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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 under-went manifold processes of cultural transformation and socio-economic modernization, including the private sphere of family 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, have come to recognize the private family sphere in of itself as one of the major impulses towards

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.

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 and religious communities interest most – courting, birth-giving, parenting and educating children – is neither completely autonomous nor strongly determined. Instead, family life may be viewed as a productive ‘*desire machine*,’² producing hopes for happiness, consumer desires, longing for love and protection, the wish for relaxation, retreat, and much more.

Yet, the ‘*desire machine*’ also produces desires that society either forbids or looks down upon, like 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 fulfills the function of keeping these desires away from the public.

In contrast, the private sphere brings to the fore but cannot fully satisfy all that which we miss most of our lifetime. Psychoanalysts posit that we enjoy being fed and protected

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

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 also 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 resists all private disasters and waves of separations and divorces in late modern western 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 still appropriate after overcoming neo-imperialistic modernization

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*, (1934), *Geist, Identität und Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt /M. 1973.

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

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

theory of the 1960s and 1970s, which has lost much of its former credibility?

Instead of criticizing modernization theory once again, I will 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 re-connect po-litical, 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 up to the present? How have men shaped and reshaped their concepts of being lovers, partners, husbands, and fathers, and how did they per-form in those roles? How did they learn to deal with divorce and separation? And, how is this all connected with or even de-termined by Fordist and neoliberal capitalist economies, and regulated by the late modern European welfare state?

In the second part of my lecture, I will talk about a recent mass phenomenon: rebuilding or designing the private as a

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,

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? Some general remarks on the long-term development of males' performance in family life and parenthood in Austrian society during the 20th century 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 social, physical and psychic destructions of World War I and the breakdown of the three largest empires in Europe (the German, the Habsburg and the Ottoman empires), a rather nervous, insecure and vulnerable concept of masculinity and sexual virility arose. After World War I this concept drove thousands of militant men into new civil wars, in Russia, in the Baltic states, and elsewhere. It also called

societal, cultural, economic and psychological dimensions of society. See the introductory anthology: *Kritische Theorie der Politik*, ed. by Ulf Bohmann and Paul Sörensen, Berlin 2019.

others back home to their private home front, metaphorically speaking. Intellectuals from different ideological backgrounds, social workers, psychologists, conservative and social democratic politicians, catholic and protestant priests, youth movement representatives as well as many others fostered a relatively new cultural ideal of masculinity, which I call ‘domesti-cated 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 all Europe and more, and drawing plans for the genocide of Jews, Roma and others. Would it be cynical to say that they designed and performed this genocide in the name of their own holy ‘Germanic’ family life? For Nazi elites too, their own modern myth of the 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

⁸ See Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2005.

training camp in family services for girls. This is not the place to dig into further details.⁹

For the man, staying at home primarily meant rest and relaxation, but also the culturally defined role of a patriarchal husband and father should be performed well. This was and still is part of the widely accepted Western model of a high or late modern, child-centered, so called *companionate marriage*, characterized by romantic love and sexual fulfillment during the early phase, and by mutual respect and emotional satisfaction even in the later stages. This was and still is the guiding ideal for old and new middle-class families, but we should not overlook that well-trained industrial workers, employees and masters supervising industrial workshops (“labour aristocrats”) can be seen as part of the (lower) middle-class as well. Most of them fully accepted and still accept a culturally modernized, comparatively moderate concept of patriarchy.

⁹ Because of 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 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, New York 1993, 99-119. A revised and extended German version is available as: *Ein Hitlerjunge aus dem Gemeindebau*. See PDF for free download on this website: <http://www.reinhard-sieder.at>

In the 1920s and early 1930s, Social Democrats, governing the city of Vienna until 1933, ‘modernized’ parts of the lower middle class and parts of the working class. They did so by improving education in kindergartens and schools, constructing *Gemeindebauten* for a more comfortable housing, and by organizing a dense system of social and medical control. The science-based youth welfare office (*Jugendamt*) and other institutions were clearly aimed at improving family life and child-rearing according to high modern middle-class concepts and norms.¹⁰ Increased leisure opportunities gave thousands of men time and ability to focus on a more *intensified fathering*. Well trained and educated laborers (“labor aristocrats”) began to engage in sports and hobbies and in monitoring their children’s progress in school or apprenticeship. All this was embedded in a broad movement of young social 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 (and later the neoliberal) economy of an affluent and increasingly competitive society.

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,

Many of those taking part in the political discourse knew very well that this clashed with the traditional patriarchal mode of male authority, which predominated family life during the 19th and the early 20th century.¹¹ Nevertheless, it must be stressed that the discourse of a new fathering did not really change or challenge the basic gender-based division of labor and the still dominant ideological figure or phantasy of the male breadwinner. When fathers started to participate in family life and child caring, they continued to do so in a moderate patriarchal mode. Fathers still saw themselves as those who (metaphorically speaking) 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 manifold daily domestic work.¹²

The Nazi movement and government took some of these high modern ideas of family reform, but blended them with racist concepts in population policy, family welfare and social policy, or in the sense of Foucault, in biopolitics. Up until the

Praxis, ed. by Werner Michael Schwarz, Georg Spitaler, Elke Wikidal, Basel 2019, 234-241.

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 Elternnglück. 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 / Main u. a., 1998, 211–284; unveränderter Nachdruck, Lizenzausgabe: Magnus Verlag, Essen 2005.

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, and so on.

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 so called companionate spouse and father still maintained patriarchal features, modified by the economic and cultural conditions. As the main 'breadwinner' he still kept a private sort of cultural hegemony within the so called middle-class double-income-family during the economic boom from 1953 until 1973, the longest of the whole century. To live and behave as a responsible head of family, father and companionate spouse he became a key element of the family's belonging to middle class, and above all, of being part of the dynamic Fordist mode of production. In this vein, the role model of the companionate spouse and father was promoted in advertisements, magazines, movies and the like. For instance: In 1958, a Viennese Radio- and TV-magazine depicted a proudly posing husband and father on the driver's side, the mother and two little, smartly dressed

boys on the other side of a newly 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 and bringing home 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, or, with even more serious consequences, all night 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 living together – 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

¹³ See the advertising „Vati hat's geschafft. Gogomobil – 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, Wien 1985, Tafel 18.

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 and industrial or bureaucratic discipline. Distrusting Nazi promises and visions of a ‘better life’, they preferred music, dance, and fashion emanating from the US, such as swing music from the famous shellac vinyl records, US movies in *Tonkinos*, and elegant clothing.¹⁴

By the late 1950s in Austria and Germany, the so-called ‘semi-strong ones’ (*Halbstarke*) again identified themselves 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’ for their kids, in case they (had) represented society and societal establishment. Beyond that,

¹⁴ Christian Gerbel, Alexander Mejstrik, 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*, Wien 2000, pp. 523-548.

and as the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan posited more generally, fathers *al-ways* represent ‘the law,’ *i.e.* the official, political and cultural 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 and criminal 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. Conflict between

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

the generations became a cultural conflict more than ever, with moral and political issues at its core.¹⁶

Up to now, this tendency, however, seems to have slowed down a little bit. One reason for this might be that late modern mass culture, mass media and neoliberal consumerism have diversified modes of daily living enormously, such that many different styles exist next to one another even in the same family or peer group. They are triggered by mass media and become accessible and legitimate. More and more people of every age, of all sexual orientations and of different social classes change their ‘personal’ style frequently. Therefore, self-distinction and branding oneself by styles of consuming and performing social life is no longer the preferred way to symbolize the generational gap. Needless to say, however, there still *is* a gap. Think of opposite interests in environmental issues, or with regard to the pension system in Austria, where the young feel the elderly clearly privileged at their expense.

Let me come back to further shifts in male roles and fathering. One of the main factors contributing to intensified fathering since the 1970s was the move of young mothers into the labor

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

force (young mothers who returned to the labor market after a baby pause of a few months or years).¹⁷ This was connected by government regulations to expand the education system from the 1970s on-wards, as well as to improve public services, trade and consumer industries. These changes clearly refashioned the nature of fathering and increasingly involved men more and more in the day-to-day care for children.

At the same time, however, a new battle-field between spouses was opened, since men often adapted belatedly or hesitantly to the new circumstances of marriage and family life. Disputes over childcare became a major topic in marital conflicts, strengthening the tendency to resolve the conflict of interests between spouses and to contemplate divorce in serious or even hopeless disagreements.¹⁸

Since the mid-1970s, feminist discourse challenged the traditional assumption that childcare was primarily a maternal responsibility. Women activists called for better childcare options, improved kindergartens, more flexible working time conditions, and the expansion of both maternity and paternity

¹⁷ As one of the first historical surveys, written in the 1980s, see Michael Mitterauer, 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 / 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;

leave. Indeed, the Social Democrats, which obtained political hegemony during the 1970s and early 1980s, met some of these demands, thus propelling main-stream acceptance of a series of ideas raised by a comparatively small, elitist feminist movement.¹⁹ While up to now 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, education and in the whole communication, which has become much more important in late 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. Many fathers have changed their behavior by offering more energy as a confidant of the child rather than as an authoritarian instructor. They do spend much more time with their babies and young children. Yet, they enjoy fewer opportunities to spend time with older

¹⁹ See my study *Besitz und Begehren, Erbe und Eltern Glück. 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/Main u. a., 1998, 211–284; unveränderter Nachdruck, Lizenzausgabe: Magnus Verlag, Essen 2005.

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.

and adolescent children, who increasingly prefer the company of their peers, and not least 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 breakups lead to the early

²¹ For this argument, which I have explored in greater depth elsewhere, 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, *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,

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 perform their concepts of an even more active or intense ‘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. Frequently, breakups and divorces affect young and still childless couples, but in many cases children are deeply involved.

In what follows, I will focus on the experience of *non-resident fathers* after legal divorce and / or after practical separation. 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) 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 nuclear 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’, but this is a historic and misleading term which fails to meet the new complexity of the post-divorce family system. And even more serious for the people involved, the term falls short of creating post-divorce family relationships optimistically.

²² „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.

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.

One of our main questions was, 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 social dynamics, economically and culturally contingent social actions and complex combinations of reasons and motives: the need for geographical mobility, new family responsibilities of the man (often accompanying with his re-marriage), 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 by family courts.

Our empirical results suggest that many fathers experience considerable emotional pain, frustration, anger, and confusion about how to maintain meaningful and intimate relationships with their children after separation and divorce. Only for a

small minority of fathers the predominant feeling after separation or divorce is one of relief; these men may welcome their new freedom from parental responsibility.

Regarding the highly controversial point of legal framework which regulates responsibility for children in Austria in the last decades, I want to make some very short remarks.

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 as well as in the city of Vienna. 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 rules and 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 the self-esteem of separated men and their performance assessment as fathers. Our findings concur with those of other scholars in the western world, who suggest that joint legal custody enforces men's conviction that society acknowledges their importance as active and responsible fathers. On the other hand, performing joint custody in daily life can lead to stressful situations, which are clearly economically, socially and culturally contingent and not at all '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, 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 that some of the mothers involved block contact between non-resident fathers and children. There are many different reasons for such a sort of 'gate keeping' by women. 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 become 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 empirical study suggests that conflicts between former spouses are more likely to *continue* for a rather long time, when the question of access to the child becomes paramount for the separated parents.

On the other hand, it turned out that continuing *active parenting* by both partners after separation or divorce can de-escalate conflicts and help to rebuild a friendly post-marital relationship, which in some cases may well lead to a lasting and helpful post-divorce friendship.

Moving on to the second of the questions identified above, I would like now to ask: What happens to fathers and children when one or both ex-partners re-engage in a new life partnership or when they remarry, in some cases with the perspective to become a new baby?

Generally speaking, when this happens, fatherhood becomes even more complicated (meaning more complex and

challenging in social performance). Men must redefine their family roles in order to integrate grown patterns of feeling and internalized behavior patterns under new conditions, new needs and possibilities. The family system now gets much more complex and under growing uncertainty at least for a couple of years. This involves all human actors within the social system (men and women, parents and grandparents, children and youths, even close friends) which live at least in two or more households. In the social-scientific paradigm we clearly prefer, that of *culture as praxis*, the family is created and reproduced by all human (and even by animal) actors taking part by communication and other forms of interaction nearly every day. It is the performance of the actors which creates the intimate life in two or more households, what we call the *patchwork family system*. In this communication system, men are obliged to perform as spouses, ex-spouses, biological fathers as well as fatherly friends, grandfathers, uncles, or very close friends. Frequently, they may also have to cope with the historically new fact that their own children, which frequently still live in their mothers household, receive there a new fatherly friend, new siblings, and a new peer group.

Thus, in many cases we witness the emergence of a *novel kind of competition between men as fathers*. And this may contribute to the ongoing change of patterns of behavior, feelings, expressing hopes or longing for nearness. Frequently men will be confronted with demands to manage daily affairs as fatherly friends and biological fathers in different parts of the patchwork family system. Because this is entirely novel, roles, behavioral patterns, feelings involved are weakly or not at all codified as clear norms and cultural terms, and this may lead to some uncertainty or hesitancy.

On the other side, however, the entire lack or weakness of norms and codes provides both greater freedom and greater need for family members to *reshape* actively and consciously relations of motherhood, fatherhood and even childhood, in order to overcome traditional or patriarchal concepts, which do not fit well any more. This aligns with the more general theory of a further boost to ‘individualization’ in late modern capitalistic societies.

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Needless to say though that the *patchwork family system* does not always function well. Children can be drawn into prolonged con-flicts between former and actual spouses or into conflicts between children as offspring of different couples.²³

The degree of exchange concerning experiences, mutual help and advice is, however, not by necessity nor by nature. It depends mainly on the communication competence of every person involved and on the extent of self-monitoring one's prior experiences and behavioral patterns adopted during earlier stages and modes of family life. Many difficulties of daily life 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 – family therapy theory referred to this child as 'trouble-maker', which was clearly formulated from the special hegemonic adult observant's view – is treated as a kind of 'bouncing ball' between spouses. In some cases, the child may be exploited as a 'spy' in the ongoing conflict between ex-partners, with the

²³ I have reconstructed these problems in case studies and provided a systematic comparison in: Patchworks – Das Familienleben getrennter Eltern und ihrer Kinder, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 2008, chapter X, pp. 244-352.

result that both new family units end up hating and attacking each other endlessly.

Whatever the outcome, in most of the cases children are at the very center of more or less friendly or hateful communication of former spouses. But in noticing this, nearly in all second and third families parents show strong desires for changing their behavior, for becoming aware of potential dangers, and for a better 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 turn to men, who enter already existing families via the side entrance. Here, we observe specific problems, distinct from those created by experienced fathers in first families of procreation. At the start of their new (second, third...) career as husbands, fathers or fatherly friends, many men lack both the knowledge and understanding of the patterns of social interaction and family life style in the household, they are going to enter. Adjustment to life as part of a new couple hence concurs with the learning process involved in parenting. Our empirical study shows that in this situation men require a substantial amount of time to learn and

to adapt successfully to the new family life and to their commitment. As I mentioned already, they have to do this widely on their own, with little help and guidance from society or family services run by the state, the city and other authorities.

A further particularly relevant question is, whether men who have already been fathers in the family households they have left, can manage this transition process better than first-time fathers. Here, it was one of the most surprising outcomes of our empirical research, that previous experience as a biological and social parent does not in every case translate well to parenting in the newly created second or third family system. Why is this?

Parenting behavior patterns that worked more or less well in first-marriage families can be less effective when applied to second and third families. Not only are they often ineffective, they can prove quite counter-productive or even destructive. To give an example. If a 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 older than six or seven years, assuming the role of *fatherly friend*

seems much more appropriate, in particular if the child has a good, regular and intensive relationship with the non-resident father.²⁴

Many men learn this quickly; others do not. Overall, we concluded that social fathers or fatherly friends do best when they define themselves in ways that consciously *differ* in many respects 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 complex and 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 / München 1991; see also E. Mavis Hetherington, John Kelly, *For Better or For Worse. Divorce Reconsidered*, New York / London 2002, p.182.

For conflict-laden couple dynamics or in cases 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 should 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. Scholars predicted that this proportion would rise up to no less than a third by 2030.²⁵

Certainly, recent trends have also produced diverse and socially more complex experiences of childhood. More and more children grow up in two and more households. They live

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

in bi- or multi-nuclear family systems. There they get to know and they have to cope with different family styles or family patterns, and with different forms of fatherhood and fatherly friendship. 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 grandparents and other relatives and close friends.

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In conclusion, let me return to the processes which are called modernization, westernization, and globalization. Most of the changes I have touched upon earlier have taken place since the 1960s and 1970s, a time when people in Austria experienced the further development of the representative democratic republic and a period of unprecedented prosperity. This transition time and its mode of politics, wage-earning, producing, consuming and leaving was clearly part of the way towards a Fordist mode of production.

Social human actors acquired greater opportunities and space in which to fulfill parts of their various desires. At the same time, they experienced more and more pressure to shape their

life according to the changing conditions. The personal autonomy of adults as well as of children and youths grew in many respects. However, all increasing opportunities to emancipate one-self from economic or social constraints were accompanied by increasing fluidity, uncertainty and the need for reshaping of one's social and intimate life. In late modern western society, it became almost a cultural maxim that unhappy marriages or partnerships can and perhaps, should be ended and substituted by better relationships.

Increased readiness or even eagerness for change is, of course, not just true for private life. In the professional world, too, a faster pace of change and uncertain working relations have become normal (short-term or informal contracts, job mobility, job migration, periods of unemployment, self-employment, precarious jobs etc.).

Similar developments can be observed in the way citizens behave in their political roles, participating in late modern western democratic or post-democratic systems. The increasing willingness to undertake movements, reforms and radical changes in private family life coincides with the loss of strong identifications with a certain political party, movement or system. To sum it up: The late modern family life with all

his instabilities and new opportunities is deeply embedded in Fordist and neoliberal capitalist modes of production, which include economic, political, private and reproductive spheres. Under these conditions, more and more people are going to require ‘soft’ social skills which previous generations did not possess, namely the communicative competence to live, to dissolve and to rebuild private, intimate and family arrangements, private, professional and business relations, and political ties.

Yet, growing autonomy is a tricky thing. It entails less reliability regarding life plans. As is the case in the economic and the 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 – a paradox of late modern society.

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 Austro-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 wider range of possibilities.²⁶

This assessment has clearly gained in validity since. Personal identity has become more self-reflexive as well as individualized.²⁷ In the late modern 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. Nevertheless, it seems true that the human *capacity to imagine* a significantly better life and better relations (see Castoriadis²⁸), both *emancipates and subjugates* the individual to the dynamics of Western capitalistic societies.

²⁶ 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 / Main, New York 1975, p. 70.

²⁷ 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 from this website: <http://www.reinhard-sieder.at>.

²⁸ 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 / Main 1990.