Soldiers), which members of the research project “Lost in Administration” on children of Black GIs presented in Vienna in 2016. The exhibition attracted widespread media coverage, not least due to the cooperation with the magazine “Fresh—Black Austrian Lifestyle,” which linked the history of the first Black generation of the post-war period with that of the current Black population in Austria (Wahl et al., 2016).

The interest in *occupation children* can have a positive effect in individual terms, as they receive, sometimes unexpectedly, attention and recognition in their social and family environment. In addition to the scholarly exploration of their life stories, it is of particular concern to them that their voices are heard, and their stories are inscribed into collective memory. However, there can also be disadvantages when *occupation children* see their family and life stories misrepresented, not only by academia but also by the media or teachers who are looking for “authentic” voices for their lessons on post-war history. Brigitte Rupp recalls being visited unannounced by a school class in the inn which she ran, and being asked to talk about her childhood after she had addressed the media with her life story.<sup>44</sup> Some *occupation children*, like Brigitte Rupp, as mentioned, nevertheless or precisely because of this, organize talks on their own initiative about their biography and its historical context; others do not feel the need

to get in touch with others or to tell their life story in public or semipublic spaces.

In parallel to academic conferences and studies, networks of *occupation children* have emerged since the end of the 1990s, often in the context of mutual support services, to search for their fathers, to exchange information about their living conditions in childhood, or both. These networks are a platform to reflect upon emotions and attitudes toward one’s own life story. Network meetings in the context of conferences are likely to have contributed to a sense of togetherness as well as a sense of belonging. This contrasts with the late 1940s to 1960s, when these children were seen as an outgroup from an implied majority society (Stelzl-Marx, 2016). More general, studies on CBOW can sometimes contribute to empowerment, as researchers in the research network “Children Born of War—Past Present Future” emphasized recently (Glaesmer et al., 2021, p. 8).

First networks of *occupation children* were founded when they were in advanced adulthood. One prerequisite for this was that they became aware that information about unknown aspects of their own family histories would become increasingly difficult to obtain as time went on and without mutual support. On a macro-societal level, the increasingly critical and reflective approach to the war and post-war period and the more open handling of nonmarital children also strengthened the self-confidence of *occupation children*. Networks in both Austria and Germany include the *Distelblüten* association and the *Russenkinder* network for Soviet *occupation children*, the *Cœurs sans Frontières/Herzen ohne Grenzen* network, in which also children of *Wehrmacht* soldiers in France and children of French prisoners of war, forced laborers, and soldiers are active, and the online platform “GI Trace,” which supports in the search for the US and sometimes also British fathers. Ute Baur-Timmerbrink (2015, p. 24), who has been volunteering for “GI Trace” since 2003, reported that, “Every search is a new balancing act between hope and disappointment. Often, wounds are reopened that time has patched up.” In addition to the informal *Wurzelkinder* roundtable meeting for Soviet *occupation children* in Austria, initiated by the *occupation child* Reinhard Heninger in 2008 (Stelzl-Marx, 2015a, p. 134), and the “Moroccan Association in German-speaking Countries” based in Feldkirch, which became a contact address for the offspring of Moroccan soldiers in Austria from 1999 onward (Lechhab, 2009, p. 124), today, the association *Abgängig-Vermisst* also provides support in the search for former Allied soldiers. To date, a network for British *occupation children* does not exist either in Germany or in Austria.

One consequence of networking is its influence on individual memories and narratives. The life-story narratives collected for academic studies are not spontaneous and uninfluenced reports of individual experiences. As a case in point, the next statement illustrates how networking and mutual exchange influences the evaluation of one’s own past. One *occupation child* remembers their first encounter with others as

<sup>43</sup> The same year, Satjukow and Gries (2015) published the first monograph on the topic in Germany. A year later, Kleinau and Mochmann (2016) published an anthology which, in addition to *Wehrmacht* children, contained several contributions on *occupation children*.

<sup>44</sup> BIK, Brigitte Rupp, interview on 21 June 2016, conducted by L. Schretter, transcript, p. 13f.

follows: “I was so horrified by what the others told me that I said, ‘I think I’m in the wrong place here.’ Because I only fared well.”<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, the attention received from academia, the public, and the press stimulates discussions on how *occupation children* see themselves. This is exemplified by the discussion of how the offspring of Allied soldiers and Austrian women are referred to, a fundamental issue for dealing with the topic.

When and in what context the term *occupation children* was first used for children resulting from sexual contacts between Austrian or German women and members of the Allied forces between 1945 and 1955 is unclear, but it was passed down from as early as the post-war period.<sup>46</sup> The very term makes it clear that, although these children were Austrian or German citizens, they were not considered part of society, but defined by the national origin of their fathers. Today, descendants of Allied soldiers identify with the term and use it as an empowering self-definition, such as Ofner (2015), who entitled an autobiographical text “I am a British Occupation Child”. Ute Baur-Timmerbrink (2015) gave her collection of life stories the title “We Occupation Children.” Others strictly reject the designation. Dupuis (2015), p. 83 spoke of herself as *Befreiungskind* (liberation child) who was born following a love affair between her Austrian mother and a Soviet soldier: “I would rather use the term ‘liberation children’. However, many people do not want to hear of it, and ‘occupation children’ has become naturalized.” The preference for the designation *liberation children*, articulated with media attention not least in a joint appearance by Dupuis and three other daughters of Soviet soldiers in an Austrian TV documentary, reflects an effort to interpret one’s origins as the child of an Allied soldier in a positive light vis-à-vis oneself, one’s social and family environment, and the public. This juxtaposition of *liberation child/occupation child* is also based on the question of whether the Allied powers of the Soviet Union, US, Great Britain, and France were liberators, occupiers, or both. Thus, the term *occupation children* may be common within academia but does not necessarily reflect individual life experiences, self-definitions, or social and familial assessments of a historical era.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

*Occupation children* were for a long time excluded from the collective memory of Austria’s Second Republic. In the

45 BIK, Leonore O., interview on 18 November 2016, conducted by L. Schretter, transcript, p. 28.

46 Die Besatzungskinder, in: Neue Zeit, 14 November 1953, p. 2.

47 Besatzungskinder—die lange Suche nach den eigenen Wurzeln, by C. Feurstein, in Thema ORF2, 26 March 2018. For Germany, the publication “Children of Liberation” about children of Black GIs and German women is an example of those who distance themselves from the term *occupation children* (Kraft, 2020).

period after the Second World War, *occupation children* were considered a financial burden for the public. Since members of the Allied armed forces were not subject to Austrian jurisdiction, welfare agencies had to provide financial support when single mothers were unable to care for their children. In their social and family environment, some *occupation children* experienced exclusion; however, due to racist prejudices, children of Black GIs were discriminated against more than *white occupation children*. Only since the 1990s has more attention been paid to *occupation children* in academia and the media; a critical examination of Austria’s National Socialist past could have changed the view of the Austrian post-war period and of *occupation children*. Furthermore, the opening of society toward nonmarital children, mixed families, and changed family structures might have strengthened the self-confidence of *occupation children*. While social and family differences conditioned divergent biographies until late adulthood, they began to deal more intensively with their memories of childhood and youth on the micro-individual level, not least because their parents were of advanced age and the possibilities to answer open questions about family history dwindled. These developments led to the founding of networks. In the meantime, several *occupation children* participate equally in research, exhibitions, and events on the topic; not least through this, they influence whether and to what extent they have a share in the collective memory of the post-war period.

## Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

## Ethics statement

The study involving human participants was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committees of Graz University (GZ 39/56/63 ex 2015/16). The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

## Author contributions

LS and BS-M contributed to conception and design of the study. LS wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Both authors contributed to manuscript revision, read, and approved the submitted version.

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## Conflict of interest

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