

Child soldiers in context. Biographies, familial and collective trajectories in northern Uganda

Abstract:

Work on this research project started in May 2014 and is supervised by Prof. Dieter Neubert (Chair for Development Sociology, University of Bayreuth) and funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) for the years 2014–16. The First Researcher is Artur Bogner. The project has been designed and is conducted in collaboration with Prof. Gabriele Rosenthal (Center of Methods in the Social Sciences, Georg-August-University Göttingen). The principal objective is to reconstruct biographies, life courses and (re-)integration processes of former child soldiers and underage abductees of the Lord's Resistance Army in the central part of northern Uganda. In contrast to previous research, data collection and analysis shall focus on embedding their biographical self-presentations and self-interpretations in the contexts of family histories and the histories of their local social settings and collectivities, interpreting them within these diachronic and collective contexts and taking into account their intertwining with the latter.

The methodological design of the study is based on the principles of social-constructivist biographical research and figurational sociology with an emphasis on family histories. One focus is on the intertwining between self-presentations and collective discourses, self-interpretation and interpretation by others, and another one on the differences, tensions and interdependencies between various socio-historical generations and between 'generational units' (in the sense of Karl Mannheim).

The main instrument of data gathering will be narrative interviews on their biographies and family histories with former child soldiers or abductees and other members of their families. This method of data collection has been tested in a pilot study on the spot. Case reconstructions will aim to capture the effects of familial pasts and family-biographical work for the life courses and self-interpretations of the interviewees before and after demobilization. Biographical and family-history interviews with family members shall be complemented among others by interviews and group interviews with other informants, largely from their local social settings.

An important aim is to combine biographical and family-biographical case reconstructions with the analysis of local discourses and their historical change. The theoretical sampling of cases will be guided among others by disputes or tensions between different groupings (including historical generations and generational units) that are related to diverse or conflicting interpretations of e.g. the transition from rebel-fighter to civilian and from adolescence to adulthood.

We envisage comparisons to the findings of our previous project on the post-conflict process in the adjacent West Nile region of northern Uganda. Thereby we hope to help improving practical efforts as well as methods of research and counseling in the context of the (re-)integration of former child soldiers or abductees into civilian life.

Contact data:

Dr Artur Bogner, Universität Bayreuth, Entwicklungssoziologie, 95440 Bayreuth, Germany.
Tel. + 49 921 554116 Fax: + 49 921 554118
email: Artur.Bogner@web.de

Project webpage (English):

http://www.entwicklungssoziologie.uni-bayreuth.de/en/research/Current_Projects/Child-Soldiers-in-Context_/index.html