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Reinhard Sieder / University of Vienna

From Patriarchy to New Fatherhood

Private family life and modernization in 20th century's Austria

Austrian society in the 20th century underwent manifold processes of transformation and modernization, including the sphere of private life.¹ Older, Marxist-inspired theoretical models tend to explain private family life as being strongly *determined* by modern civil law, canon law, politics, economy and society. Post-structural sociologists and recent propositions of Critical Theory, however, do not believe that family life depends exclusively on legislation and changes in the modes and means of production and reproduction. Instead, these intellectual traditions have come to recognize the private family sphere in of itself as one of the major impulses towards transforming society, despite being connected to the economy and the public at large in thousands of different ways. Thus, the private sphere of family life, and what governments interests most - birth-giving and parenting - is neither completely autonomous nor strongly determined. Instead, family life may be viewed as an interactive '*desire machine*,'² producing hopes for happiness, consumer desires, longing for love and protection, the wish for relaxation, retreat, and so on. Yet, such '*desire machine*' also produces desire that society either forbids or looks down upon, such as the urge to be lazy, aggressive, violent, or even sexually perverted. Illegitimate and partly illegalized desire remains, for the most part, hidden within the private sphere. One might say that private life

¹ Here, I am referring to changes in private life, which have developed in Western Europe over a 'longue durée' of two to three hundred years. I define 'private life' as that which is not in the workplace and outside the public sphere. 'Private life' thus refers primarily to the sphere of personal relationships as a system of interaction and communication, by which bodily, social, psychic, intellectual and emotional competences and abilities are produced and re-produced. In short, 'private life' constitutes an area of 'human capital' or human resources, which is essential for society overall.

² See Gille Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Antiöidipus. Kapitalismus und Schizophrenie I*, Frankfurt am Main 1974, pp. 7–63. ff.

fulfills the function of keeping these desires away from the public. In contrast, the private sphere brings to the fore but cannot fully satisfy that which we miss most of our lifetime. Psychoanalysts posit that we enjoy being fed and protected within the amniotic sac, and this creates, in their view, an unconscious longing for the whole rest of our lives. As Sigmund Freud³ and George Herbert Mead⁴ have first argued, and subsequently Herbert Marcuse,⁵ Erik H. Erikson⁶ and others have maintained, it is precisely desire that preserves individuals and groups, politics, religions and governments belief in the family as a sort of ‘heaven on earth,’ at least if social politics, religions or human sciences protect it from the evils of the profane and consumerist modern world. Astonishingly enough, this modern family myth withstands all private disasters and waves of separations and divorces in late modern societies.

In what follows, I wish to introduce some questions concerning private life in Austria during the 20th century: Which changes are to be observed and how far are they intertwined with other transformations of Western modern society? Which concept of transformation appears appropriate after neo-imperialistic modernization theory of the 1960s and 1970s has lost much of its credibility? Instead of criticizing modernization theory once again, I ask for a social constructivist concept, which should be compatible with poststructuralist theories like the Theory of Praxis (Bourdieu) and recent Critical Theory, which seems able to connect political, economic, socio-cultural and psychological aspects and research issues.⁷

I will focus my lecture on the situation faced by Austrian men during the 20th century. How have male patterns of being, feeling and living ‘privately’ altered since First World War and

³ Sigmund Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930), in: Sigmund Freud Studienausgabe vol. IX, pp. 192-270.

⁴ George H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society*, (University of Chicago 1934), *Geist, Identität und Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 1973.

⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (1957), *Triebstruktur und Gesellschaft. Ein philosophischer Beitrag zu Sigmund Freud*, Frankfurt am Main 1979.

⁶ Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*, (1959), *Identität und Lebenszyklus, Drei Aufsätze*, 2nd edition, Frankfurt am Main 1974.

⁷ After the classic Critical Theory of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s (Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas et al.), recent Critical Theory is obviously extending its realms. It seems able to incorporate post-structural theories like Bourdieus Theory of Praxis, and re-contextualize again what specialist sciences have separated: political, societal, cultural, economic and psychological dimensions of society. See the introductory anthology: *Kritische Theorie der Politik*. Herausgegeben von Ulf Bohmann und Paul Sörensen, Berlin 2019.

up to the present? How have men shaped and reshaped their concepts of being lovers, partners, husbands, and fathers, and how did they perform in those roles? How did they learn to deal with divorce and separation? And, how is this all connected with - or even determined by - capitalist economy, and regulated by the modern and late modern European welfare state?

In the second part of my lecture, I will talk about a recent mass phenomenon: rebuilding or re-designing the private as a more complex and fragile post-divorce family system. Does this change the intra-psychic model of being a father and the praxis of parenting? What do we know in the meantime about the many non-resident fathers, who had left the former family household? Are there new ways to keep the relationship between father and child close and nourishing for both sides? – I will start now with some general remarks on the long-term development of males' performance in family life and parenthood in Austrian society during the 20th century. This will be the backdrop against which more specific questions on males and fathers in post-divorce family-systems will be raised in the second part of the lecture.

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After the physical and psychic destructions of World War I and the breakdown of the three largest empires in Europe (the German, Habsburg and Ottoman empires), a rather nervous and insecure concept of masculinity and sexual virility arose. This concept drove thousands of militant men into new civil wars, in Russia, in the Baltic states, and elsewhere. It also called others back home to their private home front, so to say. Intellectuals from different ideological backgrounds, social workers, psychologists, social democrat politicians, catholic and protestant priests, youth movement representatives as well as many others fostered a relatively new cultural ideal of masculinity, which I call 'domesticated masculinity.' Contrary to what is often assumed in contemporary history, this model was even accepted by militant Austrian fascist groups and National Socialists in the 1930s and early 1940s,⁸ at the very same time as when the Nazis were preparing themselves physically and mentally to conquer Europe, and drawing plans for the genocide of Jews, Roma and others. Would it be cynical to

⁸ This is a main argument in Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2005.

say that they designed and performed the genocide in the name of their own holy “Germanic” family life? For Nazi elites too, the myth of the ‘German Family’ always included the father playing with and educating his children, even if fatherly activities were clearly limited in scope and time; and it encompassed a playground for pre-military games for boys and a basic training camp in family services for girls. This is not the place to dig into details.⁹ For the man, staying at home primarily meant rest and relaxation, and secondarily, performing the role of a patriarchal husband and father. This was and still is part of the widely accepted model of the modern, child-centered, companionate marriage, characterized by romantic love and sexual fulfillment during the early phase, mutual respect, and emotional satisfaction in late marriage. Certainly, this was primarily the guiding ideal for middle-class families, but we should not overlook that well-trained industrial workers and especially masters supervising industrial workshops (“labour aristocrats”) must be seen as part of the lower middle-class. They fully accepted a moderate patriarchal concept. In the 1920s and early 1930s, above all the Social Democrats ‘modernized’ the lower middle class and parts of the working class by improving education in kindergartens and schools, and more comfortable housing and social and medical control was part of their local politics. The famous Viennese municipal housing schemes (*Gemeindebauten*), the science-based welfare office (*Jugendamt*) and other measures and institutions were clearly aimed at improving family life and child-rearing in the lower middle-class according to middle-class concepts and norms.¹⁰ Increased leisure opportunities gave thousands of men time and ability to focus on *intensified fathering*. Young “labor aristocrats” began to engage in sports and hobbies and started monitoring their children’s progress in school. This was embedded in a broad movement of young social

⁹ Despite many unsolved problems with comparing NS, Italian fascism, Austrian fascism, Spanish or Romanian fascism and others, I recommend a tiny book about common features of fascist movements in rhetoric, mentality, ideology and power strategy, written by Umberto Eco, *Der ewige Faschismus*, 4th edition, Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich 2020. For subtle differences and similarities coming to light in a Viennese “austro-fascist” officer’s family, where one of the sons becomes a national socialist and Hauptmann of the Deutsche Wehrmacht, see my case study, *A Hitler Youth from a Respectable Family: The Narrative Composition and Deconstruction of a Life Story*, in: Daniel Bertaux, Paul Thompson, eds., *Between Generations. Family Models, Myths, and Memories*, Oxford University Press 1993, New York 1993, 99-119. A german version is available as PDF for free download: <http://www.reinhard-sieder.at>

¹⁰ See Reinhard Sieder, *Behind the lines: working-class family life in wartime Vienna*, in: Richard Wall, Jay Winter, Hg., *The Upheaval of War. Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918*, Cambridge u. a. 1988, 109 ff., first paperback edition Cambridge 2005; Reinhard J. Sieder, *Wohnen und Haushalten im Gemeindebau. Politischer Diskurs, Repräsentation, Praxis, kulturelle Folgen*, in: *Das Rote Wien 1919 – 1934. Ideen, Debatten, Praxis*, ed. by Werner Michael Schwarz, Georg Spitaler, Elke Wikidal, Basel 2019, 234-241.

democrats, academics, intellectuals and professionals espousing the idea of teaching common people how to improve and ‘modernize’ family life in order to make it more ‘productive’ for the Fordist economy and the affluent and competitive society. Many of those taking part in the discourse knew very well that this clashed with patriarchal male authority, which predominated family life during the 19th and the early 20th century.¹¹ Nevertheless, it must be stressed that the new discourse of fathering did not challenge the basic gender-based division of labor and the still dominant ideology of the male breadwinner. When fathers participated in family life and child caring, they continued to do so from a patriarchal point of view. Fathers still saw themselves as those who feed the family, represent it in public, and know best what would help it to succeed; they left no room for doubt that wives and mothers were expected to do the daily domestic work.¹²

The Nazi movement and government took some of these ideas of family reform and blended them with racist concepts in population policy, family welfare and social policy. Up until the 1950s and 1960s, the idea of patriarchy remained strongly connoted with components of Nazi ideology, epitomized e.g. in the birth-giving mother as the heroine of the fatherland.

During the Cold War era, the model of the *companionate father* constituted an important line of defense against social disorder, sexual anxieties and fears of being led astray by political movements. The companionate father still maintained patriarchal features, modified by the economic and cultural conditions of the middle-class double-income-family during the *economic boom* from 1953 until 1973, the longest of the century. To live and behave as a responsible father and companionate spouse became an important element of belonging to the middle class, and above all, of being part of the Fordist mode of production. In this vein, the role model of the companionate spouse and father was promoted in countless advertisements, magazines, movies and the like. In 1958, a magazine depicted a proudly posing husband and father on the driver’s side, the mother and two little boys on the other side of a newly

¹¹ See for instance: Otto Felix Kanitz, *Das proletarische Kind in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 1970; Max Adler, *Neue Menschen*, Berlin 1926; Kurt Kerlów-Löwenstein, *Das Kind als Träger der werdenden Gesellschaft*, Wien 1924; Anton Tesarek, *Das Kind ist entdeckt*, Wien 1933; and many others.

¹² See Reinhard Sieder, *Besitz und Begehren, Erbe und Elternglück. Familien in Deutschland und Österreich*, in: André Burguière, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Martine Segalen, Françoise Zonabend, Hg., *Geschichte der Familie, 20. Jahrhundert*, Vorwort von Jack Goody. Aus dem Französischen von Gabriele Krüger-Wirrer, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt am Main u. a., 1998, 211–284; unveränderter Nachdruck, Lizenzausgabe: Magnus Verlag, Essen 2005; a PDF-file for free download is available: <http://www.reinhard-sieder.at>

purchased small family car, accompanied by the slogan: Dad has done it! (*Vati hat's geschafft!*¹³).

Although the middle-class man and father of the Fifties and Sixties did not play a big part in household affairs – except for occasionally washing the new car or buying the first TV – his self-esteem and his self-concept of manliness included being a *responsible* father, and head of a well consuming household. However, economic factors both fostered and limited this step in the long way of emancipating men and fathers. First, earning a better living kept them away from their spouses and children all day long. Second, the leisure time of both fathers and children was increasingly reshaped in opposite directions, which tended to separate, rather than unite, the generations – a process that persists until the present day.

From roughly the 1910s onwards, diverse youth cultures started to pull adolescent children away from home. On the eve of World War I the German Youth Movement (*Deutsche Jugendbewegung*) in Germany and Austria claimed that fathers could no longer meet the hopes and expectations of the new generation, *i.e.* their sons and daughters. Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, local youth cultures opposed the Nazi regime mainly for cultural and life style reasons: They did not want to be trained as soldiers, or be subjected to party or industrial discipline. Distrusting Nazi promises and visions of a 'better life', youth subcultures preferred music, dance, and fashion emanating from the US, such as swing music from shellac vinyl records, US movies in *Tonkinos*, and elegant clothing.¹⁴ By the late 1950s, the so-called 'semi-strong ones' (*Halbstarken*) again identified with popular music from the US, but this time they listened to rock 'n' roll and wore casual clothes like denim jeans and leather jackets.

In the late 1960s, fathers often constituted the first line of the 'ideological enemy,' in case they (had) represented society and societal establishment in the eyes of their adolescent children. Beyond that, and as the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan posited more generally,

¹³ See the advertising „Vati hat's geschafft. Goggomobil – Stolz der Familie!“, in: *Funk und Film*, 14 / 10, 8. März 1958, reproduced in, and quoted from Gerhard Jagschitz, Klaus-Dieter Mulley, *Die „wilden“ fünfziger Jahre. Gesellschaft, Formen und Gefühle eines Jahrzehnts in Österreich*, St. Pölten, Vienna 1985, Tafel 18.

¹⁴ Christian Gerbel, Alexander Mejstrik and Reinhard Sieder, „Die Schlurfs“. Verweigerung und Opposition von Wiener Arbeiterjugendlichen im Dritten Reich, in: Emmerich Tálos, Ernst Hanisch, Wolfgang Neugebauer, Reinhard Sieder (eds.), *NS-Herrschaft in Österreich. Ein Handbuch*, Vienna 2000, pp. 523-548.

fathers *always* represent ‘the law,’ *i.e.* the official and political order. This tendency is further amplified when the order turns out to be (or to have been) a bad or even a criminal one.¹⁵ In the late 1960s and 1970s, universities couldn’t keep up with middle school expansion and authoritarian professors were regularly attacked by young rebels. The young confronted their fathers with the legacy of the past by asking: “What did *you* do in the war?” Youth protest was reinforced by the fact that, for the first time in history, visual imagery of a dirty war in the Far East – Vietnam – were broadcast directly into millions of family homes.

After the 1970s, the segmentation of leisure, the prolongation of schooling (accompanied by crises and deficiencies in the education system), and different patterns of consumerism among children and parents have all led to growing ideological and aesthetic cleavages between parents - especially fathers - and adolescent children. In short, conflict between the generations became a cultural conflict more than ever, with moral and political issues at its core.¹⁶ This tendency, however, seems to have slowed down in the 21st century. One reason for this might be that late modern mass culture and consumerism have diversified modes of living enormously, such that many different styles exist next to one another even in families and peer groups. Many different styles are accessible and legitimate. People of every age change their ‘personal’ style more often. Therefore, self-distinction and branding oneself by styles of consuming is no longer the preferred way to symbolize the generational gap. Needless to say, however, there still *is* a gap. For example, think of opposite interests in environmental issues, or with regard to the pension system in Austria, where the young feel the elderly are clearly privileged at their expense.

But let me come back to further shifts in male roles and fathering. The main factor contributing to intensified fathering since the 1970s was the move of young mothers into the labour force (young mothers who returned to the labour market after a baby pause of a few

¹⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Die Familie*, in: Jacques Lacan *Schriften III*, 3rd revised edition, Weinheim and Berlin 1994, pp. 39-100.

¹⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, vol. 2: *Zur Kritik der funktionalistischen Vernunft*, Frankfurt am Main 1981, pp. 567-570.

years).¹⁷ This trend was connected with the expansion of the education system from the 1970s onwards, as well as with the expansion of public services, trade and consumer industries. These changes refashioned the nature of fathering and increasingly involved men in the day-to-day care for children. This opened a new battlefield between spouses since men often adapted belatedly to the new circumstances of marriage and family life. The disputes over childcare became a major reason for marital conflicts, which strengthened the tendency to resolve the conflict of interests between spouses and to contemplate divorce.¹⁸

Since the mid-1970s, feminist discourse has challenged the traditional assumption that childcare is primarily a maternal responsibility. Women activists have called for better childcare options, improved kindergartens, more flexible working hours, and the expansion of both maternity and paternity leave. Indeed, the Social Democrat's policy met some of these demands, thus propelling mainstream acceptance of a series of ideas raised by a comparatively small, elitist feminist movement.¹⁹ While there are differing positions within feminist discourse regarding the importance of fathers in children's upbringing, we can nevertheless state that feminism has strengthened the view that fathers should engage more in child care and in the whole communication work, which has become so important in modern family life.²⁰

When we compare the last decades with the first half of the 20th century, we find that men have tended to provide and enjoy more intimacy, more physical and mental engagement and proximity in father-child-relations, and many fathers have changed their behavior by offering

¹⁷ As one of the first historical surveys, written in the 1980s, see Michael Mitterauer and Reinhard Sieder, *The European Family; Patriarchy to Partnership from the Middle Ages to the Present*. Translated by Karla Oosterveen and Manfred Hörzinger and revised for this edition, Basil Blackwell, 1st ed. Oxford 1982, reprinted 1983, 1988, 1989; Reinhard Sieder, *Sozialgeschichte der Familie*, Frankfurt am Main 1986.

¹⁸ See, for example, Norbert F. Schneider, *Woran scheitern Partnerschaften? Subjektive Trennungsgründe und Belastungsfaktoren bei Ehepaaren und nichtehelichen Lebensgemeinschaften*, in: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 19, (1990), pp. 458-470;

¹⁹ See my study *Besitz und Begehren, Erbe und Elternglück. Familien in Deutschland und Österreich*, in: André Burguière, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Martine Segalen, Françoise Zonabend, Hg., *Geschichte der Familie*, 20. Jahrhundert, Vorwort von Jack Goody. Aus dem Französischen von Gabriele Krüger-Wirrer, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt am Main u. a., 1998, 211–284; unveränderter Nachdruck, Lizenzausgabe: Magnus Verlag, Essen 2005. A revised version of this article is available as PDF for free download: <http://www.reinhard-sieder.at>

²⁰ See the early study on the manifold and partly new and high expectations for (nuclear) family life: Peter L. Berger, Brigitte Berger, *The War over the Family. Capturing the Middle Ground*, Anchor Press/Doubleday, Garden City, New York 1983.

more energy as a confidant of the child rather than as an authoritarian instructor. Men do spend much more time with their babies and young children. Yet, they enjoy fewer opportunities to spend time with older and adolescent children, who increasingly prefer the company of their peers, and they have to share education and professional training systems outside home. In short, fathers explore new models of generative fathering on a more equal level, which reshapes assumptions about family life and concepts of male identity or manliness. Practical changes in family life have altered the private and the official discourse on parenting, and vice versa. Despite the social reality of increasing numbers of men ‘drifting away’ from their children after separation, divorce and growing professional mobility (see below), men have found a new place as active fathers in first family households as well as in new family systems created after separation and divorce of parents.²¹

This leads me to the second part of the lecture. To what extent do families come under pressure by separation and divorce, and how does such pressure change concepts of family life and fathering? Again, I will focus on males and fathers. Will the increase in family break-ups lead to the early demise of a post-patriarchal family model that has barely had a chance to establish itself properly? Is there a good chance for men to practise active ‘fathering’ after separation and divorce?

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As in all European societies, and as in many other regions of the world, divorce and marital separation rates have increased steadily since the 1970s. Today, a third of marriages eventually lead to divorce in Austria. In large cities such as Vienna, this share has already reached 50 percent. Some of these breakups affect childless couples, but in many cases

²¹ For this argument, which of course could be explored in greater depth, see Reinhard Sieder, *Von Patriarchen und anderen Vätern. Männer in Familien nach Trennung und Scheidung*, in: *Austrian Journal of Historical Studies*, OeZG 11 (2000), 3, pp. 83-107; Reinhard Sieder, *Männer in Patchworkfamilien*, in: Karin Jurczyk, Andreas Lange, eds., *Vaterwerden und Vatersein heute. Neue Wege – Neue Chancen!*, Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, Gütersloh 2009, pp. 289–317; Reinhard Sieder, *Kinder nach der Trennung und Scheidung ihrer Eltern*, in: *Integrative Therapie. Zeitschrift für vergleichende Psychotherapie und Methodenintegration*, vol. 35, No. 2/3 (Oktober 2009), pp. 169–19; Reinhard Sieder, *Nach der Liebe die Trennung der Eltern: Alte Schwierigkeiten, neue Chancen*, in: *Familiendynamik. Systemische Praxis und Forschung*, 35. Jg. (2010), H. 4, pp. 348–359; Reinhard Sieder, *Geschiedene Eltern, verstörte Kinder – oder ein neues Familienleben?* Picus Verlag, Vienna 2012. See PDF for free download: <http://www.reinhard-sieder.at>

children's way of life, and the performance of motherhood and fatherhood are deeply involved.

In what follows, I will focus on the experience of so called non-resident fathers after legal divorce and / or after practical separation; then I will go on to examine the experienced and self-concepts of men who have either remarried or entered a new relationship after separation and divorce. In particular, I would like to ask three questions:

- (1) Which are the main obstacles to the continuance of generative fathering after separation and divorce?
- (2) What happens to the social and emotional quality of social and / or biological fatherhood after remarriage?
- (3) Lastly, what would help fathers deal more effectively with the problems they face after divorce or separation?

In addressing these issues, I am drawing on the results of a major, interdisciplinary research project, involving psychotherapists, social workers and sociologists, which was carried out in the early 2000s under my direction and published in 2008.²² This qualitative empirical study looked at family systems in Austria which differed from the normative family model in two key respects: Either one parent, usually the father, was absent from the household of his (former) spouse and his children, or, one of the adults in the new household was not a biological parent of at least one of the children living there. This latter family type is usually called a 'step-family', a historic and misleading term which fails to meet the new complexity of the post-divorce family system, and which falls short of creating post-divorce family relationships optimistically.

In cases where the father was non-resident and did not hold custody over the children, fathering was at risk of being limited in both time and quality, or sometimes, eliminated altogether. Thus, the need to put his fatherhood into question is highly probable in both cases.

²² Interdisciplinary research project „Beziehungskulturen abseits der Norm. Eine qualitative kulturwissenschaftliche Studie zu Stieffamilien und Einelternfamilien“, on behalf of and financed by the Austrian Ministry for Education, Science and Cultural Affairs. Final report, Vienna 2002, revised and written by Reinhard Sieder, Patchworks – das Familienleben getrennter Eltern und ihrer Kinder. Mit einem Vorwort von Helm Stierlin, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 2008.

Now, I will ask, what prompts fathers to disengage from their children after decades of growing acknowledgement of fathering's importance for children, adolescents and even adults? In many cases, fathers are *pushed out* of the original family household due to dynamic, situationally contingent social actions and a combination of reasons and motives: geographical mobility, new family responsibilities of the father (often accompanying remarriage), the outcome of legal decisions regarding custody, legal visitation rights, and forms and duties of child support as regulated by the Youth Welfare Office and family courts. Our research suggests that many fathers experience considerable emotional pain, frustration, anger, and confusion about how to maintain meaningful relationships with their children after divorce. Only for a minority of fathers is the predominant feeling after separation or divorce one of relief; and these men may welcome their new freedom from parental responsibility. Regarding this highly controversial point, it is worth considering the legal framework which has regulated responsibility for children in Austria in the last decades. Of course, I cannot go into details here. Next to the family courts, which have the power to make basic decisions on issues such as accommodation, financial support and the likes, there is a special 'Youth Bureau' (*Jugendamt* resp. *Amt für Jugend und Familie*) in every administrative district of Austria. This office adjudicates (among other issues) on the nature of the visitation rights accorded to the non-resident parent (usually, the father) if the separated couple has been unable to reach an agreement regarding the matter. In many cases, mothers retain the practical custody of their children after divorce, independent from the legal or formal status, *i.e.* single or joint legal custody (*Obsorge*). When the separated couple maintains a conflict-laden relationship, it will be up to the Youth Bureau and the family court to determine the extent of the father's active involvement. As is usually the case, an ongoing conflict overshadows relations between father and child. This clearly affects men's self-esteem and their performance assessment as fathers. Our findings concur with those of other scholars worldwide who suggest that joint legal custody enforces men's conviction that society acknowledges their importance as active and responsible fathers. On the other hand, practising joint custody in daily life can lead to stressful situations, which are clearly socio-culturally contingent and not 'given' by nature. Court orders and societal discourses failing to recognize the value of fathers through their decisions, however, discourage close involvement

by fathers and ultimately disadvantage not only fathers, but children as well. The 'visiting status' which is granted to many fathers seemingly diminishes the possibilities for active fathering while increasing the risk of loss of the father-child relationship.

Aside from the obstacles to paternal involvement resulting from family court or Youth Bureau decisions, it appears to be true that some of the mothers involved block contact between non-resident fathers and children. There are many different reasons for such sort of 'gate keeping' by mothers. For instance, they may simply want to avoid further conflicts with former spouses or partners. Whereas this may be a good choice in special cases, it can be counterproductive in other instances. Conflicts can be prolonged by quarreling over the father's desire to see his child (or his children) on a regular basis, or to play a meaningful part in education. Our study suggests that conflicts between former spouses are more likely to continue when the question of access to the child becomes paramount. On the other hand, our research showed clearly that continuing, active parenting by both partners after separation or divorce can help to de-escalate conflict and to rebuild a post-marital relationship, which in rare, very successful cases may well lead to lasting and genuine post-divorce friendship.

Moving on to the second of the two categories identified above, we now have to ask: What happens to fathers and children after men or women - former spouses - remarry? Generally speaking, when remarriage occurs fatherhood becomes even *more complicated* (meaning more complex and challenging). Men must redefine themselves in order to integrate old feelings and patterns with new needs and possibilities. The family system now gets much more complex, and it involves two or more households. Men are obliged to perform as biological fathers as well as 'stepfathers' or – what we would recommend – fatherly friends. Frequently, they may also have to cope with the fact that their own children, still living in the former household with their mothers, receive a new stepfather or a fatherly friend. Thus, in many cases we witness the emergence of a *novel kind of competition between men*. Normally there will be at least some contact and communication to manage daily affairs between stepfathers or fatherly friends and biological fathers. Historically speaking, such arrangements are entirely novel. For this reason, the roles and behavioral patterns involved are weakly codified in cultural terms, a situation that frequently leads to insecurity and uncertainty. More importantly, however, the lack of norms and codes provides greater

freedom for (nearly) all family members *to shape* motherhood, fatherhood and even childhood. This observation furthermore aligns well with the more general theory of a further boost to ‘individualization’ in late modern societies, as I mentioned in the first part of the lecture.

Needless to say though that the patchwork family system, as we call it in sociological terms, does not always function well; and children can be drawn into prolonged conflicts between former and actual spouses.²³ The degree of exchange concerning experiences, mutual help and advice is, however, not by necessity. It depends mainly on the personal communication competence and on the extent of self-monitoring one’s prior experiences and behavioral patterns adopted during earlier family life. Let me summarize: Many difficulties in patchwork family systems stem from experiences during the so-called ‘normal’ or ‘biological’ family life, both in the *family of origin*, and in the (first) *family of procreation*.

In some patchwork family systems, one of the children - traditional family therapy theory referred to the child as ‘troublemaker’, which was clearly formulated from the adults’ view - is treated as a kind of ‘bouncing ball’ between the spouses. In some cases, the child may be exploited as a ‘spy’ in the ongoing conflict between the ex-partners, with the result that the new family units end up hating and attacking each other. Whatever the outcome, children are at the very center of this kind of communication. But, it shall not go unmentioned that nearly in all second and third family systems we discovered strong desires for change, greater awareness of potential dangers, and greater preparedness to counteract difficult or undesired developments. And yet, this by no means guarantees that the actors concerned always succeed in dealing with subsequent difficulties.

Approaching the end, I will now turn to men, who enter an existing family system via the side entrance, metaphorically speaking. Here, we observe specific problems, different from those created by experienced and pre-shaped fathers. At the start of their new family career, at least, fathers lack both the knowledge and understanding of pre-existing patterns of social interaction and family life. Adjustment to life as part of a new couple hence concurs with the learning process involved in parenting. Our study shows that men in this situation require a

²³ I have described these problems in a series of case studies and provided further details in a systematic comparison, see my book *Patchworks – Das Familienleben getrennter Eltern und ihrer Kinder*, Klett Cotta, Stuttgart 2008, chapter X, pp. 244-352.

substantial amount of time to adapt successfully to the new family and their new commitment. Moreover, they have to do this widely on their own, with relatively little help and guidance from society as a whole. The norms and standards regarding so-called stepfathering are far from clear; and there is much more confusion about how to be a parent or a fatherly friend than in other family types. Another particularly relevant question is whether men who have already been fathers in other families manage this transition process better than first-time fathers. Here, it was one of the most surprising outcomes of our research that previous experience as a biological parent does not in any case translate well to step-parenting. That is, some of the common parenting behavior patterns that worked more or less well in first-marriage families are less effective when applied to second families. Indeed, not only are they often ineffective, they can also prove quite destructive. If, for example, the man wishes to supervise and discipline ‘his’ newly adopted child in a similar way as with his biological child / children, he will frequently run into serious trouble. At least in cases where the children are already older than 8 or 10 years, assuming the role of fatherly friend seems more appropriate, in particular if the child has a regular and relatively intensive relationship with the non-resident father.²⁴ Many men learn this quickly; others do not. Overall, we concluded that both divorced non-resident fathers and social fathers or fatherly friends do best when they define themselves in ways that consciously *differ* from the models adopted and practiced in first-marriage families.

As mentioned earlier, a prerequisite for such a relationship to evolve is that former spouses have overcome their conflicts and grievances. This may take more or less time, because ex-spouses must learn to differentiate their prior relationship from the ongoing relationship as parents. One of the main reasons that this proves to be so difficult in practice is that, for many parents, their relationship as spouses was shaped from the outset by the demands of the ‘third partner’ – the child who was born in the name of love and received so much attention from the former couple. Short-term intervention by psychotherapists may be helpful during this difficult transition and learning process.

²⁴ On this point, we agree with other scholars like Ingrid Friedl and Regine Maier-Aichen, *Leben in Stieffamilien. Familiendynamik und Alltagsbewältigung in neuen Familienkonstellationen*, Weinheim and Munich 1991; E. Mavis Hetherington and John Kelly, *For Better or For Worse. Divorce Reconsidered*, New York and London 2002, p.182.

For conflict-laden couple dynamics or where there is a history of domestic violence, far more intensive and extensive intervention is required in order to promote greater (re-)involvement on the father's part. But, it must be stressed that a complete, permanent interruption of contact between father and child is only necessary in extreme instances. Most of such cases are connected with different forms of domestic violence, including sexual abuse.

Lastly, we should remember that the late 20th century saw a process of pluralization not just with respect to family and household types, but also regarding parenthood and childhood. The greater frequency of bi-polar parenthood by mothers and fathers has been accompanied by an increase in what has come to be known as single-parenthood. For example, in 2000, nearly 25 percent of Austrian families with children were single-parent families, and it is predicted that this proportion will rise to no less than a third by 2030.²⁵

Certainly, recent trends have also produced more diverse experiences of childhood. More and more children grow up in more than one household. Or, to put it in another way: They live in two households, but in one (binuclear) family system. They get to know and they learn to cope with two or even more different family styles or family patterns. Equally, ever more children are obliged to commute between the newly built family units of their separated biological parents, meeting their parents' new partners, their new siblings, as well as new and additional grandparents and new relatives.

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In conclusion, let me return to the questions raised by processes we call either modernization, westernization, or globalization undergone by Austrian society in the 20th century. Most of the changes I have touched upon earlier have taken place since the 1960s and 1970s, a time when Austria experienced the further development of democracy and a period of unprecedented prosperity until the early 1980s. Social actors had acquired greater opportunities and space in which to fulfill parts of their various desires. At the same time, they experienced more pressure to shape their life according to changing conditions. The autonomy of individuals grew in certain respects; opportunities to emancipate themselves

²⁵ Karl Schipfer, Familien in Zahlen. Informationen zu Familien in Österreich und der EU auf einen Blick, Österreichisches Institut für Familienforschung, Vienna 2001, p. 19.

from constraints, however, were accompanied by increasing fluidity, uncertainty and the need for repeated reshaping of one's social and intimate life. In today's society, it is almost a cultural maxim that an unhappy marriage or relationship can – and perhaps, should – be ended. Obviously, this is by no means a fully autonomous decision, because hegemonic discourse forces the individual to behave in such a way - or at least to bear the possibility in mind. Put another way, the individual is always confronted with a *societal script* of how to adapt to changing conditions.²⁶ Increased readiness for change is, of course, not just true of private life. In the professional world, too, a faster pace of change and uncertain working relations have become normal (short-term contracts, job mobility, periods of unemployment, increases in self-employment, etc.). Similar developments can be observed in political behavior and in participating in modern democratic systems. The greater willingness to undertake change in family life coincides with all these interacting processes.

More and more people are going to require a social skill which previous generations did not possess to the same extent, namely the competence to dissolve and to rebuild stable private, intimate and family arrangements, professional relations and political ties. Yet, growing autonomy is a tricky thing as this entails less reliability regarding life plans. As is the case in the economic and political field, the revocability of life decisions – except those of having children – has become something of a strategic maxim, although the desire for stable and safe relationships continues to exist. In short, this comprises the double-edged process of individualization, which is an integral part of the Western dynamic mode of civilization. At a crucial stage in this process, namely in the early 1970s, the American sociologists Peter L. Berger, Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner stated that the course of private life at the time was increasingly understood as a migration through social worlds and the gradual realization of a range of possibilities.²⁷ This assessment has clearly gained in validity since. Personal

²⁶ See Reinhard Sieder, *Gesellschaft und Person: Geschichte und Biographie*, in: Reinhard Sieder (ed.), *Brüchiges Leben. Biographien in sozialen Systemen*, Vienna 1999, pp. 234-264.

²⁷ Peter L. Berger, Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness*, Random House, New York 1973; *Das Unbehagen in der Modernität*, Frankfurt am Main, New York 1975, p. 70.

identity has become more reflexive, and individuated.²⁸ Personal autonomy and individual rights have not only become key discursive terms; they have also become accepted moral imperatives. In all Western societies, the greatest maxim has come to be ready and capable to plan and shape one's life as 'freely' as possible. The illusion that the power and ways to do so are entirely in our own hands appears to make all the complications and frustrations bearable and worthwhile, as well as the physical, emotional and material costs which constitute the price for the breaks and new starts in the course of life. Nevertheless, it seems true that the human capacity to imagine a better life (Castoriadis²⁹), *emancipates and subjugates* the individual to the dynamics of Western societies.

²⁸ See my very short text on Subjekt, in: Anne Kwaschik, Mario Wimmer, Hg., Von der Arbeit des Historikers. Ein Wörterbuch zu Theorie und Praxis der Geschichtswissenschaft, Transkript Verlag, Bielefeld 2010, 197–202. A PDF is available for free download: <http://www.reinhard-sieder.at>

²⁹ See Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société*, Editions du Seuil 1975; *Gesellschaft als imaginäre Institution. Entwurf einer politischen Philosophie*. Übersetzt von Horst Brühmann, 1st edition, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1990.