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Oskars Gruziņš

Evaluating the Stigma of Children Born of War in Latvia and Its Challenges*

Key words: Children Born of War (CBOW), stigma, family memory, collective memory,totalitarianism

Children Born of War (CBOW) is a phenomenon of war, and also an academic field of study,which spans geographical as well as historical contexts (Lee 2017, 11). In the most straightforward definition of the term, such individuals have "one parent that was part of an army or peace keeping force and the other parent a local citizen" (Grieg 2001, 6). Oftentimes such CBOW are socially and, at times, institutionally stigmatized for their origins. Such stigmas often arise from their racial or ethnic origins, their mothers' 'loose morals' and/or, significantly, from having been born of an 'enemy' soldier and a 'collaborator' (Lee 2017, 6; 69).

Erving Goffman defines stigma as "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance" (Goffman 1990, 11). Individuals who experience stigma, Goffman explains, possess "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" from the viewpoint of the individual or group doing the stigmatization (Goffman 1990, 13). That is, a stigma is a "special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype," Goffman writes (Goffman 1990, 14). Therefore, stigmatized attributes carry a stereotype that transgresses the collective norms of society in such a way that, when exposed, they entail the social discrimination of 'discredited' individuals (Goffman 1990, 14–15). Thus, due to their 'discrediting' attributes, across contexts and conflicts, CBOW who experience stigma are often singled out and targeted by various forms of discrimination.

In post-war Western Europe studies show that CBOW were socially and, in some cases, institutionally stigmatized.[1] They indicate that often 'Third

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[1] While all European WWII CBOW studies indicate some level of social stigmatization, not all nations practiced institutional stigmatization. For example, while T.R. CBOW experienced social stigma in France, no adverse government policy has been noted

Reich' (T.R.), and even 'Soviet' (U.S.S.R.), CBOW[2] have lasting psychological, psychosomatic, and physical problems as a result of their experiences (see Ericsson 2011, 212; Ericsson & Ellingsen 2006, 105–106; Lee 2017, 64; Stelzl-Marx 2011, 252). As a case-study of the larger phenomenon of WWII CBOW in Latvia, this article will explore some major challenges to establishing the contemporary social sentiments regarding such children in Soviet-occupied Latvia, to confirming or denying the existence of stigma. In doing so, this article will first discuss what existing studies show regarding WWII CBOW childhood experiences of social discrimination. Then, utilizing the semi-structured, biographical, oral-history testimonies of 38 Latvian CBOW subjects, 15 U.S.S.R. CBOW and 23 T.R. CBOW,[3] this article will illustrate some challenges to verifying if such individuals faced childhood stigma in Soviet-occupied Latvia.

World War II CBOW in Europe

Before the discussion of childhood experiences with stigma, reflected in European WWII CBOW studies, it should be noted that the available information regarding such European CBOW is partial. The vast majority of WWII CBOW academic studies have focused on those 'children' fathered by Third Reich (TR) soldiers.[4] Furthermore, the great majority of these studies focus on CBOW living in the democratic, pluralist, countries of Europe, in nations, such as Denmark, Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, and France (see Warring 2006; Ericsson & Ellingsen 2006; Westerlund 2011; Diederichs 2006; Virgili 2006).

(Virgili 2006, 147). Conversely, in Norway and Denmark for example, studies show varying acts of institutionalized discrimination (Borgersrud 2006; Ericsson & Ellingsen 2006; Ericsson 2011; Øland 2006).

[2] For the purposes this broader research project, the terms "Third Reich" (TR) and "Soviet" (USSR) CBOW are used concerning children of not only German and Russian soldiers, but also those of other nationalities serving in those armed forces.

[3] These interviews collected from 2016 to 2019 make a part of a larger study of CBOW in Latvia, in average more than two hours in length and containing nearly 80 hours of material which is now stored in the archives of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (LOM).

[4] There have been only a few thorough studies of U.S.S.R. CBOW in Austria and Germany (see Behlau 2015; Stelzl-Marx 2015; 2011) and some exploratory studies of U.S.S.R. prisoner of war (POW) CBOW in Finland (see Westerlund 2011; Westerlund 2011a; Uhlenius 2011) and Norway (see Soleim 2011).

In the former USSR, as in the former 'Eastern Bloc' of Europe, the author is not aware of any studies of U.S.S.R. CBOW. Moreover, to date, there have been no thorough studies of T.R. CBOW living in the Soviet Union (USSR); the studies conducted hitherto have been of an exploratory nature (see Stelzl-Marx 2017; Warring 2006a; Mühlhäuser 2017; 2014). In the USSR, as Stelzl-Marx (2017, 350) indicates, essential questions regarding these CBOW and their mothers remain unanswered.

Childhood discrimination

Western European studies show that CBOW who were 'outed' experienced varying forms of discrimination during their childhoods. They, like their mothers, in their local communities were often ostracized and alienated, treated as pariahs. They were frequently treated as invisible, Lee writes, "not talked about or talked to," in the "shadowlands" of society (Lee 2017, 89). In Norway, for example, studies show that neighboring parents may forbid their children to play with *tyskerunge* (German brats) and, at times, even teachers ignored them in schools (Ericsson & Ellingsen 2006, 96). Such acts of alienation, which often created the feeling of being an outcast, have been noted across WWII CBOW studies in Europe.[5] These and other studies of WWII CBOW, much like a questionnaire conducted on 100 T.R. CBOW in the Netherlands, show that many such children came to feel rejected by their local communities (Diederichs 2006, 160).

Yet, the stigma upon such children is much easier to recognize in how 'outed' WWII CBOW were frequently singled out for more direct acts of discrimination. Across the topic of study, testimonies of CBOW, associated with 'enemy' or not, often contain tales of being physically molested and verbally abused, of being singled out as not belonging to that community (Lee 2017, 89–91). Bullying with derogatory terms, usually perpetrated by other children, but often by adults and at times even teachers,[6] seems to be a

[5] For example, such alienation has been noted for T.R. CBOW in Finland (Uhlenius 2011, 157) and France (Picaper & Norz 2004; Virgili 2006, 147), as well as for U.S.S.R. CBOW in Germany and Austria (Stelzl-Marx 2011, 252), and for U.S.S.R. POW CBOW in Norway (Soleim 2011, 226; 223) and Finland (Uhlenius 2011, 155).

[6] In Finland, for example, Uhlenius informs that the teachers of T.R. CBOW "could signal to children that something was wrong with them by the way they acted such as pressing a child for his or her father's name" (Uhlenius 2011, 157). Furthermore, a comparative survey of Danish and Norwegian T.R. CBOW shows that "18.5% of the respondents in the Norwegian sample and only 7.7% of the Danish indicated that

pattern across WWII CBOW studies in Western Europe (Lee 2017, 65). Throughout Western Europe, in varying nations, the existence of neutral and insulting terms, the existence of "striking linguistic parallels" in the naming of WWII T.R. CBOW as a group, Drolshagen argues, "hints at a perceived need to define them as 'others,' as 'not belonging to us as nation and people'" (Drolshagen 2006, 240).

However, it should be stressed that not all 'outed' CBOW had the same experiences; that the experiences of individuals depended on a variety of factors. And, that these experiences differed from nation to nation, from community to community, from child to child. For example, while many of the U.S.S.R. CBOW in Germany and Austria described experiences of stigmatization and discrimination, "others emphasize their loving homes and the absence of any discrimination at school or in the local communities" (Lee 2017, 244). Moreover, a comparative study of Danish and Norwegian T.R. CBOW shows that CBOW in Norway "have been exposed to stigmatization and discrimination to a much larger extent when compared to Danish children in similar circumstances" (Øland & Mochmann 2011, 234) and it also displays varying experiences within those nations.[7]

Additionally, and critical for this study, while T.R. CBOW in the U.S.S.R. are understudied, there are indications that experiences with stigma varied within the vastness of that regime. While the exploratory work of Stelzl-Marx indicates that such children were mocked and discriminated against, exposed to various forms of social stigmatization and discrimination (Stelzl-Marx 2017, 349–350) and that the testimonies of such 'children,' in three documentaries of T.R. CBOW in the USSR, all include experiences of discrimination (Drolshagen 2006, 238), Stelzl-Marx also acknowledges that even 'enemy' fraternizers within the U.S.S.R. may have had differing and changing experi-

"Teachers looked down on me – got no help when mobbed" and 8% of the Norwegians and 1.9% of the Danes were "pointed out as a 'German kid' by the teachers" (Øland & Mochmann 2011, 234).

[7] Øland and Mochmann tell us that, of those surveyed for the study, "45.2% of the Norwegians indicate that they were called a 'German kid,' whereas this happened to only 13.4% of the Danish sample. Similarly, the Norwegian child of a German soldier was "physically mobbed by adults" four times as much (15.2%) and 'physically mobbed by other children and youth' three times as much (25.6%) as a Danish child (4.3% and 7.7% respectively). […] Norwegian children on the way to and from school were also exposed to mobbing to a larger extent than Danish children – 20.2% were 'often beaten up' compared to 5.3% in Denmark" (Øland & Mochmann 2011, 234).

ences with stigma (Stelzl-Marx 2017, 344); that such experiences may have varied in connection to that local community's experiences of the war. Furthermore, Kauppala's study of Finnish CBOW in Soviet Eastern Karelia can be cited, which shows that "the children reported that community attitudes to them were not hostile or scornful. [That] in the schools, the worst they suffered was to have some people call them Finns" (Kauppala 2011, 321). To date, it cannot be concluded if these experiences of social stigma varied so greatly due to the nationality of the father (as Kauppala's study was of Finnish CBOW in the USSR, not T.R. CBOW) or due to cultural, regional, or other factors, such as the immense difference of life under a totalitarian regime.[8] Nevertheless, these examplesdo indicate that social stigma may have varied across the USSR. Suggesting that, to understand the social stigma endured by a specific group of CBOW in the USSR, such as T.R. or U.S.S.R. CBOW in Latvia for example, it is essential to understand the collective norms and circumstances of those particular peoples.

Challenges to evaluating CBOW stigma in Latvia

While it is beyond the scope of this article to compare and contrast CBOW stigmas in Western Europe to those in the Soviet-occupied Latvia, or to fully envision the social sentiments faced by such CBOW in Latvia, this section is dedicated to some of the challenges faced to establishing the existence of social stigma in Latvia. This context should not only bring to light these challenges, but also indicate why an analysis of childhood experiences may not give a definitive answer to whether such CBOW were socially stigmatized in Latvia. Before addressing these local challenges, it should be noted that any attempt at evaluating stigma is likely to be exploratory at best. As discussed, evaluating CBOW stigma requires an understanding of that local community's contemporary collective norms, including the social perception of the 'enemy', and how they were transgressed by CBOW origins. Yet, as Lapinski and Rimal indicate, "because collective norms exist at the social level and because

[8] Kauppala writes that "the children of Finnish soldiers and their mothers managed astonishing well in the gloomy Stalin era Soviet Union when compared to what happened in other countries" (Kauppala 2011, 321). The cause of this high level of social acceptance, Kauppala theorizes, may be that the "tolerant atmosphere was the archaic, in some way even medieval, character of both Karelian and Russian popular culture in Eastern Karelia. This would seem to result in a collective, sometimes conscious and sometimes subconscious, understanding of these children as "children of love" and not as "children of enemy"" (Kauppala 2011, 321).

they are not explicitly codified, measuring them represents one of the primary challenges for communication scholars" (Lapinski & Rimal 2005, 129–130).

Furthermore, in Latvia, such an evaluation is faced with additional challenges. For one, a lack of public interest and that of public knowledge are very hard to gauge and differentiate. In the case of U.S.S.R. CBOW in Latvia, it can be said that all 15 subjects did not have their origins hidden; in other words, the origins of 100% of the U.S.S.R. CBOW were broadly known by their local communities. Yet, while some statistics that indicate the concealment of T.R. CBOW origins can be provided, it is much harder to quantify how many of these children were, in fact, successfully hidden from society. That is, while it can be calculated how many T.R. CBOW were misinformed about their origins, how many were instructed to lie by their caregivers, or how many families tried to hide CBOW origins from the state, it is much harder to say how many were, in fact, effective in these pursuits. Therefore, while it can be said that there are clear indications that the origins of ten T.R. CBOW subjects, or 43.4%, were known by their local communities during their childhoods, it is much more difficult to tell with certainty to whom and to what extent that information was known.

It can be said that eight out of the 23 T.R. CBOW subjects were misinformed, and that five encountered silence from their caregivers, regarding their origins. Yet, while 13 T.R. CBOW subjects, or 56.5%, were withheld truths regarding their paternity, hiding the facts of origins in the private sphere did not necessarily mean that the truths were not known by the public. In fact, the majority of these 13 T.R. CBOW subjects, as has also been observed in Western European studies,[9] report learning the truth of their origins from outside sources, often from their local communities or distant relatives. Furthermore, within this discussion of concealing origins, it should be noted that 56.5% of the T.R. CBOW subjects show very direct attempts made to conceal their identities from the Soviet state. Yet, again, it is much more difficult to quantify with certainty how many of these T.R. CBOW were, in fact, successfully hidden from that state.

It can be said that there are often many layers of silence and lies that criss-cross and tangle in a single testimony; that, who is privy to what information, even in the family, is not always clear. For example, in the group of ten T.R. CBOW who seem to have been known by their local communities,

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[9] For examples, see Stelzl-Marx's study of U.S.S.R. CBOW in Austria (Stelzl-Marx 2011, 253) or Uhlenius' study of T.R. CBOW in Finland (Uhlenius 2011, 155–157).

there are three individuals who had their origins hidden from the state, as well as two who were nonetheless met with silence on the subject at home. In other words, an evaluation of T.R. CBOW social stigma in Latvia is faced with a web of silence and/or lies regarding their origins; one that is hard to untangle and impossible to quantify.

As mentioned, many caregivers relied on lies and/or silence in the private sphere to keep the child from knowing, and therefore revealing, such 'dangerous truths.' As one T.R. CBOW subject recalls: "What could I have told [others], if I didn't know? What could I tell [them]? […] She [mother] said absolutely nothing. I, myself, had to figure it out" (LOM: 2300/3353e). Another T.R. CBOW, who was told his father was a local who had died during the war and nothing else, recalls: "That is all. If someone asks you something, then you must say that [the city of] Rēzekne was bombed and father died. The question is answered. Because those were crazy times, they were such times that even a ram could have broken its leg there" (LOM: 2300/3375e). Or, as one T.R. CBOW, who was falsely told that her father was her mother's first husband who had been arrested, charged as an 'enemy of the people', and sent to a GULAG, recalls "That [father] was a forbidden subject. He was deported and that was all. We had not been deported. At nights we sat there and waited, there were biscuits and a change of clothes to take with us. Tied up in a bundle. At night, they drove around and took people. We also sat and thought the same would happen to us" (LOM:2300/3352e).

As this last example also illustrates, the vast majority of CBOW subjects, including the U.S.S.R. CBOW, reflect an atmosphere of silence, secrecy, and fear in their private spheres. As 27 respondents, or 71% of all the CBOW subjects, reporting some form of Soviet state-led repressions,[10] including murders, targeted at their families, nearly all CBOW report knowing that personal details regarding the family, not only those related to their fathers, should not be discussed in public. Moreover, significantly, these testimonies also reflect a general, societal, silence regarding the past in society. As one U.S.S.R. CBOW subject recalls, "There were no instructions, but we [children] already knew that it wasn't allowed [to talk]. Grandmother also didn't allow much talk, also during the time of Stalin she didn't allow it. 'Hush, Hush!' That was how it was. There was fear" (LOM: 2300/3368e). Another U.S.S.R. CBOW recalls: "After the war you were not allowed to open your mouth.

[10] 66.6% of the USSR, and 73.9% of the TR, CBOW subjects mention family members falling victim to, or escaping from, Soviet state-orchestrated repressions.

What you think, that is not known. Otherwise, you will be immediately sent to Siberia. You were not allowed to say anything. When we spoke about the governments, [we spoke] null. That was all endured quietly, that which we thought. I remember the silence. Especially [among] the farmers, who had not been caught and sent to Siberia, when everyone around them had been deported" (LOM: 2300/3374e).

Such social silence regarding the recent past, coerced by the terror inflicted by the totalitarian state, seems to be characteristic of society during the Stalinist regime (see Figes 2007). It was an atmosphere where, as one T.R. CBOW recalls, "Basically we were raised so that there was no chatting around. In general, we were brought up in such a way that what happened in the family was not spoken about outside. That was the norm. Maybe we were raised so as not to trust anyone, anywhere. Because they, the adults, did not trust and that was the norm – that nothing was spoken about outside the family"(LOM: 2300/3363e). Therefore, testimonies in Latvia show that most T.R. CBOW families utilized this silence to conceal the truths of origin. That is, it can be said that even if some T.R. CBOW subjects do not express overt acts made to conceal the facts of origin in their local communities, such as lies in the public sphere, they most often than not reflect the use of silence on the topic. In fact, only one T.R. CBOW subject recalls being instructed by her mother on how to address the topic of her father (LOM: 2300/3288-3290).[11] Surprisingly, when T.R. CBOW knew or learned the facts of their origins, caregivers seemed to have relayed on the child to know how to treat the topic in a public setting. Thus, most of the T.R. CBOW subjects report that it was instinctually known not to speak of their fathers. As one T.R. subject reports, "I myself understood, that such things should not be spoken about" (LOM: 2300/3396e). Another stated, "I was sensible enough. Because that whole atmosphere was such that, you had to understand for yourself" (LOM: 2300/3366e). One subject, who was told the truth of her father when she was a teenager, explains: "No. That goes without saying. No one had to tell it. That is only allowed to remain between us. Between mother and daughter. Because such information could not be told to anyone in those times" (LOM: 2300/3391e).

By now, it should be clear that the study of WWII CBOW in Latvia, unlike the vast majority of previous CBOW studies in Europe, regards the life course of such children in a totalitarian state. It is a factor which seems

[11] She was told to respond that she does not know who he was and that he had died in the war (LOM: 2300/3288-3290).

essentially important when evaluating acts of discrimination and considering the existence of social stigma. That is, in Soviet-occupied Latvia, all social interactions, including stigmatization, were taking place in a social setting vastly different from the studies conducted in pluralist Europe. Social interactions were taking place in a nation that was, once again, occupied by a murderous totalitarian regime, and where populations were coerced into conforming to a singular, state-enforced, identity. Such experiences not only likely effected societal perceptions of the 'enemy,' something beyond the scope to this study, but also impacted how all mnemonic sharing, including stigmatization, took place. As one T.R. CBOW, who was known by her local community, recollects, "It cannot be said that I was branded [a CBOW], as also no one asked me [about my father]. No one ever asked me, I was never asked by anyone – where is your father or something like that. Nobody ever asked me that" (LOM: 2300/3390e). Another T.R. CBOW, who was likely not known by his local community, recalls: "They didn't know and, also, no one ever asked. If I can remember now, then I remember that no one asked me; neither about my father nor about anything. The war was over, everyone was happy to have survived" (LOM: 2300/3375e).

In summary, it is extremely difficult to gauge CBOW stigma in Soviet-occupied Latvia; to tell if a lack of discrimination is, in fact, due to a lack of public outrage,or due to a lack of public knowledge and/or the abundance of societal fear. Evaluating the topic of stigma in Soviet-occupied Latvia requires acknowledgment of the essentially different social world of a totalitarian state and its effects on mnemonic sharing. For example, while only four T.R. CBOW, and none of the U.S.S.R. CBOW, recall overt childhood social discrimination in relation to their fathers by their peers,[12] it must, nonetheless, be considered how totalitarianism impacted childhood social interactions. That is, consideration must be taken for the possibility that there may have existed a fear-induced suppression, an oppression, of such topics in society and, therefore, of CBOW discrimination in Soviet-occupied Latvia. Crucially, it must be acknowledged that, under these circumstances, a lack of discrimination may not necessarily indicate a lack of social stigma. Essentially, it can be said that, in Western Europe it may be easier to identify 'honest' social sentiments directed at WWII CBOW, because such communities were pluralist and, therefore, 'free to discriminate.'

[12] Two of these subjects recall being called a 'German,' and the other two also experienced physical harassment, by peers.

Source and literature

Museum of the Occupation of Latvia [Latvijas okupācijas muzejs (LOM)] Audiovisual material archives. CBOW interview collection (LOM 2300/3237–3239; 3250–3253; 3288–3290; 3350e; 3351e; 3352e; 3353e; 3354e; 3355e.; 3356e; 3357e; 3358e; 3359e; 3360e; 3361e; 3362e; 3363e; 3364e; 3365e; 3366e; 3368e; 3369e; 3370e; 3371e; 3372e; 3373e; 3374e; 3375e; 3376e; 3381e; 3387e; 3388e; 3389e; 3390e; 3391e; 3392e; 3394e; 3396e; 3405e; 3406e; 3407e). Interviews recorded by Oskars Gruziņš and Aivars Reinholds 2016–2019 in accordance with European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Sklodowska-Curie grant agreement No 642571.

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Oskars Gruziņš

Latvijas karā dzimušo bērnu stigmas izvērtējums un pētniecības izaicinājumi

Atslēgas vārdi: karā dzimušie bērni, stigma, ģimenes atmiņa, kolektīvā atmiņa, totalitārisms

Kopsavilkums

Rakstā aplūkota Latvijas karā dzimušo bērnu (*children born of war*; CBOW) stigmatizācijas pētniecības problemātika. Ar jēdzienu "karā dzimušie bērni" tiek apzīmēti tie bērni, kuru nākšanu pasaulē kontekstuāli nosaka karš un kuru viens vecāks ir ārvalstu militārpersona, bet otrs – vietējais iedzīvotājs. Rakstā atspoguļoti rezultāti, kas iegūti, veicot plašu pētījumu par Latvijas karā dzimušajiem bērniem, kuru piedzimšana saistīta ar Otro pasaules karu un kuru tēvs ir dienējis kādā no Trešā reiha militārajām vienībām vai Sarkanajā armijā un māte ir bijusi Latvijas iedzīvotāja. Pētījuma bāzi veido 38 mutvārdu vēstures intervijas, kas veiktas 2016.–2019. gadā visos Latvijas reģionos Marijas Sklodovskas-Kirī inovatīvajā mācību tīkla projektā "Karā dzimušie bērni – pagātne, tagadne un nākotne".

Daudzi pētījumi, kas īstenoti par nacistiskās Vācijas okupētajās teritorijās karā dzimušajiem bērniem, liecina, ka faktiski gandrīz visi šai sociālajai grupai piederīgie bērni un viņu mātes pēc Otrā pasaules kara pieredzēja stigmatizāciju. Latvijā veikto mutvārdu vēstures liecību analīze ļauj secināt, ka padomju Latvijā situācija pēc kara bija citādāka.

Būtisks faktors, kas varēja ietekmēt karā dzimušo bērnu stigmatizāciju padomju Latvijā, bija informācijas par karā dzimušo bērnu tēviem pieejamība. Daudzos gadījumos, it īpaši, ja tēvs piederēja Trešā reiha militārpersonām, tā tika prasmīgi slēpta. Mutvārdu vēstures interviju kvantitatīvā kontentanalīze rāda, ka 56,5% karā dzimušo bērniem, kuru tēvs bija saistīts ar nacistiskās Vācijas karaspēku, izcelsme tika slēpta, lai gan nereti informācija par viņu tēviem cirkulēja lokālajā publiskajā un privātajā telpā. Savukārt karā dzimušiem bērniem, kuru tēvs nāca no Padomju Savienības militārpersonu vidus, izcelsme netika noklusēta. Tomēr arī šajos gadījumos ģimenes un bērni nepiedzīvoja stigmatizāciju. Tādējādi var secināt, ka Latvijā stigmatizāciju un tās pakāpi ir grūti izvērtēt, jo tā netiek īstenota tiešā veidā, kā tas notika vairākās Rietumeiropas valstīs.

Mutvārdu vēstures liecību kvalitatīvā kontentanalīze rāda, ka lielā daļā interviju konstatējami vairāki noklusēšanas un melu slāņi. Nereti intervētais

cilvēks savā stāstījumā pats nonāk pretrunās, kas liecina, ka pat vienas ģimenes ietvaros eksistēja dažādas karā dzimušo bērnu izcelsmes interpretācijas. Pastāvēja dažādiem adresātiem un dažādās situācijas lietojami stāsti par šo bērnu tēviem un viņu attiecībām ar mātēm. Tādējādi var secināt, ka karā dzimušo bērnu tēmas pētniecība ļauj izzināt arī cilvēku izdzīvošanas un iespējami drošākas un labklājīgākas dzīves veidošanas daudzveidīgās prakses totalitārismā.