

Johanna Geml

“I hoped you were dead!” Stigma, suffering, and memory in the lives of Norwegian war children

Abstract:

The formation of personal and group identities of war children as shaped by social suffering, and the ambiguities of memory and representation are a human rights problem to which anthropological research can contribute. This study of Norwegian war children seeks to understand the intersection of memory and representation in the lives of Norwegian war children born during or immediately after World War II. Despite some shared characteristics, individual life stories of Norwegian war children vary significantly. Recollections of pain, loss, abuses in childhood intensify the matrix of socially imposed identities throughout the individual's various stages of life. A legally acceptable definition of war children inherently requires that 'one identity' be applied to the group as a whole. Based on my field research in Oslo and Bergen, I argue that war children experienced life and coped with their status in a variety of ways. It is, therefore, difficult to find sufficient patterns to construct 'one' identity for war children as *a* group. The Norwegian case of war children illustrates a burden of need for international policies to protect war-affected children, and in particular children born of war.