

Biography and Society



Photo: Andreas Faessler

**NEXT CONFERENCE: III ISA FORUM OF SOCIOLOGY
VIENNA, AUSTRIA, JULY 10-14, 2016**

BIOGRAPHY AND SOCIETY

RESEARCH COMMITTEE 38 OF THE ISA

NEWSLETTER/JULY 2015

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENCY

July 2015

Dear Colleagues,

It is not so long ago that some of us met at the very impressive and successful conference on 'Biographies of Belonging' at the VU Amsterdam in March this year in which our RC participated. Kathy Davis shares her thoughtful reflections on this conference in this Newsletter.

Now the ISA Forum Conference in Vienna 10 – 14 July 2016 is ahead of us and preparations have started already in January of this year. Meanwhile thirteen sessions were set up and we would like to draw your attention to the Call for Papers in this Newsletter! Please do share this Call for Papers also in your networks. You can find it as an extra pdf in our blog: <http://www.biographyandsociety.com/>

The call is open until 30 September 2015, and we very much look forward to your paper proposals! Please note that only abstracts submitted online can be considered for inclusion in the program. You can find updated information concerning the whole idea of the Congress, its program and useful instructions at the ISA-webpages <http://www.isa-sociology.org/forum-2016/> as well as of the local organization <http://isaforum2016.univie.ac.at/home/>.

We will keep you informed about how the program of our RC takes shape in the second Newsletter 2015. If you have any questions up until then, please do not hesitate to get in touch!

Meanwhile we wish all of you a productive and also relaxing summer/winter time!

Roswitha Breckner, Lena Inowlocki, Maria Pohn-Lauggas and Hermilio Santos

EDITORIAL

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to present the first RC 38 Newsletter of 2015.

We start by inviting contributions for the very interesting sessions proposed by RC 38 members for the 3rd ISA Forum of Sociology, which will take place in July 2016 in Vienna, Austria. Please remember that the abstracts must be submitted until September 30. Besides the RC 38 regular and joint sessions, we advertise the session "Biographies – Figurations – Discourses: The Dialectic of Individuals and Society in the (Empirical) Study of Individual and Collective Hi/stories", held by the RC 20 (Comparative Sociology), organized by Artur Bogner and Robert van Krieken.

In the section "Conferences and Courses", Kathy Davis presents her reflections on the symposium "Biographies of Belonging", held in Amsterdam in March 2015. In the symposium, organized by sociologists from the Free University (VU) with support of RC 38, a diversity of issues were discussed by participants from many European countries, as well as from South Africa and the United States. The section "Discussion" anticipates a methodological text by Henning Salling Olesen, member of the RC 38 Board, which will appear in The Routledge International Handbook on Narrative and Life History, to be published in 2016. In the following section we present new publications, books and chapters, most of whose authors are RC 38 members. In the section "Project Announcements", Hermilio Santos announces two projects that started early this year, one of them in collaboration with Gabriele Rosenthal exploring the social construction of three border zones of the large Brazilian borders, with the financial support by CNPq (Agency of Scientific Research of the Brazilian Ministry of Science and Technology) and PUCRS. The other project, coordinated also by Hermilio Santos and financed by CNPq, explores through biographical and visual narratives the experiences of women as authors of violent actions, mostly by female adolescents and young women that are in prisons.

Finally, I would like to invite all of you to send contributions for the next Newsletter until the end of October, since this media is a very important way to share relevant knowledge and information for all of us interested in Biography and Society!

All the best for summer and winter 2015 (depending on the part of the Globe where you will be spending the next months).

Kind regards,

Hermilio Santos

Membership fees

Please remember to pay your membership fee. To apply for membership or renew ISA and/or RC affiliation, please use the membership form online: <https://isa.enoah.com/Sign-In>

The membership fees by the RC38 for 4 years are (see ISA regulations):

Regular members	U\$ 40
Students and members from countries B and C	U\$ 20

If you have any questions concerning the membership please contact Maria Pohn-Lauggas for advice: maria.pohn-lauggas@univie.ac.at

The deadline for the next Newsletter is at the end of October 2015.

Please send us:

- ⇒ A short paper (3-7 pages) on a topic you are currently working on
- ⇒ A presentation of your current project
- ⇒ Some reflections on your experiences of teaching biographical approaches and methods
- ⇒ Reports or some notes about conferences you have attended
- ⇒ General reports about activities in the field of biographical research in your institution, university, country, continent
- ⇒ Interesting calls for papers for conferences, workshops, summer schools
- ⇒ New publications from you, also in your respective native language
- ⇒ Any other thought or information you would like to share.

Send your contribution directly to:

hermilio@pucrs.br

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CONFERENCES AND COURSES



RC 38 Biography & Society – Call for Abstracts

The Third ISA Forum will convene in Vienna, Austria, 10-14 July 2016 on the topic “The Futures We Want: Global Sociology and the Struggles for a Better World.” This is to encourage a forward-orientation in empirical, theoretical, and normative research to tackle the problems and opportunities that often cut across borders.

The program of RC 38 deals with cutting edge topics such as migration, transnationalism, violence and memory as well as with new directions in methodological approaches in the context of globalization.

Anyone interested in presenting a paper should submit an abstract on-line through a centralized website until September 30, 2015. Only abstracts submitted on-line will be considered in the selection process. For submitting an abstract follow this link: <https://isaconf.confex.com/isaconf/forum2016/cfp.cgi>

- Please choose a session for your abstract (max. 300 words)
- You can submit a total of two abstracts
- You cannot submit the same abstract to two different sessions.



Notification letters about inclusion into a session will be sent by 30 November 2015

- Session Organizers will handle all correspondence concerning the session.
- Your preferred kind of presentation (oral presentation, distributed paper, poster, or round table presentation) will be confirmed or possibly modified by the session organizers as soon as the registration check has been completed. Note: *Distributed papers* will be listed in the program and their abstracts will be included in the Abstracts Book, providing the authors pay a registration fee in time. If a participant does not show up, the first participant listed under distributed papers will be asked to present his/her paper.

Registration deadline for presenters is 1 April, 2016 24:00 GMT

- Confex matches registrations with accepted presenters and will send out last reminder to register. Presenters who have failed to register will be automatically deleted from the program. No extension of deadlines is possible.

Limited appearance in the Program

- Participants may be listed no more than twice in the Program. This includes all types of activities requiring physical presence: chair or co-chair, author or co-author (oral or poster presentation, distributed paper), roundtable presenter, panellist, critic, discussant.
- In addition, participants may be listed in the Program up to two more times as Program Coordinators and/or Session Organizers.
- A participant cannot present and chair in the same session.

See also www.isa-sociology.org/forum-2016/deadlines-and-rules-for-presenters.htm

Sessions of RC 38 Biography & Society

Joint Sessions

Visual Biographies in Social Network Communication

RC38 and WG03, hosted by RC38

Session organizers: Roswitha Breckner, University of Vienna, Austria, (roswitha.breckner@univie.ac.at), Kathy Davis, VU Amsterdam (k.e.davis@vu.nl), Ayelet Kohn, Hadassah Academic College, Jerusalem, Israel, ayeletkohn@gmail.com

Visual communication has increasingly become the way people create and exchange images of themselves in so-called social networks. Bodily appearance plays an essential role in these processes, combined with texts that allow individuals new forms of expression. While these developments have been described and analysed in terms of their technologies and shifts within media studies, it is still an open question if and in what way they create new patterns and forms of biographies and images of the self. How does the visual self-presentation interact with narratives and discourses? How is the tension managed between the fluid communication in which snapshot photos are exchanged on a daily basis and their fixation in a chronology, through which visual biographies emerge in ways which were not necessarily intended by their actors? In other words, how does visual communication in Social Networks, hybrids of old and new media and digital storytelling interact with biographical processes?

For this session we invite papers, which deal theoretically and empirically with the biographical implications of visual communication in Social Networks and their inter-relations with old and new media.

Migrant Women's Biographies within the Economic Crisis: Transnationalism as a Coping Strategy Reconsidered

RC38 and RC32, hosted by RC32

Session organizers: Ursula Apitzsch, University of Frankfurt am Main, Germany, apitzsch@soz.uni-frankfurt.de and Francesca Alice Vianello, University of Padua, Italy, francescaalice.vianello@unipd.it

This panel starts from the premises that feminization as well as irregularization of migration during the process of globalization and especially during the economic crisis led to new forms of transnational migrant movements and practices. It invites to discuss the nature of emerging (1) migrant networks especially among women and (2) female migratory strategies, understanding them as the consequences and outcomes of counter-hegemonic activities against economic marginalization, on one hand, and the struggle against the loss of family ties, citizenship rights and the outcomes of trafficking processes, violence and wars/conflicts, on the other hand. The questions are: whether there exist new forms of women migrants' participation in the civil societies in various countries in the form of transnational spaces; and how the previous forms are changing. We define transnational spaces as the topographies of typical biographical account of women migrants, constituted and being continuously reconstructed within the social phenomenon of transnational border crossing activities.

Biography and Mental Health

RC49 and RC38, hosted by RC49

Session Organizers: Silvia Krumm, University of Ulm, Germany, silvia.krumm@uni-ulm.de and Gabriele Rosenthal, University of Goettingen, Germany, G.Rosenthal@gmx.de

Biographical pathways and events can contribute to mental health and illness. On the one hand, adverse and stressful biographical experiences like violence, abuse, oppression or (illegalized or forced) migration play an important role in the development and course of mental illness. On the other hand, salutogenetic approaches focus on biographical coping or biographical work with such adverse experiences. From a methodological perspective, biographical narratives provide insight into subjective understanding and explanations of the role of life experiences and specific patterns of biographical work for mental health/illness in interrelation with the societal constellations (as well as on specific biographical coping mechanism). We are looking forward to receive papers dealing with the diverse interrelations between biographic experiences and events and mental health / mental illness.

Panel Session – invited speakers, abstract submission not possible

New Directions in Biographical Research

Session organizers: Kathy Davis, VU Amsterdam, Netherlands (k.e.davis@vu.nl), Roswitha Breckner, University of Vienna, Austria (roswitha.breckner@univie.ac.at)

In the last twenty years, biographical research has not only become an established field within social scientific inquiry, but it has also begun to expand its scope to include innovative approaches to biographical analysis. These innovations have opened up new areas of inquiry, produced interventions in traditional methodologies, and initiated new controversies and debates. For example, biographical analysis has moved beyond disciplinary borders to explore research perspectives drawn from ethnographical research, art research, and discourse analysis, just to name a few. The increasing transnationalisation of people's biographies has compelled biographical researchers to reflect on how constructions of 'normal biographies' can no longer be embedded in a nation-state framework given the realities of many people's lives in a globalizing world. The importance of embodiment in the construction of biographies and their visual dimensions call out for the enhancement of narrative with non-narrative methodologies. And finally, the increasingly use of art, popular culture, and social media to think about people's lives and life histories suggests that biographical researchers need to expand their methodologies in creative and unexpected directions. In this panel session, several well-known advocates of new approaches to biographical analysis will provide programmatic statements about what is missing in biographical research today and how they would like to see it develop in the future. It is our intention to initiate a lively discussion with the audience.

Confirmed Speakers: Phil Langer (Ethnography), Irini Siouti (Transnational Biographies), Kathy Davis (Embodied Biographies), Roswitha Breckner (Visual Biographies), Maggie O'Neill (Creative biographical research)

Regular Sessions (in alphabetical order)

Biographies of Outsiders and Outsider Groupings

Session Organizers: Gabriele Rosenthal, University of Goettingen, Germany, G.Rosenthal@gmx.de and Arne Worm, University of Goettingen, Germany, arneworm@t-online.de

The life stories and histories of outsiders and outsider groupings in societies – such as certain religious, migrant or gender groupings – give us insight into the voices of people which are subdued in public resp. hegemonic discourses, into the politics of storytelling and the power relations in specific historical and socio-political contexts. With these biographies we are furthermore able to look into the figurations of these outsiders and the established groupings in a society and the specific (often violent and intersectional) processes constructing outsider positions within asymmetrical power balances.

We invite papers that consider the biographies of outsiders and discuss their experiences and positions in their societies in their interrelation with the other groupings.

Embodied Biographies, Virtual Bodies

Session Organizers: Susan Bell, Bowdoin Colleges, USA sbell@bowdoin.edu and Kathy Davis, VU University, Netherlands, k.e.davis@vu.nl

Biographical research has not paid much attention to the ways complex forms of border crossing and transnationality shape people's embodied experiences. Moreover, the introduction and development of new social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook) has opened the field to the study of embodied biographies to include the biographical construction of virtual bodies.

We seek papers that consider connections between bodies and biographical practices from individual accounts to the social structural and historical processes within which these practices take place. We are especially interested in extending the conceptual and empirical reach of the field of biographical research to interrogate how biographies are constructed in ways that attend to the role of both embodiment and transnationality in people's life stories.

Topics of interest include institutional contexts in which identities are inscribed in/on the body (medicine, prisons); the embodied traces of homelands, border crossings and remittances in the life stories of refugees and migrants; the construction of embodied communities (transgender, intersex, body modification) and political movements (FEM, Pussy Riot).

"In/Mobilities": Migration and Social Mobility in the Age of Globalization

Session Organizers: Minna-Kristiina Ruokonen-Engler, Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany, ruokonen-engler@soz.uni-frankfurt.de and Irini Siouti, University of Vienna, Austria, irini.siouti@univie.ac.at

In their classic, "Pathways to Social Class. A Qualitative Approach to Social Mobility" (1997), Daniel Bertaux and Paul Thompson called for research approaches on social mobility beyond pure statistics. They suggested the use of qualitative methods such as life stories and family case studies in order to research in a more profound way the complex dynamics of social mobility. Almost twenty years later, it can be asked what has changed in the empirical understanding and theoretical conceptualization of social mobility.

In our panel we want to continue the methodological discussion started by Bertaux and Thompson and deepen it with the question, how qualitative approaches in general as well as biographical approaches in specific can help us to understand social mobility processes in the area of globalization and transnationalization.

Following questions should be discussed: How can social mobility be conceptualized beyond the nation state borders? How can we understand social mobility from a transnational perspective? Do there exist some specific gendered and generational patterns of social in/mobility in (transnational)migration contexts? What does it mean

to speak about social mobility from an intersectional perspective? How are social mobility and social immobility linked with each other? What kind of subjectivities are produced through the processes of social (in)mobility?

We invite papers that discuss the question of social (in)mobility from a biographical perspective in different migration contexts. We particularly welcome contributions that combine a biographical approach with different theoretical approaches like that of transnationalism, intersectionality and post-colonialism.

Making Individual Memory Visible in Public Space

Session Organizers: Julia Vajda, ELTE University Budapest, h13073vaj@ella.hu and Júlia Székely, szekej@gmail.com

Traditional historical as well as classical memory narratives were greatly determined by the recollection of the figure of the hero. National identities were built around the heroic deeds of great men who then served as historical, social and cultural models for a particular society. Within this process of inscribing the exemplarity of heroes into collective memory, public space – through monuments, street names, memorial plaques and other memorial signs – typically played an essential role. What happens, however, when everyday man takes over urban space?

Both social history and qualitative sociology – especially biographical research – “discovered” everyday men and women behind macro historical events: through these trends, we cannot imagine an understanding of society without the understanding of the experiences of the individual.

This session intends to elaborate the relationship of individual memories and urban space by focusing on the following questions: How does the biography of an everyday person become articulated in urban space and how do the biographical presentation of others affect one’s own? How do urban experiences and public representations become part of the narrative of the individual’s life story? How do memories of everyday persons increasingly appear in public space (for example, by commemorating deported and murdered persons such as in the *Stolpersteine* project)? How do individuals challenge particular public memorials (such as by vandalizing statues)? How do collective and individual processes of remembering mutually shape each other within and through the urban space?

On the Uses of the Reconstructive Analysis of Autobiographical and Work Narratives for Professional Discourse and Self-Reflection

Session Organizers: Lena Inowlocki, Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Germany, inowlocki@soz.uni-frankfurt.de and Gerhard Riemann, Technische Hochschule Nuremberg Georg Simon Ohm, Germany, gerhard.riemann@th-nuernberg.de

The dynamics of sociological biographical research partially derive from an ongoing interest in biographical studies within the professions, e.g., social work, teaching, and psychosocial health care. In professional schools there has been a growing awareness that becoming familiar with biographical research can contribute to a strong foundation of (future) professionals’ practical case analyses. There have also been new styles of reconstructive research and self-reflection within the professions, which are of interest for biographical research in general. It is important for us to stay sensitised to such developments and practical uses. The interdisciplinary and interprofessional character of biographical research has always been a hallmark of our joint project.

The session will provide the chance to present and discuss innovative work, which can contribute to professional self-reflection, professional discourse and the voicing of professional perspectives and experiences in public debates. It will be possible to discuss, e.g., the analysis of professionals’ spontaneous work narratives and its practical uses, the self-reflective ethnographic study of one’s own practice, and other developments in professional research. Colleagues from different countries, disciplines and professions are invited to participate and to share their experiences. The chances of such developments should be explored but also problems and structural restrictions.

Political Participation of Refugees: Transnational and Biographical Perspectives

Session Organizers: Michaela Köttig, Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, koettig@fb4.fra-uas.de and Irini Siouti, University of Vienna, irini.siouti@univie.ac.at

In this panel we will focus on the civic and political participation of refugees from a transnational as well as a biographical perspective. Even though there are rarely formal barriers of civic and political participation of refugees, most of the refugees are politically active in diverse fields on local as well as transnational level. However, there exists a research gap regarding political participation of refugees as well as its gendered dimensions.

We are inviting papers based on biographical case studies on civic and political participation of refugees. Above all, following questions should be discussed: What are the resources, opportunities and barriers for political participation of refugees on local, national and transnational level? How is individual or collective agency and opportunities for participation influenced not only by the structures of migration societies in a globalized world but by the biographical resources and strategies of the refugees as well? What are methodological challenges for using biographical methods in the research field of refugees' political participation?

Practices in Biographical Research in the Context of Globalization

Session Organizers: Rixta Wundrak, University of Goettingen, rixta.wundrak@sowi.uni-goettingen.de and Maria Pohn-Lauggas, University of Vienna, maria.pohn-lauggas@univie.ac.at

Globalization concerns biographies. From the beginning, the biographical research has dealt with global issues, like migration and diaspora. But still, globalized practices gain in importance and play a part in how and what is recalled and told. There are new and changing practices of self-thematization, technologies of communication and global social media. Biographical self-presentations often take place in intercultural framings and they address a global public.

In research practice these new fields require an intensified ethnographical perspective and a closer look at contexts and practices of doing biography. Increasingly, we need to focus on different cultural and local settings and need to include cultural and globalized specifics of self-presentations in our research. Thus, biographical interviews may proceed in a variety of ways and require intercultural competence and assistance as translation, for instance. It also implies the question of involvement of researchers in the construction of biographies. Subsequent questions are: How does an intercultural biographical interview affects the production of biography? Which different cultural and which global settings of self-thematization can be identified? Which global structures affect an interview and therefore the construction of biography?

We invite papers that discuss practical research consequences of globalization for biographical research. We look forward to both, global thematic contributions as well as "global participants"

Transnational Migrations and Biographical Narratives

Session organizer: Ursula Apitzsch, Goethe University of Frankfurt, Germany, apitzsch@soz.uni-frankfurt.de

The concept of transnational social spaces is a way of grasping the phenomenon of the biographical knowledge of subjects who are continually crossing borders and interacting with one another. This knowledge is accumulated and symbolised in the course of individual lives and of the lives of groups. On the basis of past, continuing and necessary future separations and border crossings, this knowledge constitutes different and partly overlapping social spaces understood as coordinates of orientation for individual and group action. This biographical knowledge introduces the time axis into the constitution of social spaces, in the sense that accumulated experience represents the dimension of the past and biographical planning represents the anticipated future. The structures and effects of such border crossings and of the ways in which people cope with them in their biographies are linked to one another and interact with one another. Family members involved in a migration process experience this process in different ways depending on their age, gender, whether they have older or

younger siblings, etc. Although each individual has his or her own biography, there are typical sequences of events which are specific to migrants and which tell us a great deal about the invisible, but very real, structures of the immigration society.

Papers understanding the biographical approach as an approach to research in the sociological field of migration studies are welcome. The presentation of empirical case studies should focus especially on the methodical use of narratives in transnational migration research, treating it as a perspective revolving around a reconstructive research logic.

Women and Violent Action

Session Organizers: Hermilio Santos, PUCRS, Brazil; hermilio@pucrs.br) and Michaela Koettig, Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, Germany, koettig@fb4.fra-uas.de

In sociological studies related to women and violence two main tendencies can be observed: one that exclusively explores the condition of the victim and the other that emphasizes the subordination to a "masculine ethos" in cases when women are directly engaged in violence. The aim of this session is to explore other aspects of this phenomenon, by trying to provide new elements towards understanding how and why women are involved in violent action. In this way, this session should contribute to fill a gap in the international sociological literature that is only rarely dedicated towards investigating the participation of women as authors of violent action. This session thus asks for contributions that explore in theoretical and empirical studies the biographical experiences of women as agents in violent action. Proposals are encouraged that discuss historical and biographical developments as well as interactive mechanisms that are connected to the direct experience and exercise of violence, how gender constructions are related to these constellations, and in which ways they impact on individual and social violent actions and experiences.

Research Committee on Comparative Sociology, RC20
RC20 main page (www.isa-sociology.org/rc20.htm)

Program Coordinator

Jean-Pascal DALOZ, CNRS / SAGE Université de Strasbourg, France, jean-pascal.daloz@misha.fr

Biographies – Figurations – Discourses: The Dialectic of Individuals and Society in the (Empirical) Study of Individual and Collective Hi/stories

Session Organizer(s)

Artur BOGNER, University of Bayreuth, Germany, artur.bogner@web.de

Robert VAN KRIEKEN, University of Sydney, Australia, rvkrieken@gmail.com

Session in English

The “dialectic” of “individuals” and “social facts” continues to haunt sociology and the neighbouring disciplines. In the tradition of biographical research that originated in the Chicago School and is vibrant among others in Germany, France, Poland, Britain and Austria today, the concepts of “discourse” and “figuration” have gained increasing attention as tools for describing, investigating and explaining the mutual constitution or factual interplay between individuals and societies, individual and collective processes as well as the – individual and collective – (re-)construction(s) of these and their interdependency or interaction.

Biographical research and figural sociology have last not least converged on the postulate of a longer-term, diachronic and trans-generational analysis and data collection. On the other hand attempts at a synthesis of biographical research and discourse analysis have moved to the forefront of current biographical research, again in the context of the endeavor to cope with the dialectic of individual and collective processes.

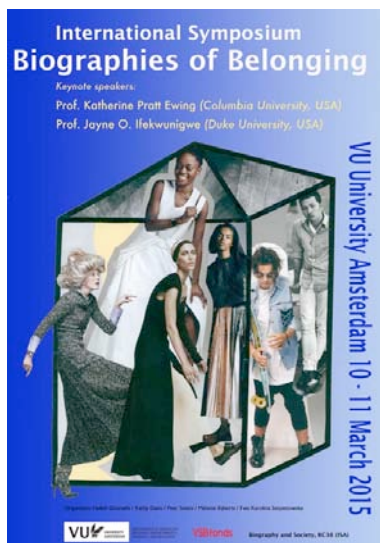
This session is intended to give a forum for discussions centered on the terms biography, figuration and/or discourse and to offer a forum for “empirical” or “theoretical-empirical” research into the mutual constitution or interplay of individual and collective processes, between individual and collective histories and their individual and/or collective (re-)construction. Slight preference would be given to contributions that discuss the use of these, similar or related concepts in the context of empirical, including “historical”, research.

COURSES

Course in Biographic-Narrative Method

The BNIM 5-day Intensive Training *in the Biographic-Narrative-Interpretive Method*. For over fifteen years in the UK and in Ireland, as well as in Auckland (New Zealand), Ljubljana (Slovenia), New York (USA), Sydney (Australia), Wagga-Wagga (Australia), Grand Canaries (Spain), Coimbra (Portugal) we have been running BNIM intensive trainings designed for PhD students and for postdoctoral researchers (both individuals and also research teams) for use in various pure and applied fields. The next 5 days course will take place in November 2015 (November 12th and 13th and November 16th -18th) at 24a Princes Avenue, London N10 3LR, Muswell Hill, North London, United Kingdom. For more details please contact tom@tomwengraf.com.

REPORT ON CONFERENCES

*Some reflections on Biographies of Belonging*

Kathy Davis

VU University, Amsterdam

The following is a reflection on the two-day international symposium, 'Biographies of Belonging' which was held at the VU University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands on 10-11 March 2015. The symposium was organized by a group of sociologists from the VU University who are part of the research group IDI (Identity, Diversity, and Inclusion), with financial and practical help from RC38 Biography & Society.

The topic of the conference 'belonging' fit neatly into the research interests of the IDI, which has a strong focus on processes of exclusion and inclusion in institutional and urban settings in multicultural societies. Since the IDI has a strong predilection for qualitative research methods, we were particularly interested in what biographical research could offer specifically in terms of methodological and theoretical insights into the subject of belonging.

In the Call for Papers, we invited participants to address experiences and narratives of belonging and think about how these might help us understand conditions of exclusion and inclusion as well as envision possibilities for social change. Initially, we envisaged a small symposium; however, much to our surprise, we were inundated by interesting proposals from scholars from all over the world (as far away as South Africa, Russia, Latvia, and the United States, but covering a wide array of European countries as well). The participants included PhD students who were just beginning their studies, retired professors with many publications under their belts, and just about everything else in-between. Many members of the RC38 attended the symposium as well.

The topics of the papers are too varied to list here, as they focused on so many different individuals, groups, and community (usually those whom belonging, for one reason or another, was a problem), on the different kind of spaces (virtual, symbolic, geographical) where people do feel or do not feel at 'home,' and on the myriad and complicated conditions which make belonging impossible (racialized discourse in the media, subtle practices of 'othering' in institutional settings).

Here I will be providing a subjective account rather than a comprehensive conference report. Given that the conference had three sets of parallel sessions, I was unable to attend them all and can, therefore, only give some of my impressions as well as indicate what were for me some of the highlights of the event. This is also a subjective account because, as a member of both the organizing committee and RC38, I had a vested interest in bringing these two areas of inquiry which are near and dear to my heart – belonging and biography – into a conversation and I had high expectations about what this kind of exchange might produce. It is in this vein that both my excitement, but also my disappointment with some of the results of the symposium should be seen. For me, one of the most interesting outcomes of the symposium was that so many of the participants insisted that we need to be sceptical of belonging – as a concept, as a discourse which is used to marginalize particular groups (a point which was brought home very forcefully by one of the keynote speakers), and even as an experience. It is

easy in the Netherlands to view 'belonging' as basically positive, probably because it is so difficult for newcomers to feel at home here. It is a term that is used in Dutch 'integration' policy, as though belonging could actually be imposed from above. However, as many participants in the symposium pointed out, individuals do not always want to belong to a particular group/community/nation. In fact, their refusal to belong may be part of their resistance to conditions of exclusion or structural inequalities or ideologies to which they do not subscribe. This suggests that we, as sociologists, should not embrace the concept of belonging, but rather need to cast a critical eye on what is, at best, an ambivalent experience and, at worst, something that reinforces thinking in terms of 'we' and 'them'

The second thing, which became clear to me as the symposium progressed was how difficult it is to separate experiences and stories about belonging from the normative frameworks we have for thinking about home, exclusion, and 'othering'. Both of the excellent keynote speeches by Katherine Pratt Ewing and Jayne Ifekwunigwe, for example, addressed belonging from the vantage point of racism and othering in the US context. Both drew conclusions about how essential it is to explore how racialization works across the globe to produce relations of inequality and marginalization. While these issues are crucial to any discussion of belonging, at one point in the symposium there were some irritated responses from participants who felt that racialization in the US context was not the same in a European context where contemporary forms of 'othering' are more likely to occur along the lines of religion, ethnicity or what is ubiquitously referred to as 'culture.' This irritation came to a head in one of the sessions in which participants used the term 'othering' to talk about East/West relations in Europe rather than relations involving skin color and 'race.' The discussion that ensued quickly derailed along the lines of which forms of 'othering' are most essential/relevant/problematic – for me, an unfortunate flashback to the kind of correct line thinking which abounded among critical scholars in the seventies. This emotionally-charged encounter made clear how important it is to explore belonging as an embodied experience which is embedded in specific contexts and specific histories of exclusion.

This, of course, is exactly the kind of issue, which biographical research has always been particularly adept at addressing and this brings me to my final – and most critical – comment. Ironically, despite the title of the symposium, many of the presentations were not concerned with biographies at all, but with structures, geographies, discourses, and processes of exclusion and inclusion. This is not to say that these papers were not interesting and provocative. They were and, what is more, they had plenty to say about belonging. However, they did not address the questions we raised in our call for papers, nor did they explore the possibilities of biographical research except to indicate that they had conducted interviews of some kind. This is a strange omission and perhaps worth considering in more detail. Has biography become nothing more than a kind of 'buzzword', which stands in for a more personalized approach to the big social questions? Or have sociologists been investigating belonging as a measure of citizenship, social cohesion, or conditions of exclusion for so long that it is difficult for them to consider what the experience itself might mean for individuals in their everyday lives? I don't have the answer, but I do think that we have more work to do in finding answers for them.

None of this detracts, however, from my pleasure with the symposium, with its thought-provoking papers, lively discussions, and – last but not least – the general atmosphere of collegiality. As one of the participants told me, laughing: 'I feel like I belong here.' When all is said and done, that is perhaps the best thing that can be said about a conference.

DISCUSSION

A PSYCHO-SOCIETAL APPROACH TO LIFE HISTORIES¹

Henning Salling Olesen

I. A PROBLEM-ORIENTED METHODOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

This article is rooted in pedagogy and educational research but intends to direct reflections on problem-oriented methodology more broadly to critical social science. It summarizes experiences of a research strategy that studies adults' *life histories* and their *subjective experience* of them as an empirical and theoretical framework for an understanding of their educational career and their learning processes.

Adult learning processes are primarily linked to their life experiences and general life situation. Therefore an interdisciplinary research group at Roskilde University studied *theoretically* the driving forces in educational activity and the effects of education in the context of learners' life histories. Later followed many and varied empirical studies of people who on their own initiative or encouraged by their institution related to learning and education in the light of crises and upheavals, especially in their work and career (Dybbroe, 2002, 2012; L. Larsen, Salling Olesen, & Tsanaka, 1998; Salling Olesen & Weber, 2002; Salling Olesen, 1994, 1996; Weber, 1995, 2007, 2010).

The concept of experience which originally structured our research questions (Salling Olesen, 1985, 1989) was taken from the Frankfurt School and its Marxist and psychodynamic theoretical tradition. In (Danish) adult educational practice it was linked to a notion of collective political learning processes, inspired by Negt (Negt & Kluge, 1972; Negt, 1964, 2001), which transcended the immediate individual experience. In Negt's version, collective learning processes (*exemplarisches Lernen*) were by definition only possible through communication of individual subjective experience of common societal conditions in a historical dialectic between everyday life experience and a mediated historical/theoretical knowledge. Our understanding of the participants' experiences combined everyday practical plausibility with a broader understanding of the relationship between learning processes, everyday life, culture and the formation of societal institutions – informed by phenomenological sociology and Berger & Luckmann's understanding of how specific individual actions contribute to the overall cultural productivity of society (scientifically, politically and practically (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Salling Olesen, 1985)). It connected the *subjective entirety of learning processes*, including the meaning of their content, with prior socialization processes and the objective life circumstances which provide their social and cultural framework and ascribes dynamics and a social transformational meaning to them.

In order to substantiate this concept of experience, we viewed empirical analyses of specific individual experiences as mediations of non-concurrent but interrelated dynamics: on the one hand, individual inner psychic dynamics and their importance in identity processes, and on the other, *contradictions and historical conflicts* in various levels of societal formation that both structure the content of learning processes and provide framework conditions for them. This meant a dialectical understanding of relationships between individual and societal factors through the study of concrete subjective processes. With support from the Danish Research Council, this

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resulted in the *life history project* (Salling Olesen, 1996), designed as a theoretical and methodological umbrella for various empirical projects with a wide range of contexts and outputs, often on a broader basis than the purely pedagogical or educational. Apart from qualifying these projects, including PhDs, we aimed to use this diversity of research as a lever for the theoretical and methodological development of research into education and learning as empirical critical social science (Salling Olesen, 2006).

It was no longer teaching but learners who formed the research basis; this allowed for a wide variety of inspirational influences from neighbouring disciplines dealing with the individual as a subject in a social context: cultural research, biographical research and (psychodynamic) socialization research - besides gender studies and Marxist social research. We sought theoretical models and concepts that went far beyond education and learning research and methodological experiences to be used in data production and processing.

In the given situation, we needed a manageable and obviously practical methodology, but which also placed educational participation and its learning processes in a scientifically relevant context. We found these resources in extensive empirical biographical research. A lengthy visiting professorship of Peter Alheit who played a key role in educational biographical research in Europe (Alheit & Dausien, 2002; Alheit, 1994a, 1994b) had a decisive influence. We also drew inspiration from the development of sociological biographical methodology (Rosenthal, 1992), including an active involvement in the research committee "Biography and Society" of the ISA – International Sociological Association.

Such inspirations have enhanced the quality of our empirical research, especially at the methodological level (sampling, interviewing techniques, transcription, coding). They have also stimulated our work on more general methodological issues. This was an exciting challenge for a research environment previously mainly based on inspiration from critical theory, and thereby Marxism and psychoanalysis. The organization of the life history project enabled a more principled and critical discussion of the methodologies and the development of theoretical problems in an understanding of subjective dimensions of societal processes through empirical data analysis.

II. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS TEXT AND LIFE HISTORY

The common feature of the traditions that inspired us is the use of narrative life-historical interviews as data, particularly autobiographical (spontaneous) interviews where informants are invited to present their autobiographies in a relatively free narrative. One aspect that appealed to us was the method's distinct "inside perspective". We worked on open-ended qualitative research interviews in advance, both from general political solidarity with "the affected parties" and their views, and because our research interest implied identification with their lifeworld perspective. We find the same concern idealized in certain types of anthropological field work which are much more resource intensive. The spontaneous narrative autobiographical interview provides a methodologically manageable opportunity to leave the (re)construction of the informant's perspective to the person him- or herself.

However, the term biographical research covers a wide range of perceptions regarding analysis and theoretical understandings. Some researchers generally do not distinguish between "biography" and "lived life", but view biography as an alternative perspective on society and history. A description of certain events and experiences in a biographical perspective involves primarily the (re)construction of a context - which besides recording events and their interrelationship, leading to discussions of causality, perceptions of continuity and possible future projections, is also a description of an individual's life, a biography. An individual life is considered by definition as a relatively limited but in itself meaningful object, and our understanding of lived life (the lifeworld perspective) is channelled through this new object. Some apply general source-critical criteria to the data, being in this sense

methodologically close to oral history traditions and ethnographic methodologies; this has been the basis of biographical research in social science (Bertaux & Thompson, 1997; Bertaux, 1981). In relation to our interest in subjective experiences, this was of secondary importance. In the narrative biographical research a new object is produced, which simultaneously represents both lived life and the interviewee's interpretation of this in his or her lifeworld perspective, including ideas about future life (something like a "projet" in Sartre's sense (1960, p. 63ff).

But how is this relationship between biography and lived life analysed? Some narrative biographical research aims to identify certain patterns in the stories which reveal real life processes and practised dispositions. One important approach with a theoretical background in symbolic interactionism has helped to renew sociological biographical research. It seems to be based on an understanding of a homology between the structure and subject positions of the narrative and the agency of lived life, and can thus in the manageable form of the interview gain access to something less apparent in other forms, namely the lifeworld perspective of social actors (Alheit, 1994a; Apitzsch, 2003; Schütze, 1984).

Some research in the life history project has used this narrative structural analysis, but always kept in mind that an autobiography is a subjective act, spoken from the interviewee's life-world perspective. Through the "narrative contract" - a common understanding with the interviewee to *narrate* his or her life - the cultural modes of narrative structure and cultural templates are established. These will tend to be binding within a given cultural framework and the narrator will seek to fill them; the discursive and normative regulation of the self-presentation is subordinated to this. In the research context, the production of a text must be analysed, not as a source, but as an expression (speech act). In this perspective, narrative structure may be seen as the utilization of a cultural repertoire of formulas and legitimate reductions by interview subjects to make sense of the diversity of events, constraints and impulses which form part of lived life.

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, as mentioned above, the narrative is seen to have a particular closeness and resemblance to the agency of lived life and meaning making. However, one may also emphasize other aspects than the narrative's *structural* similarity to the agency of everyday life. In our first life history studies, we conducted themed, semi-structured interviews on concrete life histories, in relation to e.g. experiences of education, gender socialization, work experience, work identity and future prospects. The themes were theoretically justified expectations of how structural conditions could have a differentiated impact on the interviewees' life histories, but the analyses were also marked by a very open attitude to the empirical material. If the biography is seen neither as a source of lived life, nor as a proxy, it will be clear that, although the same linguistic interface is involved, the narrator is subjectively formulating experience of this lived life - and possibly also trying to "talk around" certain aspects of it. The gestalt character of narration draws the telling close to subjective impressions of the narrative present, including aspects of emotions, mood and sensory perception, which provide experience of the life history that would not be reflected in a more logical argumentative discourse. This understanding has been motivated by Bruner's theory of two modes of thought, paradigmatic and narrative (Bruner, 1986). Bruner's concepts point to a "cultural reality", a meaning context excluded from logical cognition and general language use. Rather than accept this language-theoretical or anthropological dichotomy as a precondition, one can instead consider it as an observation of the diversity of linguistic expression of subjective experiences of lived life. We prefer to see an ongoing process that at the individual level articulates specific experiences in language as a social medium, and at the cultural/societal level incorporates new specific experiences into the "semantic stock" of this medium. Interestingly, we find similar thinking in a completely different culture, far distant from autobiographical research and psychoanalytic cultural analysis. In connection with mutual translations, I have discussed this with Brazilian colleagues conducting pedagogically oriented biographical research which almost has the character of subjective cultural archaeology: learning processes through the acquisition of life historical narratives (Menna Barreto Abrahão, 2012; Salling Olesen, 2010; Souza, 2012).

Peter Alheit made some use of narrative structural analysis but was also interested in the actual (self)consciousness articulated in the biographical narrative e.g. Alheit & Dausien, 2002, p. 290): A biographical perception and narration of one's life requires an awareness of its individuality and the ability to constantly shape it and feel responsible for its course under changing circumstances. Alheit uses the concept of "biographicity" to characterize this particular epochal quality of (adult) learning processes, which he sees as a necessary response to our (postmodern) de-traditionalized way of life. Biographical analysis of adult participation in education and learning processes inscribes individual autobiographical narratives into society's modernization process. This will scarcely be equally valid or relevant for all individuals but for a specific person or group represents a way to understand their life and navigate in it.

To some extent this was the approach in our early analysis of education for socially oppressed groups, such as unemployed women. Through their autobiographical narratives we sought to understand whether and how education gives them opportunities for self-definition and autonomous expression (K. Larsen, 1992). Precisely at a time of disruption, where women only with difficulty and against obvious odds define their lives as their own, a biographical approach may be particularly relevant because it shows "solidarity" with their effort to gain relative autonomy as wage earners. But we have also seen that unemployed people, subject to obvious structural constraints, produce narratives about their struggle to secure a position in certain segments of the labour market which also include ideas of real self-determination in (working) life and can fuel alternative life plans that are quite beyond the intended qualificational perspective. The narratives as a whole were interpreted as an expression of the individual perception of a "destiny" in society, where specific work experience, class and gender played key roles. Autobiographical interviews represent interviewees' interpretations of their life histories as they wish to portray them at the moment of narrating.

These different ways of understanding the relationship between biography and lived life and the particular nature of narrative material revolve around the relationship of subjective experience to cultural modalities - and its possible limitations. The desire for solidarity with people whose lifeworld and future perspectives we want to understand does not assume that people necessarily know their own life history in full, neither events and objective circumstances that have influenced it, nor the dynamics of their own consciousness. Most of the events that interfere with the individual's life, and then form the raw material of a biography, are essentially structured by quite different factors than the importance of the event to the person or the intention expressed by the person in the context. Bourdieu has - as an exponent of a commonly held attitude - referred to the "biographical illusion" (Bourdieu, 1986). If these events are objectively structured in contexts that have no specific connection with the individual or simply reflect societal contingency, the construction produced by the biographical ascription of meaning is not merely illusory, but misleading. The biographical context is objectively justified by the biological life cycle, which involves certain standardized and specific framework conditions (e.g. ageing or disease). Major events in an individual life, such as starting a family, choosing an occupation, becoming unemployed, etc. are dependent on objective societal conditions. The autobiographical interpretation may be more or less oriented towards the local or personal "little story", at the expense of the "big history", or the biologically "normal" story. How do we deal with the relations between them?

Marxist social theory and psychoanalysis, as conveyed by the tradition of critical theory, were the general frames of reference for our work. Both involved a theoretical premise of non-transparency, meaning that reality is not entirely transparent for either the actor or the observer. In traditional Marxist theoretical discussion, one could say that a form of structuralism - not unlike Bourdieu's argument about the biographical illusion - dominated until the 1960s, and in the Anglophone world even later. This poor theoretical background probably explains why our approach to biographical research was initially challenged for drawing on *grand theories* (e.g. Marxist social theory) in our analysis of narrative biographical material. Progressive social research in the USA, but partly also developments in qualitative methods in Europe, insisted on the actor perspective and the subjective meaning based in the lifeworld interaction. But our reason for approaching biographical research was precisely that we

saw it as a way to address some of the difficulties in the grand theories, without abandoning them. So the challenge was - or is - to examine how biographical material could be analysed in the broader context of the grand theories.

Against this background, we reached an understanding of a looser coupling between data production and analysis/interpretation. So long as the requirements of a hermeneutic procedure are met, the objectified data may be transcriptions of various kinds of interviews or interactions and also field notes, audio and video recordings, etc. This does not imply irrelevance of the data production method or the characteristics of the data. On the contrary, reflections on aspects of data production form part of the interpretation process, and this then becomes a crucial link between the concrete analysis and the research question.

III. THE SOCIALITY OF SUBJECTIVITY

The aim of the life history project was to establish an understanding of learning processes and education from a subjective perspective. Empirical research of concrete subjective expressions - including biographical narratives - was intended to elucidate the experiences of specific people of lived life and its sociality. Oskar Negt's reformulation of the basis of political learning processes (1964) was the first major attempt at a connection between the subjective endeavours of everyday life and non-structuralist Marxism. Until then, subjective factors appeared to be reduced to either false consciousness or class consciousness, which in a global context were colonized by the Leninist political understanding of Soviet communism or by various elitist avant-garde theories. In the neo-Marxist debate in Western Europe, which included the Frankfurt School, the revival of Marx's analysis of capital opened up a new recognition of subjectivity, so that at least criticism of the dominance of exchange value and the commodity form could actively change society. In the education economy there arose a rudimentary understanding of the significance of the human factor in system change, but mostly only as an analysis of contradictions in the capitalist system. Parts of the new left (e.g. via Marcuse) were also inspired by Freudo-Marxist thinking, which had otherwise been somewhat marginalized in a form of drive-based essentialism in the 1930s (Reich). But most of these theoretical developments were in fact still very abstract "openings" of particular importance for the general critique of capitalism - Frankfurt School critical theory was for example generally seen as "pessimistic" because it correctly identified the pervasive effects of the capitalist political economy on all levels of cultural and social life.

Since the life history project distinguished between biographical life history and the narrator as a situated subject, it became clear that the object of analysis was the subjective act where the subject in a given situation (usually specified by research) interprets lived life and its circumstances, and more or less consciously envisions his future life. We must try to understand the individual subject's relationship with himself and the world as a path to understanding subjectivity as an aspect of sociality in a broader sense. We were not primarily interested in the individual, but saw him/her as exemplary, as a specific person who could variously enhance our understanding of how subjective processes can emerge.

We were therefore especially interested in the contradictions, the "breaks" and "gaps", which appeared in some of the biographical narratives, as pointed out by both analysts (see Schütze, 1984) and critics (Nielsen, 2005) of narrative structural analysis. They are particularly interesting in potentially enabling an entry point to an analysis of how both recognized and unrecognized circumstances and experiences are involved in the processing of conflicts and constraints and are attributed new meaning. One can first look for signs of the defence mechanisms that are inevitably embedded in a narrative self-representation. The story can in itself be a form of rationalization to provide a coherent and reasoned view of one's life. But the task of narration, including requirements for concretisation and completion, will naturally also involve topics and memories already surrounded by defensive reactions such as repression or rationalization, or a need may arise to "repair" elements of the story during

narration. They may appear as flaws in logic or narrative, contradictions, obvious omissions, breaks in the story line, changing evaluations of people and relationships, etc. But they can also be expressed by directly opposing inner emotions. Apart from helping to reconstruct objective elements and enhancing our understanding of how the narrator interprets them, they may also sometimes be perceived as expressions of ambivalence, i.e. emotional ambiguity regarding some aspects of the narrative or the basic self-representation itself. Ambivalences are particularly interesting subjective expressions for two reasons (Becker-Schmidt, 1982; Weber, 1995). Firstly, they could represent cultural and societal contradictions of interest in understanding the relationship of the individual narrative to a broader context. Secondly, our fundamental research interest lay in learning, especially the learning processes of everyday life, as mentioned in the introductory comments on educational research issues. Learning processes involve shifts of consciousness and discontinuities on many levels, and both logical ruptures and emotional ambivalences in the autobiographical narrative can therefore indicate learning processes or provide the potential for them.

Our methodological approach in the life history project was (deep) hermeneutic interpretation, inspired by a method based on social psychology which Leithäuser et al. used in research into working life and everyday life (Leithäuser & Volmerg, 1988). Here too we adopted a proven empirical method that could plausibly be justified in social intervention projects (Salling Olesen & Weber, 2002), albeit with a quite different theoretical basis from biographical research. It is primarily a procedure for textual interpretation, mostly generated through transcription of themed group discussions (a cross between a focus group interview and a social psychology experiment). The group discussion is stimulated by a chosen theme the researchers expect to be of vital importance to the participants. Group discussions establish group dynamics that may be assumed to include elements of unconscious interaction involving participants in relationships to each other and perhaps to a particular theme. The interpretation is not aimed at individual life historical experiences but at understanding the indications of subjective experience activated by the theme in the social interaction. This is also fundamentally an example of hermeneutic interpretational practice, and the aim is to understand interaction and meaning in a broader societal context *through* analysis of the psychodynamic levels of communication. This psychoanalytically inspired interpretational practice was originally developed as cultural analysis, with e.g. works of art as its primary empirical object. Leithäuser and colleagues applied it thus first to working life, and its use was later expanded to a variety of material that objectifies social interaction in everyday life situations and organizations in the form of texts in the broadest sense (Leithäuser, 2012). This was further developed by the *International Research Group for Psycho-Societal Analysis* (Salling Olesen, 2012), which included German, Danish and British researchers.

The methodology is based on the psychoanalytic recognition that subjective meaning is rooted in life historical memories that are scenic wholes. Cognition and emotion in a present situation activate memories of similar past situations, and initiate a process of cognitive and emotional differentiation. In a social interpretation, one can thus achieve a more comprehensive understanding of subjective aspects of this situation by trying to understand the scenic recollections it might activate for the people involved. The first point in this *scenic understanding* is to interpret subjective meaning and especially conflicts, by attending to emotional and relational aspects of communication which require a situated attention and imagination. But it is also important to understand how the whole of a societal context has influenced subjective experience and forms the context for conscious as well as unconscious imagination of a future. Within the theoretical framework it would be more appropriate to talk about a *wider* (in a societal context) rather than a *deeper* understanding of the meaning under study than what is normally understood in hermeneutic interpretation. It counts on levels of meaning which may not be represented, or not adequately represented, in the socialized language, but nevertheless are embodied and subjectively significant. In brief: All the marginal(ized) meanings.

The main theoretical originator of the methodology, Alfred Lorenzer, called his method deep hermeneutics

(Lorenzer 1986) to indicate that the method is hermeneutic but also goes beyond an understanding of the immediate social surface. The depth metaphor is problematic since it connotes certain stereotypical understandings of psychoanalysis as an objectification that allows the analysis to “uncover” deep-lying “causes” in the psyche. This stereotype is fed by the original Freudian theory of drives but is far removed from the interactional understandings of psychodynamics of all the researchers involved. Conversely “psycho-societal analysis” points out that its mandate is to broaden its perspective in *both* psychodynamic and societal directions.

It is primarily Lorenzer’s theory of socialization and language acquisition that provides a theoretical basis for this type of interpretation. Lorenzer’s socialization theory is based on the material, social and bodily interaction experiences of early childhood, and its particular feature is the symbolization of these life experiences through language acquisition. In connection with Wittgenstein’s language-game theory, he sees socialization as an entry into the linguistic communities that establish an attachment between the individual, situated and sensory experiences and a socially defined semantics (symbolization). This originally interested him because he saw disturbance and discontinuity in this process as a key to the understanding of various mental disorders. But it gradually became a complete socialization theory, providing an understanding of how the total interactional experience is translated into pre-verbal interaction forms and then becomes part of symbolization, enabling the individual psyche to include both conscious and unconscious dimensions and be in lifelong development and transformation. It is not possible here to present further details, which may be found in a special issue of *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (2012/3).

In order to reach this form of scenic understanding the psycho-societal approach takes advantage of the researcher’s subjective relationship to the field being researched. The point here is that imagination is scenic in its format: it inter-relates all informative, sensory and situated impressions in holistic images. The strength of this theoretical background is that it offers a material explanation of how unconscious subjective dynamics in everyday situations are based on life experiences (social interaction). It thus becomes more readily comprehensible that the interpretation of linguistic material can provide access to meanings that are not explicitly formulated in language but must be interpreted by the researcher’s imagination. In order to *achieve* this kind of scenic understanding, the approach uses the researcher’s (interpreter’s) subjective relationship to the field under study.

Psycho-societal interpretation uses the experience of psychoanalysis of communication between interpreter and interpreted text that is socially produced but unconscious. With reference to the psychoanalytic concepts of transference and countertransference, one obtains a theoretical understanding of the fundamental methodological question of the interpreter’s involvement in the interpretation, which is reflected in any hermeneutical method. In practical terms, the researcher’s imagination is supported in the analysis of social interaction through interpretation groups and similar social interactions, which both encourage a variety of conceptions and also represent a kind of first step in a communicative validation.

The assumption that the researcher’s conscious and unconscious prior experiences are resources in interpretation, and not “disruptive elements”, touches on a principled discussion we have often met in the discussion of biographical research. It concerns the relationship between the researcher’s pre-understanding/prior knowledge and his/her interpretation of the interview subject’s knowledge of and meaning ascription to some of the same elements of the narrative. The researcher’s prior theoretical or empirical knowledge of objective social contexts and psychodynamics, such as defensive reactions and hence the potential distortion of life history by the biographical perspective, is used in this strategy as a store of insight or an analyst’s prerequisite for interpretation. This may be a particularly crucial point, since biographical research is based on respect for the interviewee, but this in reality applies to all qualitative research which aims to respect the autonomy of the research field. The delicate point, where the interpretation becomes “deep hermeneutical”, is

where the researcher has an critical attitude to the interviewee's stated interpretation of his/her life, and attempts to understand possible unconscious dynamics or to analyse it as pragmatic consciousness in connection with a specific societal practice and position (see Habermas' argument in Habermas & Apel, 1977; Leithäuser & Volmerg, 1988). The critical aspect of the interpretation will then be to open up for the suppressed or latent features of this articulation - but still with the intention of understanding the subjective meanings (better).

The theoretical basis for this is on the one hand the analysis of how fundamental social structures appear systematically distorted in the immediate social practice and to the immediate experience. This is most fundamentally attributed to *Marx's concepts of socially necessary ideological consciousness*, and in the critical theory tradition to the permeation of exchange value and reification into social relations and forms of everyday practices. On the other hand, most relevant is the psychodynamic theory of the unconscious and the understanding of the *psychodynamic defence mechanisms' distortion* of communication and individual consciousness. Here too there is a "socially necessary distortion" insofar as defence mechanisms are necessary mediations of emotional aspects of practical lived life. In both of these bases lies a theoretical justification for a *materially produced intransparency*. The intention is thus by no means that the researcher must "see through" the distortions or reveal other causalities or explanations of the life course in the biography. They are rather to be used to enrich the understanding of the subjective expressions with an understanding of how they handle conditions of reality and their latent possibilities if this handling was altered. No more than this; the rest is up to the interpreted subjects. But this fundamental consideration should suggest why the critical interpretation is supplemented with an interpretation with space for learning processes and life historical opportunities.

IV. LIFE HISTORY, LEARNING PROCESSES AND WORK IDENTITY

The above methodological discussion was related to the general question of how to empirically study subjectivity in everyday life interaction. It was based on the argument that some key issues in pedagogy and educational research could best be theorized in this way, but also that this required a concept of subjectivity that is historically and societally specified. This relationship between subjectivity as the focal point and a societal macro perspective was the source of our interest in empirical methods. The life history approach was conceived as a unit of an empirical method based on life histories and a theoretical understanding of the social constitution of the subject.

The issues in focus during the 1980s - the need to investigate the subjective dynamics related to educational participation and the need to theorize learning processes in a way that covers both life learning and more formal education - have meanwhile almost become mainstream policy issues under the heading of lifelong learning, with a dominant interest in how to mobilize all citizens' subjective engagement in learning and educational participation. In this sense, developments have justified the research strategy but thereby also intensified the theoretical and methodological challenges for a critical research. I have described how we over time have redefined the methodology, primarily by taking a consistent hermeneutic position and supplementing the methodological repertoire, but also by developing a psycho-societal, analytical concept of subjectivity and including this in the interpretation of subjective aspects of the empirical data and also as a *prerequisite for the interpretation* in the understanding of the interpreting subject (researcher subjectivity).

Using the concept of experience as the theoretical perspective on learning and education can help life historical, empirical analyses of everyday life, work and education to lead to a critical social scientific development in education and educational research. It also seems confirmed that the understanding of learning processes as a

subjective dimension in all social interactions will enable these methodological experiences to be applied to other areas of research.

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RECENT PUBLICATIONS



ZQF (Zeitschrift für Qualitative Sozialforschung, Journal for Qualitative Social Research)

Heft 1+2/2014 - Socialization, family, and gender in the context of migration - (to be published in July 2015), <http://www.budrich-journals.de/index.php/zqf>

Thematic issue with joint contributions of the binational PhD-colloquium on „Socialisation, family, and gender in the context of migration“ at Université de Strasbourg and Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

Edited and with an introduction by Ursula Apitzsch, Daniel Bertaux, Catherine Delcroix and Lena Inowlocki.



Breckner, R. (2015) Zwischen Leben und Bild. Zum biographischen Umgang mit Photographien, in: Thomas S. Eberle (Hg.) Photographie und Gesellschaft. Phänomenologische und wissenssoziologische Perspektiven, Bielefeld: transcript.



Breckner, R. (2015). Biography and Society. In: James D. Wright (editor-in-chief), International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, 2nd edition, Vol. 2. Oxford: Elsevier. pp. 637–643.



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Breckner, R. (2015). Klassiker-Studie: Thomas, William Isaac und Znaniecki, Florian, 'The Polish Peasant in Europe and America. Monograph of an Immigrant Group', in: Rätz, Regina und Völter, Bettina (Hrsg.) Wörterbuch Rekonstruktive Soziale Arbeit, Kornwestheim: Verlag Barbara Budrich, S. 301-304.



The author analyses the configuration of relations of transnational families, the influence of remittances on the budget of transnational families and its contribution to the social transformations in Cuba. With a biographical and the family history approach, the author comes to conclusions on migration trajectory from a perspective of diverse generations. The research of the influences of a diaspora migration and of transnational families on the development of a socialist country it is possible to clarify the current process of transformations in Cuba.

PROJECT ANNOUNCEMENTS

The social construction of border zones: the case of three Brazilian cases

Description of the project:

This research expands in adjusted way the on-going research in three border areas (Israel-Egypt, the Canary Islands and Africa-Spain-Morocco), coordinated by Gabriele Rosenthal. It intends to analyse the social construction of border areas and border activities, as well as the process by which they are transformed. We selected three border areas of Brazil (Argentina-Brazil-Uruguay, Brazil-Bolivia and Peru-Brazil-Bolivia), all of which have constituted most recently in routes to the flow of migrants, mostly from Bolivia, Haiti and African countries. This analysis will allow the parallel to the border regions already under consideration by the team of Prof. Gabriele Rosenthal. A comparison of the Brazilian cases and simultaneously among Brazilian cases and other international cases, will allow the reconstruction of similarities and differences in the construction of border areas and the practical reality of their implementation. Emphasis will be given to the experiences of members of different groups involved in border activities (migrants, police forces, NGOs, smugglers, inhabitants of border regions, etc.) and the process of the genesis of their respective perspectives. Actors here are not only the migrants themselves, but also every member of a group operating in the border regions selected. It is a theme that is becoming increasingly important not just for the regions located at the borders, but also for the Brazilian metropolitan regions, the main target of the trade flows and migrants who pass through the borders. The project received the financial support of CNPq and PUCRS.

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Women and Violence: Female Authors of Violent Actions

Description of the project:

Using biographical and visual narratives, the on-going research explores the experiences of women as author of violent action. In the last years there is an increasing participation of women in crime and also in everyday life violence in Brazil. The main objectives are to provide new elements for the comprehension of how and why women are engaged in this kind of action, searching to fulfil part of a gap in the sociological literature that give very little attention to the participation of women as authors of violent actions. The empirical results may permit to establish a dialogue with the sociological literature on this issue, which mostly attribute to women a subordinate or secondary role in violent actions. The research is made possible through the financial support of CNPq.

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